

"A Life Worthy"

August 1, 2021

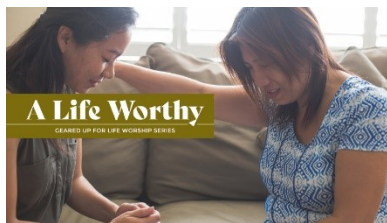
Ephesians 4: 1-16

¹ I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it is said, "When he ascended on high, he made captivity itself a captive; he gave gifts to his people."

⁹ When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

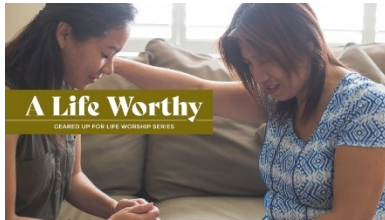
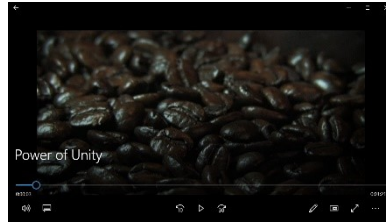


Last Sunday we worked from Paul's prayer that comes at the end of chapter 3 in Ephesians. The prayer is the hinge point in the letter. The first three chapters are primarily about what God has lovingly done for us – the

"why" of the Christian faith. The last three chapter are primarily about how we should live in response to God's love – the "how to" of this worship series. Today's passage from the beginning of chapter four is a very challenging call to discipleship. As was the case in Paul's prayer that closed chapter three, in these words today we see that the only way that we can hope to live up to this call – to "a life worthy" – is through the power of God, explored and embraced in community with one another. As we begin this morning, let us begin with a word of prayer...

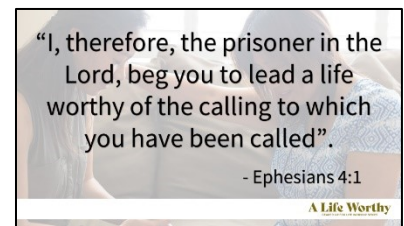
As one considers the journey of faith, one quickly realizes that there are challenges and difficulties when we try to live out our faith in community. To have unity within the body of believers requires humility within ourselves and generosity towards the other. This is part of what it means to live a life worthy of the gospel. To declare that there is a life worthy of the gospel naturally implies that there is also a life that is not worthy of the gospel. In today's words from Paul, we see that unity is one of the primary signs of a gospel-worthy life. Rather than finding a checklist of do's and don'ts in Paul's words, we find more of a plumb line – a measurement that reveals the health of the whole body. We come as unique individuals, each with gifts that are needed for the church to thrive. To help us frame our minds around what unity is all about, please turn your attention to the screens.

[Play Video: Power of Unity]

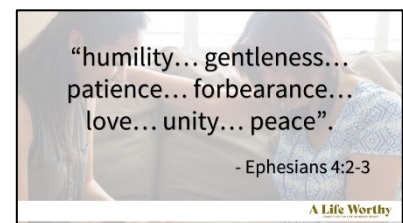


Please turn with me to Ephesians 4. To give an overview as we begin, this chapter is a sermon about living a Christian life in a difficult and hostile world. Some of this passage reads like poetry, tugging at our heartstrings.

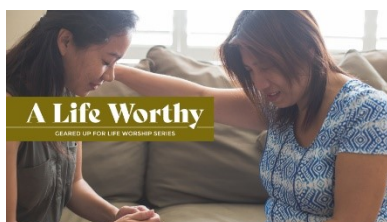
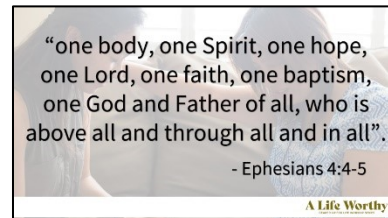
Some of it reads like a father begging his wayward children to come back home. Some of the passage gives us a glimpse of heaven and makes us realize that it is within our reach. Paul begins his sermon with these words: *"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called"*. Paul begins his invitation to live a life worthy with the admission that he is a prisoner. Paul has surrendered his will to another. He has given over his desire for power, fame, and fortune. As a prisoner of Christ, Paul invites the Ephesian churches and us to a new way of life. As a captive of Jesus, he wants to show us the possibility of a new way of living.



