

# Getting to Work

*Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*

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**Bible Text:** Ezra 3:8-9  
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Turn with me in your Bibles to the third chapter of Ezra, Ezra 3. We'll be looking at two verses this morning. Before we read the text, I do want to say thank you to Todd Friel for preaching last Sunday. I heard a number of you have expressed your just thanks to God for the message, and I was able to listen to part of it, haven't yet finished it myself, but I was encouraged and blessed and so praise the Lord for the faithfulness that he shows in his servants when we bring the word, and thank you, Todd, for doing that last week when I was out of town. I had a good week at Southern. I was up there for a doctoral seminar, my third out of, I guess, five times I'll be up there, and Sybrand de Swardt, our missionary to South Africa, pastor in Pretoria, Lynnwood Baptist Church, dear friend and brother, and actually he was one of the reasons I started the program when I did because we could do it together, and we have had a great time last week being taught, fed, instructed, and he's going to be heading out today back home, so be praying for him as he goes back to Lynnwood Baptist Church. He had asked for prayer for particularly for Wayne and Carol Mack, his father and mother-in-law, and you know they've had some difficulties and some challenges, experienced a robbery recently where they were held-up in front of their house there in Pretoria. Things are getting very violent there, very dangerous, and so they experienced that firsthand again just recently. Pray for them and their health, and then he also asked for prayer for his wife, Beth, who is having ankle surgery in August and it's a six-month healing process because they're fusing her ankle, and so it's going to be quite an ordeal with two young children to go through that and amidst just the church ministry, counseling, things that she does. So pray for Beth particularly. We're gonna pray for her in just a moment but put that down just to keep praying for her and for Sybrand, and then for the ACBC, the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors, Africa, which Sybrand and Dr. Mack provide leadership. There's a conference coming up shortly on their yearly conference on marriage and family, and so we need to pray for that as well. So we're gonna pray for them right now and ask the Lord to bless our time in his word as well.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we are so grateful to You that You are the living God, that we come to a God who hears, to a God who sees, to a God who knows even before we ask that the burdens of our hearts, the cares on our soul, the struggles, the trials, You know it all even before*

*we speak it. How good it is, O Lord, to come to a God like that who knows and who cares, who abounds in lovingkindness, compassion. Father, we ask that You would be with our brother Sybrand and his wife Beth. We pray Your blessings upon them in every way, the strength for the work that is before them in pastoring the church and leading and counseling and ministering there and throughout Africa. We pray especially for Beth's surgery, that You would make it effective, that the doctor would have skill, that this would result in her finally being pain free for the first time in years, and that she would be freer to serve You without distraction, and even more fruitful in her ministry for You. We pray for Your blessings upon all the other details that are going to be with that, working through the next six months and with Thomas Wayne and Carol Marie, that Your blessing would be upon them as well. Father, we do lift up Wayne and Carol Mack. We love them dearly. We thank You for them. We pray that You would encourage them and You strengthen them in the work. Thank You for continuing to give them to us. They are a treasure we continue to be grateful for. We ask that You continue to lengthen their days and make their days increasingly fruitful for the glory of our Savior. And Father, now as we come to Your word, we realize how much we need Your grace. We ask You to speak to us, Lord, to challenge us in places that we need to be challenged, to lead us to repentance, to lead us to more faith, to more clinging to Jesus Christ, and to more fruitfulness in Him, and we pray that You would use this time to that end. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.*

Ezra 3:8-9. This was originally gonna be a topical message out of Ezra in my planning for what I would be preaching this morning because we have felt burdened as elders to really ask the church to consider, to make a more, kind of a more open and frank call for you to consider how you can serve in the ministries of the church. We know we're all called to service, we're all called to work, and that means the work for Christ is wherever you are. In your home, in your neighborhood, at your workplace, we're always to be laboring for the kingdom of God.

We were created for that purpose, to make disciples, and we're all about that wherever we are, but there's also work in the body of Christ, and so as we have had trouble over the last years particularly recruiting enough workers for our children's ministry and we've realized that, hey, we just need to be more direct and clear about opportunities and being more mindful of how we can help people see that, so we had planned next Sunday after the service we're gonna have, for lack of a better term, a job fair. Remember that when you were like in high school and you had the job fair and you didn't know, in high school you didn't really care, at least I didn't, about the job fair, it was just time to be out of class, you know? But this is not that kind of job fair. This is one that you really want to be a part of and be excited about because I think it's gonna be a real opportunity to learn about some things that you might be interested in. In the other building after the service, we're gonna have different ministries, different children's ministries, men's ministry, youth ministry, women's ministry, hospitality ministry, on and on, and have opportunities to talk to people about the various things that you might could help out in, the specifics, and one of the things we've also made a commitment to do just to encourage you is as we've grown, we realize that our former practice of recruitment doesn't work anymore. The way it used to be that if you signed up to be the nursery coordinator, it was a lifetime

