

Num. 21:4–9
Ps. 107:1–3, 17–22
Eph. 2:1–10
John 3:14–21

Before and After

Goal for the Session

Tweens will thank God for the free gift of salvation—from sin and for good works.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Ephesians 2:1–10

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” John M. Vonder Bruegge

Verses 8–10 force the reader to look both back and ahead. Looking back, the reader is reminded that salvation—being made alive again after being dead in sins—is a gift that comes only by grace. As Paul argues in both Galatians and Romans, any notion that such a result comes from “works” is forestalled, and any cause for boasting removed. Looking ahead, however, God has prepared in advance other “works” for all those who are created in Christ as God’s handiworks, culminating in a new way of living that contrasts with the old.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Ian S. Markham

The great privilege of being human was never meant to be reduced to a state of manipulated control by forces outside our control. We were made for greater things. And God sees all this even when we are dishonoring the gift of creation by self-absorbed egotism. God’s vehicle to bring about the transformation is the work of Christ. We are already saved. The work is accomplished. We participate in the resurrection now, and are invited to witness to the gift of grace that we have received. The agent of this dramatic change is God.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Adam E. Eckhart

While we can oppose the forces of sin, make personal headway against them, and forge our identity as church in relation to them, we cannot defeat them. “No one may boast” that they have overpowered the powers. We are too weak. Not even Christ defeated the powers in life. It is Christ’s resurrecting victory over sin and death that manifests and verifies our hope of redemption. The already, but not yet quality of the resurrection is why we return perennially to Lent, unable to avoid Christ’s death to the powers but able to foretaste Christ’s decisive victory.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Jeff Paschal

Yes, we are saved by grace through faith. No, we do not rely on good works to be saved. But we *are* what God has made us—people “created in Christ Jesus for good works.” So good works are now transformed. Instead of being frantic means for trying to save ourselves, good works are the blessed opportunity for us to live out the lives we were destined to live. Good works are expressions of Christ alive in us ministering to the world. Good works are demonstrations of our present reality and future; we are God’s royal children exercising God’s dominion of love in the world.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 2:1–10

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ purple cloth
- ☐ large white battery-powered candle
- ☐ wide ribbons from previous sessions
- ☐ newspapers, magazines
- ☐ plain paper
- ☐ scissors
- ☐ glue sticks
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ markers
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 2
- ☐ Color Pack 1, 5, 6, 30
- ☐ fine-tipped permanent markers
- ☐ 20" pieces of wide orange and yellow ribbons
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: Color Pack 30; *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player; drawing paper; markers; Internet-connected device (optional)
- ☐ option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2, supplies listed
- ☐ option 3: guest speaker

Focus on Your Teaching

Most tweens know a lot about “good works.” North American tweens are more socially aware than generations before them. Many of your learners likely give time, energy, and resources to worthwhile causes. Some may even be required to complete community service projects for school or for youth organizations. The church can affirm and encourage tweens’ volunteerism and activism, and also help tweens look at those activities through a theological lens. Use today’s session to help learners see themselves as doing more than good works. Jesus has saved them from serving sinful powers in order to serve God.

God of grace, help me excite these young people about the high, holy purpose for which you have claimed us all. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you will use option 3 in Responding, invite a guest to speak about an outreach or serving ministry of your church.

Greet tweens as they arrive. Invite learners to arrange the purple cloth, candle, Color Pack 1, and wide ribbons from previous sessions in the center of your meeting space.

Gather the group and light the candle. Take a quiet moment for group members to consider an answer to the question on Color Pack 1. Pray aloud:

You have given us so much, dear God. We offer you our time today, so that you might touch our hearts and minds with your Word. Amen.

To begin thinking about “before and after,” have each learner cut out two pictures of individuals from magazines or newspapers. Have each learner exchange one image with another learner. Instruct tweens to glue their two images side-by-side on plain paper, and then write a caption that turns the paired images into a “before and after” advertisement for a made-up product. Encourage creativity and clean humor! After enjoying everyone’s ads, explain that today’s Bible reading is about a very important “before and after.”

