

**INTRODUCTION & CHAPTER ONE:**

A Masterpiece in the Making

# YOUR DIVINE DESIGN

HOW TO DISCOVER, DEVELOP, AND  
DEPLOY YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

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Living on the Edge

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# YOUR DIVINE DESIGN

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# INTRODUCTION

Jim lived in Alaska but did a lot of business in California. That business was cocaine. He was a drug dealer, an addict, and an alcoholic. His family was falling apart, and his life was a wreck.

Then Jim came to Christ, and his life began to change, miraculously. He and his wife moved to Northern California. He got work as a janitor, stayed sober, began to read the Bible, and started coming to our church. Thanks largely to my wife's gift of mercy and her sensitivity to people's needs, Jim got more involved. Our family pastor and some small-group leaders invested time with him, and God's Word took deeper root in his heart and mind.

Jim began to ask what God wanted him to do with his life. After discovering his spiritual gifts, he began a recovery ministry. It grew into the largest of its kind in Northern California. He knew what addicts went through, and he knew how to care for and challenge them. Most importantly, he knew how to guide them toward a relationship with Christ. He attended college and became a pastor, speaking all over the country to people struggling with substance abuse. Jim's adult son came to visit and wondered how this man could be the father he knew growing up.

Jim is a dramatic example of an extreme makeover—a drug-dealer-turned-janitor-turned-minister whose life went from a disastrous wreck to a beautiful picture of redeeming grace and miraculous fruitfulness.

## **Extreme Makeovers**

We all love a good makeover, don't we? For decades, television's most popular offerings have

been shows that give viewers a front-row seat to the transformation of houses, cars, restaurants, people, and just about anything else in need of a radical makeover. The process of taking something old, broken, imperfect, or no longer useful and turning it into something useful, beautiful, new, and whole is fascinating. When the finished product is unveiled, jaws drop and tears flow. It's an exciting moment.

Why are we so fascinated by such transformations? For one thing, we love to see positive change. Another reason is our curiosity about how it happens—the skill and creativity involved in making the old new, the broken whole, and the unappealing beautiful. But I think the main reason we find makeovers fascinating is that we all want one. Deep down, we long for change—not just gradual change but radical transformation. We want to be different.

God designed us that way. He is the Author of extreme makeovers and has written that desire

into our spiritual DNA. It's our story. Jesus Christ working in a human heart takes what is old, broken, imperfect, or no longer useful in our lives and turns us into something useful, beautiful, new, and whole.

The apostle Paul expressed this perfectly: "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). God wants that for every human being on the planet. He wants to transform us into something and someone wonderful.

## **The Ultimate Makeover**

The second chapter of Ephesians gives us a clear picture of the ultimate makeover. The passage presents the kind of before-and-after contrast that brings tears to people's eyes. Here's the "before" of our lives:

You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the

kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. (verses 1-3)

That's a human life in need of renovation—or, in this case, a resurrection. We were dead in sin, separated from God, prisoners of the world's system and all its dysfunctional relationships, and addicted to our own cravings, manipulation, and people-pleasing habits.

That's who we were, but by the grace of God, we've been given a completely different “after” picture:

Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. (verses 4-6)



We who were dead are now alive. We who were prisoners are now delivered from sin's power, Satan's grip, past mistakes, and the curse of death. We who were once objects of wrath now have a new standing with God as righteous and clean. We have a new identity, a new power, a new future, a new purpose, new privileges, and a new inheritance. It's the most dramatic, extreme makeover ever.

Why did God do this? What was His motivation for making such a radical change happen?

[He did this] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (verses 7-9)

God wants to demonstrate the riches of His grace. This whole makeover is a revelation of His nature—His goodness, kindness, compassion, love, wisdom,

and power. He puts His people on display to exhibit what He is really like so human beings can know Him.

That's what Jim's story—  
and the story of many  
others—accomplishes.  
When I look at where Jim  
was compared to where  
he ended up, I'm amazed at everything that  
happened between “before” and “after.”

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God puts His people  
on display to exhibit  
what He is really like.

His story also demonstrates how God uses special passions and abilities He gives us in this ultimate makeover process. The apostle Paul called these “spiritual gifts.” God took the spiritual gift of mercy in my wife, Theresa, to make Jim feel loved at a time when he didn't think anyone cared.

Through my and others' spiritual gift of teaching in our congregation, God replaced lies Jim believed about his identity with the truth of God's Word.

God used the exhortation of one of our counselors to help Jim learn and grow. He used the spiritual gifts of a small-group community to demonstrate His love, kindness, and acceptance.