appointment. It was a terminal position. I mean, we never came back and said, "Do you want to go again next year?" We just said, "Thank You, Lord, for giving us someone who will do that position." And that's not right. It's something that, you know, it's a smaller church, you sort of, these things, you know, you do and praise God so many of you have been patient in that position and it actually never was terminal. Eventually somebody said, "I've got to have some relief," and they stepped away, but it would be five years, six years, that kind of thing. We're trying to make a plan to every year ask people for a commitment of a year, and of course, the Lord can work where you may have to end that commitment early because of things in your life, of course that's reasonable and appropriate, but we're gonna try to be more disciplined and just doing that, we think that's biblical, that's right, that's wise, and so be encouraged that you're not gonna be asked to sign up for life. You're not signing anything in blood. It's just going to, you won't be signing anything, period, actually. But that's next week.

So today's message was gonna be about trying to talk about the role of service and the work of ministry in our lives, and as I worked through the week and was thinking through things, I realized that actually there's something right in our text that lends itself to this in God's providence, verses 8 and 9, in the very next two verses that we needed to go to. I was planning on preaching verses 8 to 13 but we're gonna just do 8 and 9 this week and we'll do the rest, Lord willing, next Sunday, but verses 8 and 9 of Ezra 3. Now we're gonna read verses 1 to 9 to get the context, but we're gonna be focusing in on 8 and 9 and see and the title of the message is "Getting to Work." Getting to work. We see the people of God getting to work, to the work that God has called them to do, and that's essentially what we're called to do, to get to work.

So getting to work, Ezra 3:8-9. Let's look at verse 1, though, of chapter 3,

1 Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. 2 Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God. 3 So they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the LORD, burnt offerings morning and evening. 4 They celebrated the Feast of Booths, as it is written, and offered the fixed number of burnt offerings daily, according to the ordinance, as each day required; 5 and afterward there was a continual burnt offering, also for the new moons and for all the fixed festivals of the LORD that were consecrated, and from everyone who offered a freewill offering to the LORD. 6 From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, but the foundation of the temple of the LORD had not been laid. 7 Then they gave money to the masons and carpenters, and food, drink and oil to the Sidonians and to the Tyrians, to bring cedar wood from Lebanon to the sea at Joppa, according to the permission they had from Cyrus king of Persia. 8 Now in the second year

of their coming to the house of God at Jerusalem in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua the son of Jozadak and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all who came from the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work and appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the LORD. 9 Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers stood united with Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah and the sons of Henadad with their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God.

So getting to work, the idea, "Let's get to work," is what's happening here in the text. These people are getting to work, the work that God has called them to do, and what I want us to do in considering this and looking at how this relates to us, is consider this text under two points, two main points this morning, and the first point is that they were and we are called to work. Called to work. They were called by the Lord out of captivity, not to go back and to enjoy their lives of just being back in the land, being back home, enjoying the blessings of God, they were called to a work. They were called to build the house of the Lord.

You see this in the very first chapter of this book when we read in verse 5 of chapter 1, "Then the heads of fathers' households of Judah and Benjamin and the priests and the Levites arose, even everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem." God had stirred them. We talked about that word, the same word that was used earlier about Cyrus in the first verse of this book, the Lord stirred up Cyrus' heart to issue the decree to rebuild the house, and then he stirred up the hearts of his people. Remember, 50,000 almost 50,000 people returned but there were probably, you know, a million or more over in Babylon and only 50,000 returned, but the 50,000 that returned are defined by this characteristic: God stirred up their hearts in verse 5. He awakened their hearts. He roused them. That's what we saw that word means that's repeated in verse 1 and 5 of chapter 1, "stirred up" means "awakened; roused; moved to action." And so they're not getting up just like, you know, you get up in the morning and you have nothing to do, like it's nice to have days like that, isn't it? You get up in the morning and there's no agenda. Most of the time we get up in the morning and there's an agenda and that's, we're really made that way. We're made to get up and be at work. Well, they were wakened up and not just to hang out, they were wakened up by God to get to work as we saw in verse 5 of chapter 1, "whose spirit God had stirred to go up and rebuild." They want to be about the work. God has put it in their hearts.

