

His Workmanship

On God's Personal Hand in the Life of the Believer

For five days and most of a sixth, God creates at the sound of His own voice. “Let there be light,” and there was light. Let there be an expanse, and the waters divided. Let the earth sprout, let the lights be set in their places, let the waters swarm, let the earth bring forth living creatures. Command after command executed at a distance, worlds ordered by a word, and never once does the text show God touching what He makes.

Then the pattern breaks. When God makes the man, He does not speak him into the field like the beasts. He stoops. “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Genesis 2:7, ESV) Formed. It is the potter’s verb, the word for a craftsman working clay with his fingers. And then closer still: God breathes into the man’s nostrils, which cannot be done from across a room. Everything else in creation received its existence by decree alone. The creature made to bear God’s image received his life mouth to face, from a God who had drawn near enough to give it that way. Before the fall, before the covenants, before a single command has been given, Scripture establishes proximity. Hands in the dust.

The prophets never forgot the picture, and they reached for it precisely when Israel needed to remember whose they were. “But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.” (Isaiah 64:8) Notice what Isaiah does with the image. Here the potter’s hand is not invoked as a threat but as the ground of the clay’s appeal. Israel, under judgment and pleading for mercy, does not argue from her own worth. She

argues from her Maker's investment: we are the work of your hand, and a craftsman does not abandon what his own hands have shaped.

But the doctrine of God's sovereignty is often confessed in a way that erases this picture. The believer confesses that God ordains whatsoever comes to pass, that his days were determined before one of them existed, and somewhere in that confession the hands tend to disappear. The Potter recedes and a strategist takes His place, moving pieces across a board toward a victory that was never about them. Whole seasons of doubt live inside that substitution, and it can sound humble while it works, as though shrinking the self down to a game piece were a way of magnifying God. It is a substitution all the same, an image smuggled in from somewhere other than Scripture. The God who decreed your days is the God whose hands formed the first man from dust, and the Bible never allows the Planner and the Potter to come apart. Every human being is His workmanship in that first sense; being formed by God is not what saves. The believer's confidence runs further: the hands that formed him have taken up a second, saving work.

I. Known: Days Written Before One of Them Was

If any man in Scripture had reason to feel like a piece on a board, it was David. Plucked from a sheep pasture without being consulted, anointed for a throne he had not sought, driven through caves and deserts by a providence he could not steer. And David is the man the Spirit chose to write the Bible's longest meditation on God's exhaustive knowledge and determination of a single human life. Psalm 139 is the decree examined from the inside, by the man under it.

He found, first, that there was no part of him outside God's knowledge. "O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar." (Psalm 139:1–2) Not the knowledge of a surveillance system, but of a

searcher: God has searched him, turned him over, gone through him the way a man goes through his own house. Before a word is on his tongue, the LORD knows it altogether. There is nowhere to flee from His presence, not heaven, not Sheol, not the far side of the sea, and David has checked.

Where did that knowledge begin? “For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb.” (Psalm 139:13) The potter’s proximity of Genesis 2 was not a one-time event at the head of the race. It is repeated, personally, in the forming of every human life. David was not mass-produced from Adam’s template. He was knitted, a weaver’s word, deliberate work done thread by thread in the dark. “My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.” (Psalm 139:15) Then: “Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.” (Psalm 139:16)

The days were written before they existed. All of them. Formed, the text says, the same shaping language used for the body, now applied to the life. The God who knitted David’s frame also authored David’s calendar, and He did both before David could contribute so much as an opinion. If the decree were the cold thing the strategist picture makes it, this is the verse where a man should shudder.

David does not shudder. “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.” (Psalm 139:14) And then, staring directly at the exhaustive thoughts of God concerning him: “How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand.” (Psalm 139:17–18) The one man in Scripture who looks longest at the decree over his own life comes away worshipping. The reason is in the grammar of the psalm itself. Every act of

determination in Psalm 139 is performed by hands. The days are written by the same God who did the knitting. David cannot experience the decree as impersonal because the psalm will not let him meet the Planner anywhere except in the Potter. The knowledge that wrote his days is the knowledge of the One who wove his frame, and a weaver's knowledge of his own work is not the knowledge of a spectator. It is the knowledge of love.

II. Ruined and Remade: New Creation

But the vessel did not stay whole. Sin entered the workmanship, and it did not enter as a scratch on the surface. It went to the root, corrupting the nature, deforming the image, turning the thing God had shaped for Himself into a thing at war with Him. And here is where a distant planner would show himself. A strategist whose piece is broken removes it from the board and reaches for another. There are always more pawns.

God does not reach for another. He makes again.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) That is the ESV, and it is faithful. But the Greek of the central clause is more abrupt than English grammar will allow: ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις. There is no verb in the second half. Paul does not write “he is a new creation.” He writes, if anyone is in Christ, new creation. English has to supply the missing words, and every translation pads the sentence back out; the Greek simply detonates. At the precise moment Paul declares what God does to a person in Christ, his syntax compresses into pure announcement, two words where an argument might have stood.¹ Then comes ἰδοὺ, behold, the herald's word

¹The construction is a verbless clause, ordinary in Greek, which routinely omits forms of εἰμί. What stands out is the compression itself: a two-word apodosis at the climax of the argument, connectives dropped in the clauses that follow, and the prophetic ἰδοὺ opening the next line. The effect is emphatic in a way the grammar did not require.

the Septuagint uses when God unveils His works, echoing the promise of Isaiah: “Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing.” (Isaiah 43:18–19) The old passed away at a stroke; the new has come to be and stands. The voice that once said “let there be” now says “new creation” over a ruined man, and the word κτίσις makes the claim impossible to soften: this is creation language, the vocabulary of Genesis, applied to the remaking of a person. The Potter’s answer to the marred vessel is not disposal and not repair. It is a second act of making by the same hands that performed the first.

