

**Drift (Acedia)**

Ephesians 2:4-10

Connie and I have a bucket list.

For most people, this is a list of things you still want to do before you die—before you “kick the bucket.”

Our bucket list is *different* because we add items to our list *after* we’ve done them.

So we have on our list, already completed, a trip to Niagara Falls, which—should anyone doubt this—is one of the 25 best and fun things to do in western NY.

And we’ve been to Victoria Falls in Zambia and Iguazu (i-gua’-zu) Falls in Brazil.

We rode on a elephant in Thailand and swam in the Andaman (Ann’-da-man) Sea at Krabi, at one of Thailand’s most beautiful beaches.

This past summer we camped in Acadia National Park in Maine. and most recently we put on our bucket list, as you might expect, serving as interim pastor at Millersville Church.

The one exception to our after-the-fact approach is something Connie may still want to do—ride in a hot air balloon.

She may have gotten this hope from the time we lived in New Mexico and served at a school and church for Navajos.

For nine days in October, in the Rio Grande Valley, the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta features mass ascensions of hot air balloons that fill the sky with the brilliant colors of hundreds of balloons.

The balloons *drift*, at the mercy of the wind, for miles, with the operator and riders hanging in a wicker basket underneath the balloon.

That is not on my bucket list.

I am always glad to drift off to sleep.

I enjoy drifting downstream in a canoe.

I take delight in drifting snow.

I like to see leaves from my lawn drifting into our neighbor’s lawn.

But drifting hundreds of feet in the air in a tiny basket under a balloon with flamer thrower for propulsion, which, if anything goes awry, could set the balloon or the basket on fire, is not my preferred kind of drift.

The word drift means to be carried along by a current of *air* or *water*.

It also means to move *slowly, aimlessly, passively, or involuntarily*.

It is in this sense that Christians through the centuries have identified “*drift*” as one of seven deadly sins. The word they used to name this sin was “*acedia*” (uh·see’·dee·uh). *Acedia* comes from Greek, and means “a lack of care.” This is not an acute spiritual illness like influenza or sensualitis; rather, *acedia* is *spiritual laziness*. It is *listlessness* in following Jesus, *inertia* in our Christian life: not *running* or *walking* or even *waiting* on God, but drifting without any internal impetus, carried along by the movement of others.

The antidote, the remedy, is to be **purposeful** in our **calling** (or **vocation**) for God.

Samuel Clemens, the humorist and writer known as Mark Twain, once said:

The two most important days in your life  
are the day you were born and the day you find out why.”

In this statement Mark Twain *almost* got it right. I would only add *two letters*:  
The two most important days in your life are . . .  
the day you are **reborn**,  
that is, the day (or season) that you come to faith in Jesus,  
and the day you find out why—  
the day you discover your **purpose** in life.

I’m going to focus this morning on Ephesians 2:10, a single verse, in the first half of Ephesians.  
In preceding verses, the apostle Paul describes what occurs when we are reborn.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. . . For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

We are *reborn* by a personal, trusting relationship with Jesus, not based on anything we have done (or do), but on what Jesus has done *for us*—which we will celebrate today with communion. Once we absorb this great truth into our heart and mind, and trust Jesus to forgive us as an unearned gift, we immediately become the beneficiaries of “the immeasurable riches of [God’s] grace . . .

We can summarize these riches, most simply, in four words:  
 we have **peace** with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1);  
 we have the reassuring **presence** of Jesus within us (Romans 8:15-16);  
 we experience the immeasurable greatness of God **power** (Ephesians 1:19);  
 And with these spiritual blessings in place, we can sort out a sense of **purpose**.

**The purpose of God in our life and work . . . is the *remedy* for drift.**

This reassuring truth is encapsulated in Ephesians 2, verse 10.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,  
 which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Just to be sure there is no misunderstanding,  
 these "good works" come *after* our salvation!  
 Paul just declared in the preceding verses:  
 it is by grace you have been saved, not by good works.  
 The two aspects of the Christian life that *are* encompassed  
 in the phrase, "good works,"  
 are our **lifestyle** and our **vocation** after we come to Christ.

Paul introduces the word "walk" here, in Ephesians 2:10,  
 and in the second, practical half of the book,  
 uses the word "walk" six more times to describe a fitting day-to-day lifestyle.  
 Here are three of the times he uses the word walk in this way:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to *walk* in a manner worthy of the  
 calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with  
 patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the  
 Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and *walk* in love, as Christ  
 loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.  
 (Ephesians 5:1-2)

At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. *Walk* as  
 children of light. (Ephesians 5:8)

We have already talked about several aspects of Christian behavior in this series,  
 so I am not going to expand on ways we "walk" in light and love,  
 except to point out that the word "walk" connotes *intentionality* and *movement*.  
 We are not *drifting*, not *meandering*, not *moseying* along;  
 we are walking with a sense of purpose  
 to bring our lifestyle into conformity  
 with God's design for Christian conduct and behavior.

The second aspect of the phrase “good works”—  
where I want to concentrate this morning—refers to our **calling** or **vocation**.

In *Ephesians*, Paul applies the word “vocation” in three arenas:

**First**, God calls some to vocational ministry **in the church**—  
For these people, their primary vocation is to build up the church.

Pastors (and others who serve in the church) come from all backgrounds,  
in a rainbow of colors, in male and female varieties,  
in an assortment of personalities, and with a wide range of gifting.  
Despite high-profile exceptions,  
most pastors are not extroverted, multi-gifted, visionary superstars.

Working with whatever God-given combination of temperament, abilities,  
knowledge, interests, quirks, and flaws has been bequeathed to them,  
pastors (and other specialists in the church) have a clear and specific assignment,  
as we read in Ephesians 4:11-13

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds  
[pastors] and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building  
up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the  
knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the  
stature of the fullness of Christ.