When we look at verses two and three, we find some words that indicate the character traits of people seeking to live a life worthy of the gospel. In these two verses we find these words: *"humility... gentleness... patience... forbearance... love... unity... peace"*. Being human, these are essential or necessary traits for membership and participation in the body of Christ. In verses four and five we hear of the source of our unity.



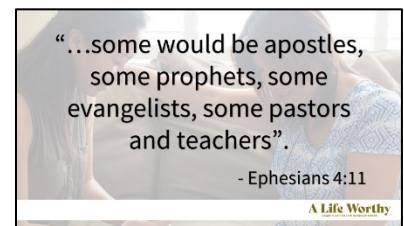
I invite you to hear these words as the source of what brings unity to the body of believers. In God's design for the church, there is *"one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all"*. This sense of oneness connects into Paul's words about being a prisoner in the Lord. To be sold out to or for something, to be totally committed to someone, one cannot divide allegiances. It is faith in Christ alone that brings unity to the body of Christ. It is a full commitment to Christ that leads us to live a life worthy of our calling. But simply making the commitment does not guarantee that we will live a life worthy of Jesus' example. The ability to live the life to which we are called comes from Christ, not from ourselves. The power to live into our calling comes from Christ, not from within us. Left on our own we are limited, selfish, concerned with our things. Left on our own, we would struggle to be humble, gentle, patient, and so forth. When we are choosing to live a worldly, driven life we are in fact moving in the opposite direction from Christ. Friends, may it not be so.



Paul also addressed the gifts that were given to the various members of the churches in and around Ephesus. To help us understand what Paul is saying to us in verses eleven and twelve concerning teamwork in the body of Christ, I invite you to think about these jerseys for a moment. They represent different players on a football team. In some ways, a sports team is a lot like a church. There are some teams that function really well together. And there are some teams that do not. The biggest influences on a team's success are the level of teamwork and their commitment to the team over self.

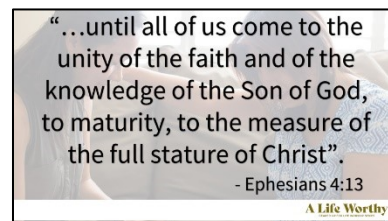
Like a church, a football team is made up people with different gifts and talents. For example, the gift of some people on the team is their size and strength. Although the line is not always the most glorious place to play, it is an essential part of the team. A team without any 60's and 78's would not be a complete team. Imagine a team with a bunch of 3's, 140 pound wide-receiver types, trying to block the opposing team's 250-pound defensive linemen. That story would not end well. Each player, working together, using the gifts and talents that they each have been blessed with makes for a successful team. That requires the type of humility that Paul speaks of in today's passage.

In verse eleven Paul describes some of the players on the church team. Here he defines these roles: "*some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists,*

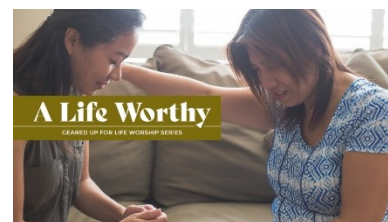


some pastors and teachers". The list we see here is what we would call the "staff" in most churches today. Elsewhere in the Bible we find even more roles defined by Paul and other writers. These roles would include many other places to serve the church and community with the gifts we have each received. A partial list at Grace looks like this: pastor, office administrator, custodian, usher, reader, Sunday school teacher, musician, Trustee, VBS helper, and so on. And much like the illustration about the football team, each has a role to play. In a similar way, for example, you would not want me in charge of the Children's ministry. I could survive for a day or two, but our long-term prospects would not look good. Kelly is a wonderful fit for that position because she has the gifts and graces for that role in our church. In her role she, like many others, begins that process that Paul writes of in verse twelve.

Here Paul writes of *"equipping the saints for the work of ministry"*. As we plant seeds of faith in our young ones and in our teenagers, we are beginning to equip them to one day respond and to continue responding to the call of Christ on their lives. The goal of this process is what Paul names in verse thirteen. Here we read about the ongoing process that happens *"until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ"*. To be fully like Christ. Imagine what that would be like.