God's people are called out of bondage not to live lives of pleasure in this world, we're called out of darkness and bondage to live our lives devoted to our King, building and extending his kingdom. We're called to work. We're called to serve. That's why the apostles, one of their favorite ways to refer to themselves whether it's Paul or Peter or even we saw James, is, "James, a bondservant of Jesus Christ," or it could be translated, "James, a slave of Jesus Christ." To receive the call of salvation is to receive the call to be God's servant, God's slave, and we find that in that, that is the greatest freedom and the greatest, ironically the greatest rest. We find rest in serving Christ.

This is pictured beautifully and think about this and some of you may be really tired today, you may be really discouraged, some of you may be at the point where you feel like you just can't go on, the cares, the concerns, the burdens, the pain, discouragement in relationships, just general fatigue from how hard you've been laboring in your job, laboring in your family, young mom, young dad not sleeping, and you're just at your wit's end, what's the way out? Well, ironically the way out of being so fatigued and so weak is to go to Jesus Christ for rest; to hear the words of Jesus, some of those beautiful, one of those beautiful passages in all of Scripture, Matthew 11:28-29, "Come unto Me, you who are weary and heavy-laden. Come unto Me, you who are weary and heavy-laden." You're weighed down. You're worn out. Jesus says, "Come unto Me to find rest. Come unto Me, you who are weary and heavy-laden," but what does he say next? "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls." You will find rest. How? Amazing paradox: when you take the yoke upon you. When do you put the yoke? A yoke, we don't think about yokes in modern day but in the days before the tractor, you yoked the oxen or you yoked the horses or you yoked the donkeys together to pull a wagon or to pull a plow, and so here the image is yoking oxen together to pull a plow, to get the work done, you need more than one ox and so you put the yoke on so that these two beasts of burden work together to shoulder the load. So Jesus says, "Come unto Me, yoke yourself to Me, shoulder the load with Me. Take My work and labor with Me," and in that you will find the sweetest rest beyond your wildest dreams because our God is a God who, as we sang about earlier, who is, he's able to accomplish all that concerns us. He's able to do all that he calls us to do. His strength is made perfect in weakness. He empowers you to do what you don't have the power to do, but you only receive that power when you submit to him and yoke yourself to him and say, "I'm Your servant, Lord, what would You have me do?"

So we're called to work, in fact, we could have two subpoints under this first point and the first is we're created for works. Not just called for work, we're created for work and I'm using the plural to help me out with the second point. Created for works, all works, works in general. You think about it, God made man to work. This is something that is, the reason that there is such a thing as the Protestant work ethic, do you know where that came from? Roman Catholicism in the medieval centuries had lost the Bible, covered it up in the Latin language, nobody basically could hear the Bible in their own language when they went to the cathedrals, they read in Latin and so it's a language they didn't speak and so the Bible was lost. When the Bible's lost, you're in the dark and so people began to see work as just an awful burden and the way that many people in the world see it today. You probably have friends that they work through the week to get to Friday night and Saturday night so they can party and have fun. No joy in the work except to make money so they can party and then later they can retire and have fun. That's all it is. But when you see it biblically, what happened is when the Bible came back into the church, Luther translated the Bible into German, and Tyndale translated it into England, and others translated the Bible into the native tongue, the language of the people, then the word of God was recovered and what they saw as they read the Scriptures was the nobility of work, and one of the ways you see that is we're created for work. Genesis 2, the Lord places the man in the garden and he puts him there to cultivate it. He says, in a sense, not literally but it's clearly in the passage, "Adam, get to work." Work is not a

result of the fall. You hear that. Work preceded the fall. We were made to join God in working and building and extending his rule. We were made as image-bearers to reflect his glory, to be above everything else in creation and to rule over it; to extend his rule over it; to work at it. This is why it's so ennobling when people, I mean, everything that we do that is, you think about the jobs and you can figure it out if somehow everything productive that's not just wicked, everything that's productive is basically extending the reign and rule of God in his order to a creation that needed that. Even before the fall, the creation needed man to shepherd it, to make it more lovely, to tend it. Now it became even more in need of that after the fall because now the world's a mess and it's subjected to futility and our efforts aren't successful like they were.

So Adam worked. Now his job was a whole lot better than our jobs are because it always, it worked out. It wasn't like he was Superman and he was just having easy stuff. I think he was working hard but it wasn't like he was sweating and then, you know, how you can work really hard and it come to nothing. Had those projects where you work and you work and you work and you've got to start all over? That's tough. It can be. So the Lord made us for work, created for work. You were created to work. You will not be as fulfilled as a human being if you are not working in some way. You may have limitations but there are things that you can do to extend God's kingdom and to serve others and to extend his reign and rule throughout creation and that's what you need to be doing, all of us until we die. And we never retire from God's work. You may retire from your job and that's okay, but that gives you more time even for God's work.