While it may seem that a pastor works only one hour a week  
—and with Zoom worship, only 20 minutes—  
in actual practice, the work of a pastor involves preaching and teaching,  
caring for people, mobilizing volunteers, unraveling problems,  
reaching out to the unchurched, dealing with conflict—  
and making sure there are no mice in the Loft.

So the wise pastor does not attempt to “do it all,”  
because *everyone* who follows Jesus is called to build up the church.  
not necessarily as a *vocation*, with compensation, like a pastor or church staff;  
but as an *avocation*, alongside whatever else we do, as a *volunteer*.

Some of *us* work voluntarily with children, some with youth, some in hospitality,  
some in worship, some with buildings and grounds, some in technology,  
some in intercession, some in outreach, some in caregiving, some by helping.

We *all* have a role, a calling, an assignment,  
a way to contribute in building up the church  
and the health and mission of Millersville BIC Church will be better and stronger  
as all of us take up *our* calling to build up this community of faith.

Vocational *and* volunteer work in the church is essential to prepare God's people to serve *beyond the church*, which is a **second** arena of work—**in the world**.

In 1 Corinthians 7:17 Paul writes:

Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. 1 Corinthians 7:17

The *same word* that the Bible uses for vocational ministry in the *church* is used here for every honest vocation and occupation in the *world*, which means that you can approach your daily work—whatever it is—as an assignment (or calling) from God.

In Ephesians 4:28 Paul writes:

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something share with anyone in need.

Whether or not we've been dishonest before we came to Christ, the point is: we are called to honest work with our hands (or minds) so that we have something to share with those in need—not only money, but skills, abilities, insights, whatever it is we *do* and *know*.

In what we call the "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus said:

[Your Father in heaven] makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Matthew 5:45

God's love and mercy and compassion are so great, that he provides rain and sunshine for *everyone*, whether they deserve it or not, the *evil* and the *good*, the *just* and the *unjust*—the *good*, the *bad*, and the *ugly*.

God cares for humankind *directly* by sun and rain, and *indirectly* through us—by the (so-called) "secular" work we do: in day-to-day life at home; in agriculture, business, technology, education, medicine, or the arts—whatever it is we do in the home, workplace, or marketplace.

The biblical perspective is that *all* work and service and even play have an exalted purpose because God loves and cares for the world through us.

And we do that *best* simply by doing our daily *work* and *service* and *play well*, in our home, our community, our sphere of influence, in our profession or occupation or trade, whatever it is.

To recap, some of us are called to serve **in the church**, some are called, just as surely, to serve **in the world**, and, third, some of us are called to serve **in constraint**. Let me explain . . .

In Ephesians 4:1, Paul writes:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord . . .

When Paul wrote the letter of *Ephesians*, he was in prison in Rome awaiting trial before the emperor, Nero. He seems to have had certain privileges: he was allowed to stay in a house that he rented; his friends were allowed to visit him; but, still, he was a prisoner; day and night he was fastened by a length of chain to the wrist of a Roman soldier. Paul was *literally* a prisoner, *metaphorically* a slave of Jesus. By *necessity*—and by *choice*—Paul chose to embrace the *constraints of imprisonment* as the *arena* of his calling at that time.

To bring this closer home, some of us are limited (and constrained) by circumstances, such as: a parent, with ample potential for a fulfilling career, who is at home full- or part-time with children; or a worker furloughed in an economy depressed by COVID-19; or someone constrained by an accident or health episode, by a chronic illness, a disability, or by caring for someone with an illness or special needs.

If anything like this applies to you, and these are your marching orders, Ephesians 6:5-8

Bondservants, obey your earthly masters [that is, live within your constraints, whatever they may be] with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

The purposes of God are not limited by our circumstances. In fact, God seems to take special delight in impacting the world through his servants, his slaves, in the most constricted circumstances.

The promise in Ephesians 2:10 applies to persons who serve **in the church**, persons who serve **in the world**, and *just as certainly* to persons who live and serve **under constraint**.

The most intriguing aspect of this verse, Ephesians 2:10, for me, are the words the *precede* Paul's call to "good works" in our *lifestyle* and *vocation*.

For we are his **workmanship . . .** (ESV)

Our lifestyle and vocation are the *creation*, the *artistry*, the *workmanship* of God. Before we took our first breath, God had in mind the *strengths* and *virtues* and *light* that would shine in us. He designed us to be a *unique* and *special* expression of his *artistry* in the combination of *traits* and *skills* encompassed in our *transformed* **lifestyle** and *purposeful* **vocation**.

The Greek word translated "workmanship" is *poiēma* from which our English word 'poem' comes. Some people can write with clarity. Some do even better, and write with clarity and grace. But not many can manage good poetry. Poetry has *rhyme* and *rhythm* and *pace*. It is *concise* and *precise*; it uses *images* and *metaphors*. It stirs the *mind* and *heart* and *emotions*. Poetry is the highest form of creative writing. And each of us, without exception, is a poem written by God himself, the highest form of artistry in the created world.

**All** of us who follow Jesus have a role in building up **the church**. **Many** of us serve God's redemptive purposes **in the world**. **A few** of us, who live **under constraints** of one kind or another, pour out a very costly, lavish love for Jesus, our Master.

Whatever our life circumstances, we do not need to *drift*; we can trust Jesus to lead us into his *purpose* for our lives.

Reassured by the **peace** of God, encouraged by the **presence** of God, drawing on the **power** of God, we can grow into the **purpose** of God in our **life** and **work**.

For [we] are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that [we] should walk in them.