Jim saw that he had spiritual gifts too and began to reproduce in the lives of others what God was doing in his life. He experienced the joy and fulfillment of being fruitful in God's Kingdom, and through him, many others also experienced joy and fulfillment.

Just like He did in Jim's life, God wants to put away the old in your life and replace it with the new. He wants an open door in your heart and life through which to give you new desires, purpose, peace, and fruitfulness. His extreme makeover has brought you into a relationship with Jesus in order to shape you into His image. And, as you'll discover, the spiritual gifts His Spirit has placed in you make the "after" of your life a beautifully fulfilling picture for all to see.

# **A MASTERPIECE** in the Making

You are a masterpiece in the making.

The extreme makeover God is taking you through is not just a cosmetic upgrade or self-improvement program, and it isn't about only you. If you had any doubts about that, notice where the first nine verses of Ephesians 2 have been leading:

We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (verse 10)

That word *handiwork* (or workmanship in some translations) conveys a masterpiece, a work of the finest craftsmanship. When you become a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), you are given a renewed purpose and are being handcrafted by God to fulfill it. He is giving you a second (or third or hundredth) chance to become the person He originally designed you to be: your divine design. He is an artist painting you as a beautiful piece of art, or a sculptor shaping you into a remarkable sculpture, or a literary genius writing a profoundly fulfilling and meaningful story with your life.

Ephesians 2:10 not only identifies what God is doing in your life but also tells you how and why. His master workmanship is recreating you through your relationship with Christ for the purpose of doing good works.

Deep down, we all want a sense of purpose, don't we? Think of Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life*, which, although first published two decades

ago in 2002, remains a best-selling Christian book. It wouldn't have sold more than 50 million copies in various formats in over 137 languages if the human heart weren't filled with a hunger for meaning and purpose.

No surprise, then, that God tells us right there in Ephesians 2:10 what His purpose for us is. It's to do the works He puts in front of us to do.

Before the foundation of the world, God knew you and loved you (Ephesians 1:3-5). He saved you, understands you, cares for you, and wants to restore to you all His good purposes for your life. To do that, He is calling you to put away the old nature, maintain a deep relationship with Christ, and demonstrate His goodness, wisdom, and love. That's what the makeover is all about: your life becoming beautiful, winsome, and kind—an illustration of God's very nature.

As a means toward that end, God planned good works and purposes specifically for you to fulfill.

Not only that, but He designed you so that you'd be able to do what He planned for you. And as you'll see in the following pages, He equipped you with the gifts and tools you need.

That's how it worked with my friend Jim. God preordained that He would rescue and restore Jim and then give him the gifts to reach into people's lives to help *them*. First it was drug addicts, then alcoholics, then sex offenders, and on and on. It kept building as Jim allowed the love and grace of Christ to pour through his life into the lives of many others.

God wants to do something like that in each of us. It will look different from person to person, but the goal is the same. You are a special masterpiece designed to demonstrate the nature of the Artist who made you.

## **The Master's Studio**

This doesn't just happen spontaneously, though. There is a step-by-step process made possible because

of what Christ did on the cross, providing us “access to the Father by one Spirit” (Ephesians 2:18). Paul went on to write about the essential context in which the Master Craftsman does His work in us:

You are no longer foreigners and strangers,  
but fellow citizens with God’s people and  
also *members of his household*, built on the  
foundation of the apostles and prophets, with  
Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.  
In him *the whole building is joined together* and  
rises to become *a holy temple* in the Lord. And  
in him *you too are being built together to become  
a dwelling in which God lives* by his Spirit.  
(verses 19-22, emphasis added)

Notice the italicized phrases; this is a household, a temple, a joining together of believers in Jesus to be inhabited by God’s Spirit. Paul presents a picture of all who are in Christ being built together into God’s dwelling place.



In other words, God does spiritual makeovers in a special place: in a supernatural community we call the Church. That's where the old becomes new—where unshaped clay is turned into a magnificent sculpture in the Master's hands.

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**The Church is the  
Craftsman's studio  
where masterpieces  
are made.**

When the New Testament talks about the Church, it is not describing a building or institutional religion. It's talking about the living, breathing,

called-out people of God who are living in community together, walking authentically and faithfully, doing life together in the power of the Holy Spirit based on God's Word. The Church is the Craftsman's studio where masterpieces are made.

That's why local churches are the hope of the world. Some may be operating in a dysfunctional manner, missing out on the makeovers God wants to do, but that doesn't negate His original purpose. Christ-centered communities are still where He redeems,

restores, and renews people so they can live out their callings in the world. When God's people gather around His Word and are empowered by His Spirit, lives change.

