

Lives Worthy of our Calling
Ephesians 4:1-6

Turn to Ephesians 4 please. “*Live worthy of the calling with which you were called.*” God says this to us in our Scripture today. Live worthy of the calling to which you were called. Apparently God brought us into something with honour and dignity. God has given us a high position of some kind, and people in this position should live in way that fits with what we have become.

So we want to know what this calling is – what is our high position? And then we want to know, what kind of life fits the honour and dignity of our new position? Apparently some kinds of living are beneath our new role, and let’s not live like that, says Paul.

Eph 4:1 *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*

Our Calling is our Blessing – This is our New Position (Eph 1:3-14; 4:1)

Paul begins Ephesians by telling us to praise God because God has “*blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly realms.*” We covered this two weeks ago. Here are the specifics:

God chose us before the world began. He decided back then to adopt us, because he loved us. He freed us from captivity by paying with his Son’s life. God made his whole plan clear to us. He gave us a boundless inheritance. He gave us the Spirit as a seal, to mark us as his own possession. And he gave us a deposit on our future inheritance, which is the Spirit himself.

In summary, God *blessed us with all spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.* Jesus began the beatitudes in Matthew 5 with almost the same words: *blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Paul describes these blessings in the first half of Ephesians 1. Do you know what he does next? He prays for those people, that they and we would get it. He prays that God would give us wisdom, and send his Spirit, and that God would open the eyes of our hearts, so that we would know how much God has given us.

He prays that these blessings he just wrote about would change from being words to a confidence of incredible position. Paul knew that believers could hear the words and it not make any difference. It’s a real possibility, isn’t it. He prays that we would get it. It’s a good thing to pray for, and apparently it’s one of the things God does.

In the last part of Eph 3, he prays the same kind of prayer again, that we would have strength to grasp how much God loves us. Oh Lord, please open the eyes of our hearts.

Here's the thing: never has so much been given to people so undeserving, and God did this because he loved us. Never so much to people who deserved so little, but were loved so much.

Folks, we've won the eternal lottery. Our incredibly good fortune is to be among Christ's people. Envy no one on earth, for you have far more. How is this a calling? Simple: freely receive, freely give. We treat people as God treated us. We're as good to people as God is to us. That's how we live worthy of the calling we received. Freely we received, so freely we give.

Detour: Paul, A Prisoner of the Lord (Eph 4:1, Acts 21:33; 22:29)

Paul says he's a prisoner in the Lord. In Eph 3, he said it was a prisoner of the Lord, and in 2 Timothy also he says he's a prisoner of the Lord. He's talking about his chains.

There is controversy right now in our society about government regulations, and controversy about this in the church, too. So whenever someone in the Bible comes up against their government, my ears perk up.

Paul was in chains because he preached the gospel. In Acts 21, Jews in Jerusalem were preparing to stone Paul. A Roman commander rushed in with soldiers to break up the angry mob. He arrested Paul and immediately put chains on Paul's hands and chains on his feet. In Acts 22, the story continues, and this commander was getting ready to whip Paul.

Paul said, "should you be whipping a Roman citizen who has not had a trial?" The commander said, "What?! You're a Roman citizen?" "Yes," said Paul. So they did not whip Paul. And that story ends with the commander being afraid because he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains. The commander should never have put chains on Paul, and he knew it.

But the commander did not take them off. We don't know why. Paul wore chains on his hands and feet for the rest of Acts, which covers at least four years. He got dressed with chains on, got undressed with them, ate with chains on, slept with chains on and all the other things.

Here's the thing: he calls himself a prisoner of Christ. Not prisoner of Rome, but of Christ. "Don't be ashamed of me the Lord's prisoner," he writes to Timothy. How does Paul come to think he is the Lord's prisoner? Because Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth, and the Lord has full rights to our lives. Lord of heaven and earth includes Lord of Rome. Full rights to our lives includes chains on hands and on feet.

Rome broke its own rules in how Paul was treated, putting chains on him and leaving them on. But Paul never suggests that he is a victim of Roman injustice. He's the Lord's slave, the Lord's captive, the Lord's prisoner. For Paul, to blame his chains on Rome would be giving them more credit than they deserved.

And holding Rome responsible for his chains would insult Christ, as if Christ did **not** have all authority in heaven and on earth. Paul will not flatter Rome, and he will not insult Christ. If he's a prisoner, he's the Lord's prisoner, end of story. We could view govt regulations like this.

I find this refreshing. I love this. Suddenly I'm breathing clean air. Jesus is Lord. And now the detour is over. What is our calling? Our calling is our blessing, that because of Christ, the poor in spirit have received every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. We've received the kingdom of heaven, and we're waiting for the Lord.

