

True You

3. Masterpiece

August 5-6, 2017

Welcome to Part 3 of the Series “True You.” Mirrors are a reminder that our self-image can get distorted. Please turn in your Bible or your app to Ephesians 2.

During an off-day on our France trip, Linda and I were able to stop at a museum where we saw paintings by famous French artists and also by Vincent Van Gogh. Here’s a picture of me standing next to a self-portrait of Van Gogh. (I’m not looking quite as stern as he was.) Today Van Gogh is regarded as one of the greatest artists ever. But while he was alive no one paid much attention to his work. In fact, he only sold one painting in his entire life. He did trade some paintings for food and such, but he died broke, depressed, and mentally ill.

Today it would take more than a couple cheeseburgers to get your hands on one of Van Gogh’s paintings. In 1990 one of his paintings sold for \$82.5 million (\$151.5 million in today’s dollars), making it one of most expensive paintings ever. During Van Gogh’s lifetime his paintings were seen as almost worthless, but today each one is regarded as a masterpiece.

God regards *you* as a masterpiece! That’s right; Ephesians 2 tells us that as a follower of Jesus, **you are God’s masterpiece.** This is not just some pop psychology, self-esteem lingo, this is what the Bible tells us. ***Ephesians 2:10 says, For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*** The New Testament was written originally in Greek. The Greek word for “handiwork” can be translated “masterpiece.” That Greek word is “poema” from which we get our word poem. God says, “You’re my poem. You’re my masterpiece.” You are a priceless creation of God -- more valuable than a Van Gogh painting! That’s what Ephesians 2:10 says.

There are reasons you are called a masterpiece of God, and it’s not some kind of overstatement. For one, **you bear the marks of God’s design.** ***Ephesians 2:10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus.*** Linda and I were able to walk right up to look closely at these famous paintings. We could clearly see the brush strokes on the canvas. I said to Linda, “You know, Van Gogh was on the other end of the brush that made that stroke right there.” Looking at those strokes it was almost like I could feel the artist’s presence. You are much more valuable than a Van Gogh

painting, because you are created by a much greater artist than Van Gogh -- you were created by God!

You bear the marks of your creator. Genesis 5 says, “When God created human beings, he made them to be like himself.” When we look at people we are seeing the marks of the Creator. We see that capacity to love and say, “That was put there by God, who is love.” Or “That person’s creativity --- that comes from the Creator.” We are created in God’s image. That’s why marvel at a new baby... we realize the amazing nature of creation.

The value of a work of art is linked to who created it. For many years a painting that had hung in a castle in Scotland was thought to be a copy done by a minor artist. It had been valued at \$26 in 1899 (about \$2,600 in today's prices.) But the painting caught the eye of art expert who recognized it as the work of the famous Renaissance artist Raphael. Over night, the value of that painting went from \$26 to an estimated \$26 million¹... all because of the artist. You are a masterpiece because you have been created by God, the ultimate artist.

But maybe there are times you don’t feel like a masterpiece of God. Maybe you feel like the brush strokes of God on you have been smeared or obscured because you sinned against God and messed up. Maybe you feel broken by life or the sins of other people. [*holding the pottery pieces*] Maybe God fashioned you to be fine pottery, but the pot has been broken into pieces by your own choices, the pressures of life and the choices of others.

Being a masterpiece doesn’t apply just to morally superior or highly spiritual people. Just a couple verses before tells us we are his masterpiece. Ephesians 2 tells us we are God’s masterpiece because **We are being restored by his grace.**

Ephesians 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. The image of God has been broken in everyone, to some degree. We have all sinned, and we have all been hurt to some degree. No one has escaped “unsmudged.” But God completely forgives and restores anyone who puts their faith in Jesus! This verse reminds us that we are saved by grace through faith. That means we don’t deserve God’s mercy -- He just gives it to us when we trust Jesus to lead us. That means we can’t take credit for being a masterpiece of God because we aren’t the artist - God is.

So our brokenness doesn’t stop God from making us his masterpiece. Our student pastor Andrew Miller told me about Kintsugi pottery, which means “golden

¹ <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2016/october/9101716.html>

repair.” It is the ancient Japanese art of fixing broken pottery with a special lacquer dusted with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. Usually when a potter breaks a bowl or pot, they throw it away. But in Kintsugi, they use gold to put the pieces back together again. The result looks like this [<http://mymodernmet.com/kintsugi-kintsukuroi/>] Beautiful seams of gold gleam in the cracks of the bowl, giving it a unique appearance. Instead of hiding or disguising cracks and breaks, this repair method celebrates each artifact's unique history by emphasizing its fractures and breaks. Kintsugi makes the repaired piece even more beautiful than the original, revitalizing it with new life. They become masterpieces!

God is a Kintsugi artist. He does not reject or throw you away because of your brokenness. Instead, he calls you to himself and offers to forgive and restore you-- if you give him the leadership of your life. He restores you so that even your broken places are beautiful -- because they are reminders that we once were broken and now we are being made whole. We become trophies of his grace and mercy; masterpieces!

You are designed to make a difference

Everyone wants their life to count. We want to matter and to make a difference. Sometimes we feel unsatisfied with our job and want a new one. That's because we don't think it is significant. Or maybe we wish we had gotten more education. If we had, we think we could do something more fulfilling and meaningful. What we are really looking for is not just a more interesting job, we are looking for significance, and we figure the right job will offer that. We don't want just a degree to hang on the wall, we want significance and believe that a degree will help us find that.