A few verses later in Ephesians, we see the larger purpose:

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (3:10-11)

God's overarching plan was for His people to become demonstrations of His wisdom and character so the entire universe could see the amazing makeovers that God's grace and power produce. When all the people on earth, as well as the "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) in heaven, see someone like Jim reach out to restore sex addicts and substance abusers, they marvel at God's greatness. That kind of radical

change demonstrates God's "manifold wisdom"—His unmatched knowledge and skill.

We notice when a person's outward appearance is completely remade by fashion and makeup artists. We're impressed when designers and contractors renovate a house into something better than we could have imagined. That takes vision and skill. But when human beings are remade from being "dead in [their] transgressions and sins" (Ephesians 2:1) into trophies of God's grace, the whole universe is in awe.

God wants every human being on planet Earth to see what He does in His people and think, *Wow!* When He reveals the beauty and glory of His nature through the demonstrations of wisdom, power, and love in His Church, He wants us to realize, *Lord, You're so much more wonderful, powerful, faithful, and loving than I could have dreamed.*

## **Heart-to-Heart Transformation**

That's the corporate, communal side of things. But there's also an individual, internal side. God does extreme makeovers in two places: *in the Church*, which He is building up as His dwelling place, and *in the human heart*, which He is aligning with His heart.

Paul prayed that the Holy Spirit would empower believers so that we in faith would experience the indwelling in our hearts of Christ Himself, all for His larger purposes:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this

love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19)

Every human being who allows the Spirit of God to have His way in his or her heart becomes a demonstration to the world of God's wisdom. It isn't magic; you don't just walk into a room, get transformed, and come out a new person. It is supernatural, and it happens in a supernatural community where His Spirit dwells.

Your DNA is unique, physically and spiritually. God loves you, saved you, and called you individually. He has a unique purpose for you and has laid out good works for you to do that no one else can. Those may be high-profile or behind-the-scenes works, but they are yours and only yours. And you are being prepared for these good works in the depths of your heart and in the community of believers.

## **How the Masterpiece Is Made**

The first part of Ephesians presents the new you. The first three chapters show the extreme makeover God does in every believer's life, a transformation He had planned even before He created the world. Ephesians 2, as we have seen, was largely about the who and what— what you used to be like and who you are now. Ephesians 3 was about the why— God's purpose in it all.

That brings us to Ephesians 4, where the message now shifts from our identity in Christ to our life in Him. It turns to the process and how it works. Now that we are loved, adopted, and accepted by the Father, redeemed and transformed in Christ, and sealed with the Spirit, what does this new life look like?

Ephesians 4 opens with a challenge to live out what we now know to be true. In other words, since God has done all these miraculous, wonderful things and we already possess them, we are to walk in a manner

“worthy of the calling” (verse 1). What we believe and how we live ought to line up.

That can happen only when we embrace the nature and character of God (verses 2-6) and receive the gifts He has given us (verses 7-13). We each have been endowed with grace (verse 7). It’s an endowment, a share in the plunder of Christ’s victory over sin and death (verse 8). Paul is evoking an image of a conquering king completely stripping his enemy of power and giving the spoils of war to his fellow warriors. He casts it as a cosmic battle that fills the universe with Christ’s glory; the gifts that come from this victory are therefore otherworldly gifts (verses 9-10). They are supernatural.

With that in mind, notice how these gifts operate in the lives of Christians and the Church:

Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that

the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (verses 11-13)

When Jesus died on the cross for your sin, He redeemed you. Restoration began when you put your faith in Him. Between the time of His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave, He proclaimed His victory over Satan, sin, and death. That's how it's possible for you to have been dead in sin (2:1) but now alive with Christ and seated with Him in heavenly places (verses 5-6). He broke the power of sin and death in your life. And the evidence of this wonderful, miraculous event is the spiritual gifts He gives to each and every believer.

Those are our tools for transformation. Just as an artist uses a paintbrush or a sculptor uses chisels and detailing instruments, God uses spiritual gifts to shape His human masterpieces.



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**Our task is to  
discover, develop,  
and deploy our  
spiritual gifts.**

As we live in an authentic, loving community centered around the Word of God and exercise our spiritual gifts, we become the paintbrushes and trowels

in His hands. The results these gifts produce are evidence of Jesus's victory. They demonstrate that Satan, sin, and death have no power over us. Our task is to discover, develop, and deploy our spiritual gifts for God's purposes and our joy and fulfillment.