Description of the Worthy Life

Be completely humble and gentle; be patient. The word for "gentle" is the word often translated "meek." Be completely humble and meek, be patient.

This sounds like the Beatitudes in Matthew 5. The poor in spirit have been given the kingdom of heaven. So they are merciful to others, because they received mercy, and they make peace with the hostile, because God made peace with them.

It is very hard to live like this. It does not come easily to any of us. But we do know *why* this is our call, and we know it *is* our call. God is telling us how to live out our salvation. These are angry times, my brothers and sisters. Let's not do that. Let's be humble, meek, and patient.

Bearing with one another in love. "Bearing with each other in love" assumes that we will hurt and offend one another. The NT Letters often speak like this, and so did Jesus. God assumes we will hurt and offend one another. That's not the end of the worthy life, that's the beginning of the worthy life. The worthy life shows us how to act when this happens, which it will.

We were offensive to God, and he loved us and rescued us, so we bear with one another. And folks, this does not happen if people just show up for one hour on Sunday and have no more to do with each other. It does not happen if we just meet with Christians we enjoy. This is body life, this is family life we're talking about. Let's bear with one another in love.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. Our unity does not come from us deciding to get along. When we believed in Christ and were baptized, the Spirit joined us to the body of Christ. That work of the Spirit makes us one body. But it takes much effort to live like this, to act this out with one another.

You all know that bad things sometimes happen between Christians. Let's make every effort to avoid that. Let's be completely humble and meek and patient, let's bear with one another in love. Let's act like the poor in spirit who've received every blessing in the heavenly realms.

Through the bond of peace. Keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. The Greek word for “bond” is a general word, does not have to be “chains,” although the NT sometimes uses this word to mean “chains.” Here in Eph 4:3 it has a prefix that means “together.” We are “bound together” by peace, we are “chained together” with peace.

Imagine all believers are chained together, and every link in that chain has the word “peace” engraved on that link. If you don’t like “chain,” imagine a strong belt, like a tow rope or a seat belt, and it ties us all together, and every few inches the word “peace” is written on the belt. The Holy Spirit made that belt, and wrote “peace” on it, and put it around us when we came to Christ.

How do you feel about that? I am not sure I like that. For most believers that’s okay, but for a few, I’m not sure I want to be tied together with them by cords of peace. (That does not include any of you, of course.) The trouble is, I am not always interested in being the poor in spirit who was given the kingdom of heaven.

Living worthy of our calling is not a private matter, my brothers and sisters. It is this kind of relationship with each other. *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

That’s the worthy life described. Now we will look at the foundation of the worthy life. Paul lists seven spiritual realities that we all share, and these are the basis and foundation of our unity.

The Foundation of the Worthy Life

One body and one Spirit, called to one hope.

There is one body of Christ, we are all members of that one body, and Christ is the head of the one body. There is one Holy Spirit who joins us to that body. We are all members of the one body of Christ, we all have the same Holy Spirit in us, and we all have the same hope. Christ will return for us, we will be fully restored. That’s the hope we all share.

One body, one Spirit, one hope. The Spirit joins us to Christ’s body, and the Spirit nurtures hope, he’s the seal and deposit of our coming inheritance.

One Lord, one faith, one baptism. We all have the same Lord and Master, we all put our trust in him, because he is the one God sent to rescue us. And we were all baptized because of that Lord and that faith. One Lord, one faith in that Lord, one baptism when we come to faith.

One God and Father of all. All of us worship the same God, and we all have the same heavenly Father, which makes us brothers and sisters to each other.

Who is over all, and through all, and in all. Look around at your brothers and sisters here. Our God and Father is over all these people, and works through them all, and is in them all.

He is over all, he rules us all, he is through all, his presence gives us life and energy, and he is in all, he indwells us. In Acts 17 Paul says, *“In him we live and move and have our being.”*

One Body, one Spirit, one Hope,
One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism,
One God and Father of All,
Who is Over all and Through all and In all.

The logic is simple: we share such incredible things with each other, the same Spirit and Lord and Father, so let's not be divided amongst ourselves. Let's make every effort to live in unity, because nothing else is worthy of our calling. There are substantial differences of opinion among us, differences of temperament, and interest, and so on. But they are nothing compared to what we have in common.

It's clear that you people are working hard to do this. That is so good. You are hearing the call of God, and aiming yourselves in his direction. You are living worthy of your calling. That battle is as intense right now as it has been, and it could increase. So let's carry on. Amen.

PRAYER: Oh God, open the eyes of our heart so that we can understand what a great gift we have from you, our hope and our inheritance. Strengthen us so we can grasp how much you love us. We need your help with this for our lives to look as they should look. But this is a prayer you answer, so we ask. We are helpless before you on this. Help us with your Spirit, so we can live worthy of our calling. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give us a spirit of unity among ourselves as we follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.