Look at Ephesians 2. I'm gonna show you how this is so clear in the New Testament that we're created for work. Here the Apostle Paul essentially says in verse 10, we're gonna read verses 8 to 10, in verse 10, you're recreated for work because, you see, in sin when we're separated from God, we're not really able to do the work of extending his kingdom. We still can be a part, unbelievers can do amazing things in ordering creation, but in really extending the kingdom of God, we're completely useless and worthless until we're saved to extend spiritually his rule. But when we're reborn, we're created for work. That's what he says in Ephesians. Look at 2:8 to 10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." Now this is really interesting how Paul points this out. He says, "Listen, you're saved not because of your works." Be clear on this, if you are saved, you are saved completely separate from your works, apart from works, Romans 3. You're saved apart from anything you do. You're saved by the finished work of Jesus Christ and your trust in him. You repent, you surrender, you place your faith in Christ and what he has done, and that faith God then declares righteous and translates into salvation, justification, sanctification, and the rest. You're saved apart from works so that no one may boast. But if you're saved apart from works, you're saved unto works. Look what he says in verse 10. After he says you're saved not as a result of works so that no one may boast, verse 9, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works," literally in the Greek, "unto good works which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." So we are God's workmanship. He's made us again, he's worked us, he's made us, and then he's done that specifically so that we can get to work.

If you're a Christian, you're called to work and that's a good thing. That's a wonderful thing and it really is true. I mean, think about it, little kids need to work and we're unbiblical in this. I wasn't a good dad in this. I didn't see this clearly enough. Now some dads can be tyrants, you know, and sit around and just, I guess, you know, but anyway, I wasn't like that but I was more like, "Oh, I don't need to make my son or my daughter help me out here." I mean, I did some but not as much as I should have. If I'd really been thinking theologically, you guys would have done a lot more work and it would have been good for them. I mean, like, this is why a two-year-old or a three-year-old, you start, you should start letting them try to make their bed or, you know, picking things up, letting them contribute in some way. Why? They're made for work and when you work together, man, that's everything. Working together is better than working separately. God made us to work together to accomplish these things. So as Christians, this is even more, it's taken to another level. Now you're back reunited to God, connected to God, filled with his Spirit, enabled by his power and set to work. Baby Christians, adult Christians, mature Christians, working together, that's what God intends, and we're supposed to be zealous for work.

Turn over a few pages past Philippians and Colossians and 1 & 2 Timothy, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy to Titus. A key word, a key phrase in the book of Titus is the phrase "good deeds" or "good works" depending on the translation. It comes up a number of times but in the most concentrated form starting in chapter 2, verse 14, which I want to read it in context, though. Look at verse 11. Chapter 2, verse 11 of Titus. God's purpose. He's saying, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men," the grace of God that saves has come and what does it do when it comes? What does the grace of God, the saving grace of God do in the life of the people of God? What does God intend it to do? Verse 12, "instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age." So first of all, it teaches us to turn away from ungodliness and worldly desires and to live positively, sensibly, righteously, godly. But then he goes on to say in verse 13, "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus," look at verse 14, "who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds." Jesus wanted to purify for himself a people who formerly gave themselves to lust and to their own pleasures, to their own desires, and he's teaching us to say no to those things, to say yes to him, and to be zealous to work with him for his glory. To get to work.

Now look what he does. That's verse 14, so then he says in verse 15 to Titus, Paul speaking to the pastor Titus and he says, "These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you." Look at verse 1 of chapter 3, "Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed," remind them this is how you're supposed to live, you're supposed to be subject to authorities, not be rebellious, you're supposed to be a good kind person and you're supposed to be ready for every good work, constantly looking for opportunities to work for the kingdom.

Look down to verse 8. He's wrapping up his letter and he's gonna keep hammering this home. Verse 8, "This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men." Hey, I want you to make sure that your people, Titus, are engaging in good deeds.

You would think that would have been good enough to end with. Well, after he talks about the factious man in verses 8 and 9, I mean 9, 10 and 11, as he closes out his letter with his greetings to individuals, he says in verse 14, "In case you didn't get this, Titus. Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful."

We're not called to a life of ease. Now there are moments the Lord wants us to rest. Yes, we're called, we have to sleep, we have to rest, only God works all the time. That's right. That's right. That's right. I heard one of the guys at one of our classes this week said that, or no, it was Sybrand that said this. Well, he was one of the guys in the class too, I guess. But he said John Piper made a statement somewhere in one of his books that sometimes the most godly thing you can do is take a nap. That is true, to take care of your body. But the reason you take the nap is so you can be refreshed to get back to work.