We desire significance because we are created for significance. Ephesians 2:10 tells us where that significance comes from. ***Eph. 2:10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*** Our sense of significance is to come from knowing God has created us, restored us, and then allows us to do “good works” that matter eternally. Verse 9 says we are not saved because of “works.” That is, we can't earn God's acceptance by doing good things. Salvation is the gift of God. But once we are restored and saved by God, we will do “good works” as a result.

For example, we can't earn God's acceptance by being kind to people, but once we have been accepted by God and restored, then we will be kind to others as a result. We're told God has prepared good works in advance for us to do. God has created you to make a difference by what you do. God created you to be fulfilled to live beyond yourself. If we just focus on our own pleasure and enjoyment, we will miss out on the reason we were created. Eventually we will feel unfulfilled.

Now, we know that our first identity is that we are children of God. We aren't just workers for God. But once we put our faith in Jesus, we want to do good works, because God has designed us to make a difference. So, how are you making a difference with your life? You won't find lasting fulfillment through getting more stuff. You won't find security through more money. You won't find ultimate joy in finding the right partner.

God has created you to make a difference. God has reached out and drawn you to Himself by his grace. On the other side of these walls there is a broken world. There are people who are bound by addictions and running after what will ultimately let them down. There are people who look like they have it all together but will get to the end of their lives and will have totally missed the point.

We are created to do good works. So are you? If you aren't, what are you waiting for? Maybe you feel like you've messed up and are broken yourself. Remember, God is putting your broken pieces back together again with gold. The Apostle Paul explained that he had been broken too, but God still used him. *Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.* One look at Paul and you understood that the good news and power of Jesus was not coming from him. He was a cracked pot. But Jesus shone through him!

We are all broken vessels, but God will use us as we present ourselves to him and say "yes." He will shine through us, when we step up to our destiny to do good works. Don't wait until you are perfect and have it all together because part of the way you get it together is stepping into the purposes of God for you to make a difference.

Maybe you aren't sure of where to start or what to do. So here are a couple possible ways to step into the good works God has for you.

We are created to make a difference in our community as we BLESS.

Every day, God sends us to a mission field filled with needy people. Did you know that the U.S. has the 3rd highest number of unbelievers of any country in the world, behind only China and India?² That means that God can use us where we live, work and play. How? What specifically can we do to help people find their way back to God? There is no end of possibilities of how to make an impact in our communities, and I am very proud of the ways so many of you do so.

² <https://goingfullcircleblog.wordpress.com/2014/07/15/america-is-now-the-1-mission-field-in-the-world/>

One main way to help people find their way back to God is to *BLESS* them. Earlier this summer we did a message series about BLESS, so I don't want to get too repetitive (getting a little repetitive helps us remember though!) I'll just remind you of the wording:

B = begin with prayer. When you pray for the people you live, work and play with to open themselves to Jesus, you are doing a good work that will advance the Kingdom.

L = Listen to them. Talk to people and ask them about what is happening in their lives.

E = Eat with them. Have lunch or coffee. It's a way to make a connection.

S = Serve them. Watch for a need in their life and help meet it.

S = Share your story. Be prepared to share why you have hope in life, and what Christ has done for you. It's important to take this step, because if all you do is the other four people still won't know where to find hope and healing in their lives.

These are simple steps, but powerful. They are good works. When you do them you will make a difference in people's lives and sense the smile of God. You can check out the message series on BLESS online for more information. You can also enroll in the MD1 class this fall that will help you learn more about these 5 simple steps. When you BLESS the people at your community pool, or the soccer field or the break room at work, you are making a difference.

We are created to make a difference in our church through our spiritual gifts.

Each of us are created to make a difference, but we are not to make that difference in the same way. Each of us have a different mix of experiences, passions and spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are special abilities God gives Christians to help build up the people of God and to reach out to share Jesus. Every believer has some spiritual gifts, whether they know it or not! God has given you abilities which you can use as part of the family of believers that will help others find Jesus and follow him. These are gifts like, helping, teaching, administration, prophecy and others.

We teach about spiritual gifts in the MD1 class here at Crossroads. If you have been through *Following Jesus*, then you are invited to sign up for MD1 this Fall. But the best way to discover your spiritual gifts is to try some areas of service that appeal to you, and see how it goes. When you serve in an area you are gifted, you will enjoy it and people will be helped. You will need to develop your gifts, but there is nothing like experience to guide you.

There are dozens and dozens of ways to use your spiritual gifts here at Crossroads church, and when you do so, it will make a difference in someone else's life. And hundreds of you are already involved in serving in ministry through Crossroads. If you aren't serving somewhere, today we want to give you a chance to take a step toward trying out a serving role. Right after the service there will be representatives of several ministry areas in Chapel. We invite you to stop in and learn a little more about what's involved in serving in their areas. You can also ask any questions you have. I hope you can stop by.

A marble sculpture of Adam by Venetian Renaissance master Tullio Lombardo, was smashed into hundreds of pieces at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2002, the result of a faulty pedestal. Here's a link to the picture.

[\[https://static01.nyt.com/images/2014/11/09/arts/design/20141109ADAM-slide-LH5P/20141109ADAM-slide-LH5P-master1050.jpg\]](https://static01.nyt.com/images/2014/11/09/arts/design/20141109ADAM-slide-LH5P/20141109ADAM-slide-LH5P-master1050.jpg) Now, in 2014, the "second Adam" has been put back together and is ready for display, through a painstaking process of reconstruction that has left the finished masterpiece so finely repaired that only an expert could tell the flaws. In fact, the story is expected to make the piece a public favorite.³

If you want to see a valuable masterpiece that was broken to pieces and then restored to masterpiece quality again, you don't need to go to Italy. You can just take a look in the mirror!

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/09/arts/design/recreating-adam-from-hundreds-of-fragments-after-the-fall.html?smid=tw-nytimes>