And the second making is not performed at a distance. New creation in Christ, created in Christ Jesus, conformed to the image of the Son: every one of those phrases hangs on the same union. God does not hold the Son before the clay as a model to copy. He places the clay in the Son, and forms within it the likeness of the One to whom it now belongs. That is why the ruined vessel is not discarded. It is no longer merely an object on the wheel; it is joined to the Craftsman’s own beloved Son, and what is in Him will be made like Him.

III. His Workmanship

What, then, is the remade thing? “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10) In Greek the sentence opens αὐτοῦ γάρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, and the first word is the possessive: HIS workmanship we are. Paul throws the ownership to the front of the sentence the way John fronts the deity of the Word in his opening line. Before the verse tells us what we are, it tells us whose we are.

The word for workmanship is ποίημα, a made thing, the product of a craftsman, and Paul uses it exactly twice in all his letters. Here, of believers. And in Romans 1:20, of the created universe itself, where God’s invisible attributes are “clearly perceived, ever since the creation of

the world, in the things that have been made.” The same word that covers the heavens declaring the glory of God covers the believer. Paul places you alongside the stars as something God has made: a work that exists to display its Maker.

And notice what this one verse does to the supposed conflict between God’s determination and our living. The good works were “prepared beforehand,” the same beforehand as the book of Psalm 139, and yet the verse ends with us walking in them. Prepared by Him, walked by us, in a single sentence, with no tension and no apology. Paul feels no need to explain how divine preparation and human walking fit together, because in the workmanship frame there is nothing to explain. A craftsman’s designs are accomplished in what the work does. The walking is really ours, and it is really His workmanship, at the same time and without competition.

IV. For Our Good

So the believer is a thing twice made, formed in the womb and re-created in Christ, decreed down to his days by the God whose hands did both. One question remains, and it is the question underneath the strategist picture all along. What is the making for? A pawn, after all, is also handled by its player. The fear was never really about being determined. It was about being used, spent on a purpose that has nothing to do with us. A pawn’s good is irrelevant to the victory it serves. The question is whether the believer’s good is irrelevant to God’s.

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28) Before this verse says anything about what happens, it says who it is for. In the Greek the beneficiaries stand at the head of the sentence, τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεόν, in front of “all things,” in front of the verb itself: for those who love God, all things work together for good. The word order preaches. And “all things”

means all of them, πάντα, not the pleasant things sifted out from the painful, but the whole of the decreed life, the losses and the delays and the years we would never have written for ourselves, worked together toward good.²

Paul does not leave the good undefined. “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” (Romans 8:29) The good toward which every thread of the decree is being worked is conformity to Christ. Not usefulness. Not a role performed and discarded. The Potter is not making tools. He is making sons who look like the Son, a household of brothers of whom Christ is the firstborn, and every providence in the believer’s life is a stroke of that particular craftsmanship.

Man was made for the glory of God. The chief end of every creature, and of the whole creation, is that God be glorified, and nothing here changes that. But the glory of God is not a write-off of the creature’s good. It is the direct fulfillment of it. Jonathan Edwards, pressing this very question to its bottom, put it in a sentence the church has never improved on: “God’s respect to the creature’s good, and his respect to himself, is not a divided respect; but both are united in one, as the happiness of the creature aimed at is happiness in union with himself.”³ The good God is working in you and the glory God is seeking for Himself are not two line items in the decree that must be balanced against each other. They are one event viewed from two sides. When the vessel finally and fully displays its Maker, that is His glory. And it is also the vessel’s

²Some early manuscripts (P46, A, B) read πάντα συνεργεῖ ὁ θεός, “God works all things together,” making God the explicit subject. The shorter reading is followed by the NA28 and the ESV, with God understood as the agent from the context of verses 29–30, where He is the subject of every verb.

³Jonathan Edwards, *A Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, chap. 2, sec. 7, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed July 11, 2026, <https://ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works1.iv.iv.vii.html>.

highest good, because the greatest thing a made thing can be given is the beauty of the One who made it. Conformity to the Son is precisely where the two become indistinguishable: God glorified in a son who bears His image, the son blessed with the very likeness of God. In aiming at His own glory, He was never aiming away from your good. He was securing it.

V. The Vessel and the Hands

The believer who fears he is a pawn has imagined the wrong picture entirely, a player hovering above the board, touching the piece only to spend it. The picture Scripture paints is a Potter bent over His wheel, hands on the clay from the first day and never once removed. He formed you in the dust of Genesis and knitted you in the dark of the womb. He wrote your days before one of them arrived, with the same hands that did the weaving. When sin ruined the work, He did not reach for another piece. He spoke a second creation over you in His Son. He made you His ποίημα, prepared the road, and set you walking on it. And He is working all of it, all things, toward the day the vessel bears the image of the Son, which is His glory and your good in a single, undivided act.

You are not a piece in His game. You are the work on His wheel, and the work in His book, and the work of His hands. “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6) The Craftsman finishes what He starts.

*“Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.*

How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!”

Psalms 139:16–17