We're called to work. We're created for all of God's works. We come to salvation, we come to be redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ and to surrender our lives to him, we come to serve him in his strength and his power. So we're created for all God's works. This is still point 1, called to work. That was subpoint A, created for all God's works. Now the second subpoint, created for specific works. Something I think we get in the text of Ezra as well as the New Testament is we're created for specific works too. We're created to be about work in general. Whatever your hand finds to do, do with all your might for the Lord. That's right.

But it's interesting when you look back at our text in the book of Ezra in the context of the Old Testament, one of the things that we noted as we read chapter 2 was the Lord has called and created specific people to do specific works. Remember how we looked at chapter 2, verses 1 to 70, and we saw that the way that Ezra records all of these almost 50,000 people who are coming home, he points out that there are so many priests, there are so many Levites, there are so many, this is verses 36 to 58, there are so many priests, 4,000 some odd priests, there are so many Levites, there are so many singers, there are gatekeepers, there are temple servants, Solomon's servants, all of these different roles and all of them have different roles to play and the Lord has called them back to be a part of the ongoing work of temple worship. They're gonna be, the Levites have responsibilities. In fact, when you read back through the earlier passages, you see how interesting, it's really interesting 1 Chronicles 23 and 24, David before he dies is setting up things and giving instruction on how the work is to be carried out after he dies. Solomon, his son, is gonna build the temple and he divides up all the Levites, there's 36,000 or 38,000, I can't remember, but anyway, there's a bunch of Levites at that time. There were a lot less Levites here on this end but there were like 36,000 and it was 6,000 would be singers and

4,000 are to be gatekeepers, and 4,000 are to be something else, and 24,000 are just to work the regular Levite ministry, and he divides them, those 24,000, into 24 groups.

The same thing with the priests, the next chapter or chapter 25 you find that he's doing the same thing with the priests. There are four families of priests and they're all so many different individuals in those families and he divides those into 24 groups. And the way that the temple service worked and was set up is that 1,000 Levites would leave their homes, leave their families, come to Jerusalem and work for a solid week. They would arrive before the Sabbath one week and leave after the Sabbath the next week. So they'd be there eight days, a little over eight days. And they would give themselves completely to the temple service, whatever their role was, and there were all kinds of jobs that needed to be done. All kinds of jobs. The priests would do the same thing. They would come and so you had 24 groups like that, you served twice a year, that's 48 weeks. Well, in the Jewish calendar, there's actually only 51 weeks. Remember it's a lunar calendar. It's kind of a lunar/solar. Every few years they have an extra month to make up for their... Anyway it just, you can look it up if you want, if you're interested in that, if that intrigues you. Probably very few of you actually even care that I gave that. I care about that stuff. I'm like, "51 weeks? What do they do with the extra week?"

Anyway, okay, so 48 weeks and three other weeks were the three annual festivals that all of them had to come to. Every man in Israel comes to it, so all 38,000 Levites and all the priests have to be there those three weeks. So you've got 51 weeks. So they served twice a year for a week each and they came back those other three weeks so they served five weeks a year. This is actually good grounds for why you have nursery rotations, you know? Hey, we need to make it five weeks. No, I'm just kidding. We have a system, though, and the idea is you come and you do your part, then you go home and somebody else comes and does their part, and it made things function so that people, so that the temple worship where people were meeting with God, offering sacrifices, regular burnt offerings, offering incense, offering grain offerings, offering things so that they could be right with God could carry on. So you had that specificity.

You had musicians and singers. There were basically, I can't remember if it was like two dozen singers that were there for each week. No, there were 24. No, it was 12. They had 12 singers that were there each week so they had singers who were there singing praise as they're doing various things. They're supposed to sing. It's time to sing. Hit the notes. There they are.

Everything laid out like that and what that tells you is God is concerned with the details. God is not unconcerned about the details. We tend to be unconcerned about the details. In fact, when you read the passages in Exodus where God lays out what the tabernacle is supposed to be set up like, when you read the passages in Chronicles where this is laid out and then executed, it's honestly, frankly, for me it's hard to read. I find my flesh reacting and getting irritated having to read it and I have to repent. And why is that? Well, I just, I don't want to bother with these details. Why do I have to bother with these details? Well, the Lord wanted that there for some reason and part of it is because he knows that you and I tend to disdain certain things that need to be done in our lives. We

tend to value, look down upon them and devalue them and he's saying to us even in this way in his word, those things are way more valuable than you imagine.