Perhaps one day we will know. Methodist founder John Wesley described this as "going on to perfection". It is a place that we do not reach until we stand before the risen Christ. Yet it is our daily goal, to grow more and more into the image of Christ, to move closer and closer to Christ's perfection. As it was with the early church, so it is with the church today. To live a life worthy of the calling of Christ is difficult. In verse fourteen we read, *"We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming"*. We can so easily be distracted, drawn into conflict and arguments. We can too easily align ourselves with this viewpoint and then with that opinion and we soon find ourselves standing on our own little island. It is often difficult to not be swayed by this doctrine or that understanding of a passage from scripture – never mind by the whispers and lies of the world. Paul's urging us to be patient would come in to play as we struggle with distractions and differing viewpoints.



Patience and kindness go a long way in understanding the other and in treating and caring for one another in love. It is unfortunate that we do not always practice unity and patience, humility and understanding. As the body of Christ, we have so much more in common than the things that differentiate us. To illustrate this failure to maintain unity in a humorous way, listen to this story about how we can split hairs in the "church".

A man was out on walk when he saw another man about to throw himself from a bridge into the river. He ran over to save him. "Why do you want to kill yourself?" the man asked. "I've nothing to live for."

"Don't you believe in God?" "Yes, I do." "What a coincidence – so do I! Are you a Jew or a Christian?" "A Christian."

"What a coincidence – so am I! Protestant or Catholic?" "Protestant."

"What a coincidence – so am I! Anglican or Baptist?" "Baptist."

"What a coincidence – so am I! Southern Baptist or Independent Baptist?"

"Southern Baptist." "What a coincidence – so am I! Premillennial or amillennial?" "Premillennial."

"What a coincidence – so am I! Pre-tribulation rapture or mid-tribulation rapture or post-tribulation rapture?" "Mid-tribulation rapture."

At that, the first man pushed the suicidal man into the river, shouting, "Die heretic, die!"

While this fictional story may go a bit far in where the line is finally drawn, it does illustrate how churches and denominations can find reasons – even the smallest of reasons – to build walls instead of bridges. Paul offers a better way.

In the closing verse Paul offers this alternative: *"But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love"*. This morning I ask: is this vision for the church possible? I believe it is possible.

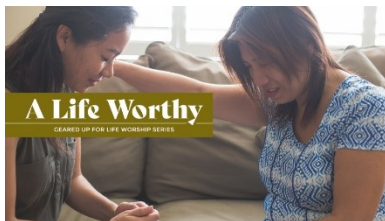
"But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knit together by every ligament ..."

A Life Worthy

"... with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love".

- Ephesians 4:15-16

A Life Worthy



To live a life worthy of the calling we must first practice humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, love, unity, and peace. We must then be willing to use the gifts and

talents that God has blessed us with to serve the church and our communities. And then, we must always be striving to grow into Christ. As we practice these traits and as we use our gifts for God's glory, we will be naturally growing into the image of Christ. My fellow sojourners, we must ever seeking to intentionally grow in Christ. We do that by attending to the personal means of grace – personal study, prayer, meditation – and by participating in the corporate means of grace – in worship and fellowship. As we do these things our lives begin to move on towards perfection. As we become shaped and formed more and more into his image, we reflect Jesus out into the world.

As we live a life worthy of our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ, we begin to live out God's vision and hope for our world. Doing so we begin to cross boundaries and to break down the walls that divide and separate.

In our passage for today from Ephesians we first heard the call to live as "*one body and one Spirit*" with "*one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Father*". In the second half of our passage, we hear Paul's celebration of the different gifts that we bring to the body while also emphasizing the fact that the calling of Christ requires that we are mature and loving enough to work together, "*joined and knit together... building itself up in love*". My friends, we all have our strengths and talents; we all have our struggles and trials. When we humbly and patiently accept one another as we are and are willing to listen and learn from one another, we live a life worthy of our calling as we build the kingdom of God in this time and place. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. What gifts or talents do you have to offer that would build up the unity and the effectiveness of the body of Christ that is Grace UMC?
- 2) *Pray*. Which trait(s) do you need more of (humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, love, peace, unity)? Pray for God to bless you with more!
- 3) *Study*. Read Ephesians 4:17-24. What "former way" or "old self" still needs to be "put away" to better your walk with Christ?