## **Gifts for Specific Purposes**

If you're wondering why we've gone through so much of Ephesians to get to the main focus of this book—which is discovering, developing, and deploying spiritual gifts according to God's design for each of us—it's because many Christians approach spiritual gifts as though they are items on a buffet table. They consider the options, take a test that helps identify their interests, and pick one they would like to have.

Even though desires and tests can help us with our understanding, spiritual gifts are not there just for the choosing. God has given *specific gifts* to each of His people to fulfill their *specific purposes* (1 Corinthians 12:11).

God made each of us to be a tool in His hands, and like physical tools, we aren't effective if we aren't being used according to His design. I've tried hammering with a screwdriver before, and it doesn't work very well. Tools are useful only in the situations they were made for.

Discovering the gifts that are ours is a process that involves study, much prayer, and evidence of fruitfulness. That may be why some Christians can't say with certainty what their spiritual gifts are. Such knowledge should be the basis of our life choices, yet over and over again, as a lifelong pastor, I've watched believers make crucial decisions without that fundamental knowledge.

Realizing your specific gifts would likely spare you a lot of frustration. It would keep you from saying yes simply to fill a position when you really ought to say no. Too many faithful people have been manipulated by guilt into serving in areas where they are not gifted. Joy and fruitfulness are rarely the results. Of course, I understand that sometimes situations call for someone to step up and meet a need; you do what you have to do when the circumstances call for it. But it is never effective to operate in someone else's good works. Most of a person's time, energy, and focus should be invested in the areas of their God-given giftedness.

I did a lot of "Christian" things as a young believer because I thought more activity meant more fruitfulness. But my joy and the impact of my life for God's Kingdom never got off the ground until I got clear on what my spiritual gifts were and then focused my time and energy on them. When I learned to say no to possibilities that didn't fit those gifts, God began to use my life in ways I had never dreamed of. It had nothing to do with being special

or earning His blessings. God was using the free gifts He had given me at the time of salvation to accomplish His purposes.

It's simply a matter of discovering the paintbrushes within us and learning how to use them to add our colors to the masterpieces God is creating in other people's hearts and lives. When we do that, the life of Christ becomes visible in us. The "manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:10) is on display.

Can you see how wisely using your spiritual gifts is so much more important than filling the slots at church each year to make sure all the programs are covered? The goal is not about keeping believers busy, getting them connected, or helping them become more productive. God is not aiming at moderate improvement; He wants an extreme makeover in your life and the lives of people who need to experience the spiritual gifts you've been given.

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**God wants an extreme  
makeover in your life.**

Your spiritual gifts came into your life at the same time the Spirit of God came in: when you placed your faith in Christ. Whether you recognized any of the gifts then or not, they were there. And now the Master Artist wants them to color the masterpiece of His Kingdom. You are a paintbrush in His hands.

## TEN PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING SPIRITUAL GIFTS\*

1. Every Christian has one or more spiritual gifts.
2. Many believers have received more than one spiritual gift.
3. Spiritual gifts are given at the moment of regeneration, but they may lie undiscovered and dormant for a long period of time.
4. Spiritual gifts can lie dormant or be neglected, but they cannot be lost.
5. Spiritual gifts are not the same as the gift of the Holy Spirit.
6. Spiritual gifts are not the same as the fruit of the Spirit.
7. Spiritual gifts are not the same as natural talents.
8. Some spiritual gifts are more useful in local churches than others because they result in greater edification of the body.
9. <i>Charismata</i> literally means “grace gifts.” These gifts are sovereignly and undeservedly given by the Holy Spirit.
10. Spiritual gifts are God’s spiritual equipment for effective service and edification of the body.

\* See Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12, 14; Ephesians 4; 1 Peter 4:10-11.



## Questions to Ponder

- How have you understood spiritual gifts in the past?
- How did this chapter help clarify why God gives spiritual gifts?
- Look over the chart on the previous page. Do any of the principles surprise you? If so, which ones and why?
- Describe how God has used the spiritual gifts of others to help shape and transform your life.

# YOU ARE A MASTERPIECE IN THE MAKING!

Just as an artist uses a pen, paintbrush, or chisel to create a work of art, God uses spiritual gifts to craft us into His handiwork. Are you ready to discover *Your Divine Design*?

In this book, Chip Ingram guides you through the biblical passages concerning spiritual gifts and shares the specific steps you need to take to embrace God's call on your life. You'll learn:

- How to discover the gifts God has given you
- How to develop the unique ministry He has prepared for you
- deploy your spiritual gifts and demonstrate His love and character to the world

Start today to uncover God's purpose and workmanship in you and begin to serve the Church and your community as you were designed to do!



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