So caring for the babies in the nursery, is that important to God? Is it just important even because so their parents can be in here, which is certainly one of the main reasons that we have a nursery? So that a mom and dad of young children can hear the word. But you know, the ministry of the nursery isn't just about that, it's also about Spirit-filled Christians in the nursery caring for these children. It's about you asking God, if you want to see it the way God sees it, it's not just this is my week, oh bummer. No, this is my week to serve. The Lord values this. This is precious to him. This child that I'm holding or this child that I'm changing or this child that I'm having to try to convince not to hurt this other child, whatever it is, this child is created in the image of God and this child may be going to become a believer and walk with God. This child could be, who knows who this child could be. You could be, I mean, can you imagine if you worked the nursery at the synagogue in Nazareth. Boy, that was an honor but they didn't know it. We don't know what we're doing when we minister like that but if we have a right mindset, we will make a difference in this child's life.

That's the way God works. God takes little things that seem insignificant, inconsequential, and he infuses them with his grace and power when his servants are yielded to him and he does above and beyond all we ask or imagine, not because we're anything but because of his power that's at work in us. The little things matter. They matter way more than we think they do and I confess this as someone who's convicted. We as elders have been convicted of not investing as much as we need to in just supporting and encouraging the people that have been working in the children's area. We've been burdened about that, particularly me most. I have failed as a pastor in that area and I want to be, I want to get on God's agenda in that, and we're committed to that and we've been making strides the last couple of years. There's been such great work going on. There's been great work going on the whole 25 years I've been here in spite of the lack of emphasis that I could have been having on it. But when God shows you what to do, the message is get to work and we need to do that.

We're created for specific works and so that means that some of us are equipped and gonna be equipped to do certain things that others aren't, and rather than be envious, "I wish I could do that like them," rejoice in their giftedness and their ability and their calling and don't look down upon your own because every one of us has a role. Our God is so wise and so incredibly thoughtful of every detail that needs to be done. He's not missed a single thing. Every believer is placed within the body exactly as the Spirit intends, gifted as the Spirit intends.

So the command is don't be discouraged that you haven't found your niche yet, just keep serving. You're created for work. Keep working. In fact, that brings us to the second point. Called to work, created for all works, created for specific works, that was our first point. The second point is we're equipped for work. Back to Ezra 3. Note the repetition of the words in those verses, in verse 8 he "appointed the Levites from twenty years and older to oversee the work of the house of the LORD." In verse 9, he tells us, then, that

"Jeshua with his sons and brothers stood united with Kadmiel," so this is just repetition. He's basically saying the same thing he said in the first verse but giving us names with it. He says, "Then Jeshua with his sons and brothers stood united with Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah and the sons of Henadad with their sons and brothers the Levites, to oversee the workmen in the temple of God." Emphasis on work and workmen which we just talked about. Created for work.

But the key word I want to look at now is the word "oversee" that's repeated. Your translation if you've got the ESV or the NIV says "supervise." Twenty years and older, verse 8, to supervise the work of the house of the Lord. Or verse 9, to supervise the workmen in the temple. The word translated "supervise" or "oversee" is actually a word which means in its context it pictures not someone sitting there just directing, which that's an appropriate position in certain circumstances, right? You tell someone what to do without doing it yourself. This word, though, doesn't mean that. This word means oversee and supervise in the sense of doing it as well because the word means "to excel; to be bright; to be preeminent" is what the root meaning means. Not just to direct, that's not the focus. It means to be preeminent, to be bright, to glitter. There's this different usage so the idea is they're shining examples of the work themselves. They're showing people how to do the work so that the people of God to get the temple built aren't just called to work, they're equipped to work by leaders. You see this. The leaders God has placed there to equip them to do the work and the way the leaders equip them to do the work is to be leading out in the work. Exactly what we would expect.

Look in our New Testament. Every Christian is called to work. We're called to build the house and, remember, we've talked about this in weeks past, as Christians we're called to build the temple, the real temple, the spiritual temple, not the building or the building fund. No, that's a part of it but that's secondary. It's important but it's not fundamental. It's not primary. What is primary, that's a tool to do this, an important tool but nevertheless a tool. The work is to build the spiritual temple of God which is to bring more and more people to faith in Christ and to build those who have faith in Christ up in their faith so they become more holy, more like Jesus, more united in purpose and in ministry and in oneness. That's the work. We're called to that work and if you belong to Jesus Christ, you are called to that work.