EXPLORING

Pointing out the red ribbon from March 3, ask any learners who were present last week to recall some key points about the Ten Commandments. Remind tweens that the Commandments outline God’s will for human life. Today’s reading explores God’s work in our lives through Christ.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Welcome to Ephesus!). Display Color Pack 5 and 6.

Explain that, according to Acts, Paul visited Ephesus twice. (See Acts 18:19–21; 19:1–20:1.) On Paul’s second visit, he stayed for over two years, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ through preaching and performing miracles (Acts 19:10). Tell learners that the information on Resource Sheet 1 is based on archaeological and historical evidence from Ephesus in Paul’s time, and details from Acts 19. Color Pack 5 and 6 show actual ruins from Ephesus, including the only remaining column from Artemis’s temple. Discuss:

- ✠ Based on this information, what are some of the things that might have been considered important in ancient Ephesus?

Have learners find Ephesians in their Bibles, assisting one another as needed. Ask a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 2:1–10 while the others follow along. Discuss the text using these questions:

- ✠ In verses 5, 6, and 8, what are the different ways Paul talks about what God does in a person’s life through Christ? (*God makes them alive with Christ, v. 5; God raises them with Christ, v. 6; God saves them, v. 8*)
- ✠ Paul says that, before coming to faith in Jesus Christ, his readers were “dead” (v. 1). What does he mean?
- ✠ Paul’s first readers believed spiritual beings between the earth and moon could control them, causing them to sin (v. 2). Do you believe there are invisible forces that can lead people to sin? Why or why not?
- ✠ How might verses 8 and 9 have challenged values and priorities in ancient Ephesus? How do these verses challenge our society’s values and priorities?
- ✠ How do you understand God’s grace (vv. 5, 8)? (*Answers might include: God’s eternal love, life with God forever, God’s gift of unmerited forgiveness, the restored relationship with God that Jesus makes possible.*)
- ✠ Why, according to verse 10, do Christians do good works?

Although biblical scholars debate whether Paul wrote Ephesians or one of his students wrote it in his name, you’ll probably find it best to speak of Paul as the author. Stay focused on the message, not the messenger.

Read aloud the quotation by Marius Victorinus on Resource Sheet 2 (The Work of Our Hands). Ask:

- ✠ How do our good works as a congregation give witness to others that Christ is at work in us?
- ✠ In what ways does God’s gift of grace free Christians to do good works? (*Responses might include the sense of being able to try new things or take risks on behalf of others, as our salvation does not rely on the outcome of our good works.*)

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

**EASY
PREP**

1. **Amazing Grace** Celebrate God’s free gift of saving grace by exploring the hymn “Amazing Grace.” Display Color Pack 30 and invite learners to read or sing along as you listen to a recording of this hymn (track 1 on *Singing the Feast, 2023–2024*). As a group, identify ways in which the lyrics reflect Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 2:1–10. Invite tweens to use drawing paper and markers to create an image or symbol of God’s grace. Play the hymn again as they work. Display these images of grace in your meeting space. Option:

Amazing Grace

Amazing grace, how sweet
the sound,
That saved someone like
me.
I once was lost but now am
found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Through many dangers,
toils, and snares
I have already come;
'Tis grace that brought me
safe thus far,
and grace will lead me
home.

When we've been here ten
thousand years
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing
God's praise
Than when we'd first
begun.

During Lent you will
add a ribbon to the
worship space each
week, creating a
rainbow by Easter. Keep
the wide ribbons to use
in upcoming weeks.

Listen to recordings of this well-known and well-loved hymn on YouTube in a variety of musical styles.

