

Our Calling: Living a Worthy Life

Ephesians 4:1-16
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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August 4, 2024

I'm going to do something a bit different today, more of a Bible study sermon. Our Epistle Reading from Ephesians 4 is so full of helpful and needed information that we're going to walk through some of it verse by verse, and in some cases word by word. But don't worry, I'll finish on time ☺

Verse 1 begins, "I, therefore..." Let's stop right there. Whenever a thought begins with "therefore," it indicates that what follows is predicated and grounded in what has come before. In this case, the first three chapters in Ephesians are primarily theological in nature, with a special emphasis on our being adopted as children of God into the family and kin-dom of God. The "therefore" at the start of chapter 4 **moves from the theological into the practical, moral, and ethical implications of what it means to be and live as a child of God, with an emphasis on life together in community, marked by unity and peace.** This focus continues through the end of chapter 6, the conclusion of this letter.

As children of God, the author begs that we "**lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called**" (v.1). In the Greek, the word "you" is plural, thus it is the entire community of faith (individually and together) that is being addressed. Hence, it is as a community of faith that we are to live a life worthy of this high calling. Thankfully, we are given more specific guidance in this passage from Ephesians.

We are to lead a life worthy of our calling "**with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...**" (v. 2). Let's look at that sentence in detail. **Question:** How **humble** are you? Am I? Are we? How modest, unassuming, and unpretentious? Perhaps some work needs to be undertaken in this area. A fuller definition of being humble involves more than simply not thinking more highly of ourselves than we should.

It **also means to not think less highly of ourselves than we should.** After all, we are nothing less than children of God, infused with God's Sacred Presence within us.

Next, as a child of God we are called to be gentle. **Question:** How **gentle** are you? Am I? Are we? This can mean having a mild temperament, being kind, considerate, tender, not harsh or severe. Perhaps there are some rough edges on each of us that could use some smoothing out to be more gentle.

Next, a life worthy of our calling should also be marked by patience. **Question:** How **patient** are you? Am I? Are we? Oh well. Two out of three isn't bad. The word for patience in Greek carries the connotation of endurance, perseverance, or steadfastness rather than just a passive kind of waiting. This kind of patience withstands adversity without quitting. It endures opposition without striking out at an opponent with physical or verbal abuse. I must apologize, therefore, to you for the times I have not been as patient as I should have been.

Next, in addition to living life with humility, gentleness and patience, we are called to bear with one another in love. **Question:** How well do you **bear with others?**

Do I? Do we? At one level or another, every relationship in life (whether personal, familial, with friends, at work, at the church) requires an element of bearing with others. Within our Presbyterian denomination, one of our foundational principles is grounded in what is called “**mutual forbearance**”. Written back in the 1788, as our denomination was expanding and facing differences in theology and practice, this principle states, (and yes, I’m always thrilled at the opportunity to quote from the *Presbyterian Book of Order*):

We believe that there are truths and forms with respect to which men [and women] of good characters and principles may differ. And in all these we think it the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other. [*Book of Order* F-3.0105]

At the very least, this is a call to tolerance. However, we are not being taught in this scripture passage to bear with one another in necessarily every circumstance. It will always be the case that victims of abuse will need to escape from the situation, or relationship, when danger dictates separation as the appropriate course of action. Also, bearing with another does not mean to become an enabler. Yet when possible, we are called to bear with one another in love.

(Just a quick note at this point. Hang in there, we’re almost through with the first sentence in this biblical passage.)

So, where is all this heading? Here’s the entire sentence. “I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**” (vv. 1-3). It all leads to peaceful unity. **Question:** How **united** are we? The recent history in our Presbyterian denomination reflects much more peaceful unity than in previous decades. The United Methodist Church is no longer united after officially splitting over the issue of LGBTQ+ inclusiveness.

It is beyond obvious, of course, that we are witnessing the **debilitating effects of disunity within our nation**, perhaps more so than at any time since the Civil War according to many. **In the political realm, there appears to be very little humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another, let alone in love and in a bond of peace.** Given those descriptive qualifications, there are certainly those who are not living a life worthy of their calling. Living together in any sense of unity almost seems beyond our reach at this point.

Yet... as Christians within the church, the body of Christ, we are reminded that any unity is possible only because of the Holy Spirit working with and within us to bond us together in love. Mennonite pastor in Lawrence, Kansas, **Joanna Harader**, writes:

I’m gradually understanding that the Spirit’s unity isn’t so much about keeping everyone happy with each other as it is about tearing down walls so more people can get in. It’s about the faithful path, not the warm and fuzzy path; about making us hear one another, not necessarily agree.

In fact, **it is from our unity in God that we can acknowledge and affirm our diversity and that which makes us distinct.** Here at College Hill, by God’s grace and a lot of intentional hard work, we have indeed been blessed to understand that unity is not the same thing as uniformity.

This biblical passage goes on to reveal that **the use of our variety of gifts is to, “equip the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ” (v. 12). That goal is ever before us. And it includes equipping *you*, plural, for ministry.

Well, I'm out of time and I only made it through verses 1-12. So, as a homework assignment, read the rest of this passage, verses 13-16, and you can do your own Bible study. It includes the powerful verse about speaking the truth in love. We will continue with the remainder of Ephesians 4 next week if you want to read ahead. I'll leave you with this as a summary, in the form of an epistle to you.

I implore you, therefore, lead a life worthy of the calling with which you have been called as a child of God, so that together we may mature in our faith, using the variety of gifts of which we all have been blessed, to build up one another in love and peaceful unity within the family and kin-dom of God.

Amen.