This is one of the reasons it's absurd for someone to say they're a Christian, they love Jesus but they just don't care about church. You may hear people say that and some of the people have had bad experiences and I'm not saying they're not believers, for sure, but if they can continue in that after being challenged, it certainly gives you pause to consider have they really been saved because if you love Jesus but you don't love what Jesus loves, how do you make sense out of that? Jesus loves his church, warts and all. He loves his church. Jesus is building his church so if you have come to Jesus and you're following Jesus and you're working with Jesus, what are you doing? You're building the church.

So we're called to that and here we see we're equipped for that. The workers are being equipped by those overseeing, supervising and leading out in the work. Now a key passage that comes to mind is obviously Ephesians 4:11-12, a very familiar passage to

many of you, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service," the work of ministry, "to the building up of the body of Christ." So all of us are called, all the saints are called to the work of ministry, the work of service to building up the body of Christ and the pastors and teachers, that is elders, the evangelists, the prophets, the apostles, they are called to equip the saints for that but that doesn't mean they sit by and tell people what to do, they lead out in the work. They say like Paul said, "Follow me as I follow Christ."

So we are called to lead out in that and that's one of the reasons we actually made some organizational changes in the way that our elder ministry works and our deacon ministry works in the last year. We've been working on it for about a year and a half or two years and we're getting a little more clarity. Our elder oversight basically happens as elders oversee areas of ministry and as they oversee an area of ministry, their goal is to equip people in that area and invest in people in that area and to shepherd people in that area as they lead out in that area. So when you serve in an area, you're gonna have an elder and maybe a deacon or two that are working with you in that area who will be helping you and there for you to look to for direction as you serve. Then as you, this is where the one-anothering happens is actually in ministry. This is one of the benefits of working together. There's nothing like working together to get to know one another.

You know, you can have and we facilitate and want to facilitate more opportunities for people to have fellowship, that's why we have Sunday afternoon fellowships that we talk about, we're having one today for the Carpenters, say goodbye to them next week, and today we're celebrating, not celebrating, we're eating together, though, and fellowshiping together and we do that from time to time and we encourage people to stay after church on Sunday to have that, but you can really get to know people by working with them. You work together on a children's ministry team teaching a certain, you know, K-2 grade class. Think about how close you get as two ladies teaching or two couples working together, the relationships that develop. In fact, one of the things that we talked about, let me just say a word about nursery for a second, one of the things we realized is that if you don't staff a nursery, you won't need a nursery. Think about that. If you don't staff a nursery, you won't need one because when people come to the nursery and there's nobody there, they won't come back. So what has to happen is you have to have nursery workers that get there 15 minutes early like they're supposed to and are there waiting for people when they come and then people will start coming, but if nursery workers don't make the commitment to do that because they don't think, "Well, I didn't have anybody last week. I didn't have anybody the time before my last time rotation as a priest in the nursery, there was nobody there." And you know, it doesn't seem that important and so not that you intended to not be there on time but the next thing you know, you're late and that might be in the week that the new couple came with the baby in that age group and they won't be back, or if they're coming back, they're not coming back to Sunday school and it's a self-fulfilling prophecy. There's a sense in which if you build it, they will come. You know, that one piece of wisdom from that silly movie in the 80s. If you build it, they will come. If you actually do have a nursery, then people will

come if you're ready for them and if you're eager and if you see there's an opportunity to minister.

Now we realize this is a problem and we haven't facilitated well. We haven't helped you and we've decided that, hey, nursery workers need to be there 15 minutes early and if nobody comes, stay there, we're gonna stay there probably the whole time anyway, and what we're gonna do, though, is we're gonna have resources for the nursery workers to one-another each other while they're there. No kids show up, you pull out the devotional stuff and you work together and here's questions to ask each other about life and ministry, and you get to know one another. So that could be a great Sunday. "Man, there were no kids and I had such a wonderful time ministering to my co-worker." So either way, then next week when it comes, it's gonna be like, "Oh, man, now we've got some babies." No, it's gonna be, "Oh, man, I can't do that, I've got another work to do." We've got to work at that. You can't enjoy it too much so that... Okay. I don't think that'll be a problem.

But it's like we have to value what God values and realize that he will equip us and so this is part of equipping is even like that. We realize we need to be doing that to provide instruction to people when they come and there's no one there. Don't be discouraged. Hang in there. Let's keep doing it. The Lord may have this couple that's gonna join the church or three couples may show up on one Sunday in that age group. That kind of thing happens and we can serve the Lord and serve our brothers and sisters in a wonderful way by doing that.