- 2. The Work of Our Hands** Create a visual reminder of today's reading that connects with the cultural context of Ephesus. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Work of Our Hands). Encourage learners to help one another follow the instructions for making hand sculptures. As they work, read aloud Acts 19:23–27. Explain that Paul's preaching threatened the Ephesian silversmiths because it denied the power of gods made from silver by human hands. When learners have finished painting their hand sculptures, recite Psalm 90:17 from the resource sheet. Use this verse as a prayer response: Have learners take turns naming one good work they will do this week in gratitude for God's gift of grace; after each good work is named, have all group members recite the verse.
- 3. Guest Speaker** Learn more about opportunities for good works in your church. Invite a person involved in one of your congregation's serving or outreach ministries to talk about his or her service. Encourage the speaker to reflect on his or her work in connection with today's Bible reading. Invite tweens to ask questions about this ministry, and to imagine how God has created them to be part of good works such as this.

CLOSING

Gather around the candle, and invite tweens to quiet themselves by singing "Dona Nobis Pacem" (Color Pack 29; track 5 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024). Drape 20" lengths of wide orange and yellow ribbons over the cloth. Mention that these bright colors suggest a celebration, reminding us that Paul celebrates God's free gift of grace in Ephesians 2. Ask:

✠ What word, phrase, or image from today's Bible reading will you remember, and why?

Provide fine-tipped permanent markers for tweens to write or doodle their responses on the ribbons.

Offer this prayer:

*We thank you, merciful God, for forgiving us and freeing us to serve you
and the world you love. Amen.*

Extinguish the candle.

Speak this blessing to each tween:

(Name), go out to do the good works that God has prepared for you in Jesus Christ.

Say a personal good-bye to each tween.

March 10, 2024
Before and After

Tweens
Resource Sheet 1



Welcome to Ephesus!



Explore this important port city, which blends ten centuries of history with today's bustling commerce.



Worship our famous fertility goddess, Artemis, and deposit your money with confidence in her magnificent temple. It is certified as one of the world's Seven Wonders!



See the statue of Artemis that miraculously fell from heaven.



Shop our expert silversmiths' stalls, specializing in locket, amulets, and replicas of temples and statues. It is all the finest craftsmanship!



Buy our renowned scrolls of magic incantations, guaranteed to make your future bright.



Exercise your mind at Tyrannus's lecture hall—hear from the finest philosophers of our time.

Enjoy your stay in Ephesus, one of the largest, loveliest cities in the world.

The Work of Our Hands

Does Paul mean “good works” in the future tense or those which we now perform?

Taken either way they are good for us to walk in. They are witnesses to Christ’s working in us.

—Marius Victorinus, ancient scholar (Quoted in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament*, Vol. VIII, [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999], p. 135)

Supplies needed:

- ☐ heavy duty aluminum foil, one 12" x 16" sheet per participant
- ☐ tempera paint
- ☐ white glue
- ☐ paint dishes
- ☐ paintbrushes
- ☐ dishes of water
- ☐ paper towels

Preparation: In small paint dishes, mix two parts tempera paint and one part white glue. Prepare three contrasting colors.

To make a hand sculpture:

1. Lay a sheet of aluminum foil flat on a table or the floor.
2. Place one hand flat on top of the foil, fingers spread apart.
3. Using your other hand, wrap the foil around your hand and in between your fingers. Crimp and crease as needed to create a “mold” of your hand. The foil should be fairly close to your skin, but not so tight that you will be unable to remove your hand in the next step.
4. Carefully pull your hand out of its “mold.” Crimp the foil only as much as needed to retain the shape.
5. Carefully paint your “hand” with symbols and images that will remind you of today’s Bible reading. Be sure to rinse the brush before changing colors.
6. When you are finished, carefully wash the paintbrushes and paint dishes with soapy water.
7. Allow sufficient drying time before taking your “hand” home as a reminder of your commitment to do the good works God has prepared for you.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and prosper for us the work of our hands—O prosper the work of our hands! (Psalm 90:17)