You know, equipping also means gifting. God equips us by gifting us. We're gifted for the works. This is part 2, point 2, equipped to work. Part of it is we're gifted for the work. You see this in Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, 1 Peter 4, Ephesians 4. These are the main passages in the New Testament on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. God gifts his body. When he calls you to faith, he gives you spiritual gifts and essentially the message in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4, is that the Lord does what he wants to do but he's telling us that what we're supposed to do is use your gift. In fact, 1 Peter 4 breaks this down into basically two types of gifts: speaking gifts and serving gifts, and he says if you are speaking, that your gift is speaking, when you speak, do it as the oracles of God. Try to speak God's word. Be diligent to speak everything you can faithful to the word of God. If you're serving, if you're cleaning up on Wednesday nights, if you're setting up a room so that you're facilitating ministry to happen the next day, as you're doing that, serve with the strength that God gives. Don't think of it as unimportant. This is not that you're doing something for the Lord, the Lord loves this work. But now we're gonna have different gifts. We're gonna have gifts that are serving gifts, some have speaking gifts, and again, don't despise the gift God gave you, embrace it and use it. And that passage in Peter, he says if you do this, if you speak as the oracles of God, if you serve with the strength of God, what happens is the glory of God and the glory of Jesus Christ.

That's what we're about. God gives us the gifts, we then are equipped as we serve, and how do you find out your gift? I've said this before, let me just say it again. You know, you may have seen spiritual gift tests, you may have taken them, I'm not saying they're really worthless or anything, I'm just saying they're not that valuable in my view. I don't

think the Lord really gives spiritual gifts in a way that you can just test it. You can get some idea but the best way to know what your spiritual gift is, is get to work. Take a job and try it and serve with everything that you can in that job. Do the very best you can and for the term that you can, and if you for some reason are so un-gifted in it, you can't do it, then come to the equippers to help you, and if they say, "Hey, maybe this isn't the right thing," then you can step back, but what'll happen is sometimes you'll move into an area that you don't think your gifted in and when you try it and you move in that, the Spirit empowers you and you suddenly find yourself doing things you could never imagine doing and God's grace flows through you and you know it's not you. You give glory to Jesus Christ and people who know you and see the difference, they give glory to Jesus Christ.

So don't think in terms of just what you might want to do, what you might find naturally, I mean, it's not that that's no factor but don't limit yourself. Basically I think a good rule of thumb is when you see a need and the Lord lets you keep seeing a need, there's a reason he lets you keep seeing a need. Do what Titus said, be zealous for good deeds to meet pressing needs. Meet the need. Ask God's help, meet the need, and as you do that, as you lay yourself down and you yoke yourself to Jesus Christ, you say, "Lord, I need Your help. I don't have the ability. I don't have the wisdom but I'm gonna move in this situation." Then what you will see is you will find that you'll be effective, you will make a difference in some way beyond what you even think, even if you think sometimes you're not, sometimes so often we will think we're not making sense. "You know, I don't know what I'm saying. I don't know why I said that." And then later you find out someone says, "What you said to me meant so much to me." And you're like, "I can't believe that."

The Spirit of God. We use the gift, God empowers the gift, God enables us and God builds up his body and we build his kingdom. We are created to work. We're created for work and God is glorified when we work, and there's nothing more wonderful. It's true the most wonderful things in life, this is true even unbelievers know this, there's nothing that's really worth having that you don't work for. Every really valuable thing is something someone works for. I mean, a championship in athletics, they work and they work and they work and they receive. Now that's a thing that's passing away but there's some value in it because you work. When we work, we're laying up treasures in heaven, we're building an eternal kingdom that cannot be taken away, and we're bringing glory to our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Let's go to him in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the work that You have done, Lord, to save us. We acknowledge that as Your word tells us, You save the one who stops working to try to work works of righteousness, he ceases from his own work and he rests in Christ, he places his trust and his faith in Jesus. That's what brings salvation. You don't save us on account of our works. We can't do things to earn Your favor. The spiritual malady that we have is far too great, we're dead in our sins, we must be saved from outside of ourselves by Your divine power and all we can do is extend our hand, our empty hand,*

*the empty outstretched hand of a beggar and ask you to save, and yet then, Lord, when You save, when You grant repentance and faith, when a soul is delivered from darkness to Your marvelous light, You then recreate us and You empower us to work alongside You in the building of Your eternal kingdom. What an awesome and amazing privilege, that You invite men, sinners saved by grace, to do works that will last forever, works in the hearts of men, for the souls of men that will redound to the glory of God forever and ever. Lord, help us be busy, not in the things of this world but in the things of Your kingdom. Let us labor while there is time for Your glory we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*