

HOW YOU LIVE MATTERS

Ephesians 4:1-6

Let me tell you a little bit about my relationship with my wife and how our relationship started. Laura and I came from very different perspectives on how we thought our lives were going to turn out. When I first met Laura, she had no intentions of dating anyone, ever. Her life plan was to be a single missionary living in Africa. Me, on the other hand, I knew I was not going to be a bachelor to the Rapture. Even though I wanted to find a wife, there were significant adjustments that I had to make in my life in order to have a healthy marriage.

Laura and I started dating in 2001 and then were married in the spring of 2003. Beginning in our dating years and continuing on through our marriage there have been many changes that have been made in both our lives in order for our relationship to be what it is today. We've been married for 13 years, we have 5 kids and it's obvious to me that I can't live the same way that I did when I was single and had no one else to be responsible for. There's a new standard that's been set, with greater responsibilities that cause me to raise the bar of what is and what is not acceptable.

The commitment that I made to Laura and that she made to me has drastically changed the way that we live our lives. May 31, 2003, our anniversary, is a day that marks a turning point in our lives. We were primarily living with our own set of priorities, our own set of responsibilities, and fulfilling our own set of desires. And from that day we have been seeking to align our priorities, align our responsibilities, and align our desires together. We haven't done it perfectly; we have our good days and our bad days, just like everyone else. But we both realize, as a married couple, that the way we live our life matters.

This morning I want to encourage you to think of your life in the same way. That **How You Live Matters**. Now I'm not going to be talking about marriage this morning, I'm going to be talking about the Christian Life. And I think there is a good parallel between our human relationships and the relationship that we have with Christ. If you are a Christian, the moment that you placed your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, your life changes. There's a heart change that takes place and new desires begin to arise. And the actions of your life begin to change. *The love of Christ compels the believer to raise the bar to live to a higher standard.*

This is the seventh week of our series, Follow the Spirit and what I would like for you to grasp that whenever you are encouraged to change the actions of your life, that *it is not you doing it completely on your own*. Now, I've brought this up before but I want to remind you something that was said when we first started this series. If remember, I introduced an equation of how much the Holy Spirit is at work in your life. It's not an equation where the Spirit does 100% of the work and you have 0% responsibility to contribute. It is also not a 50/50 contribution, where you do 50

percent of the work and the Holy Spirit does the half. The only equation that makes sense from scripture for spiritual growth, is 100% the Holy Spirit at work, and 100% you following after faithfully.

So as we walk through these verses here in Ephesians, I need you to keep that in mind that although the Christian is called to new life and a new standard, *it is not just you* doing better, trying harder, all on your own. The Spirit of the living God is at work within you to enable you and assist you in reaching the standard that God has set.

So let's go ahead and read the first three verses of Ephesians 4 as Paul encourages the Christian to **Live a Worthy Life**.

READ EPHESIAN 4:1-3

Paul, the author of Ephesians, begins by saying I “urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called”. He says I urge you. Some translations will say entreat or implore. It's a word that specifies intense feelings and strong desires. Paul was never a take-it or leave-it type of guy. This should be the same attitude that we should all carry for each other. There's a loving concern for the Christian here that's making a plea to respond with obedience to the gospel.

What I am attempting to do every single Sunday morning is plead with you to see the greatness of God and then to follow after Him wherever He may lead you to go.

And what Paul does here challenges this group of believers to live their lives in such a way that it matches what they've been called to. What is Paul talking about here? He's talking about salvation. And salvation is a free gift to anyone who believes but that does not mean that it came at no cost. Salvation came at the cost of Jesus taking on the form of a man, living a perfect, and then dying a horrendous death the cross. Jesus did that in order that you might be called to salvation. Salvation is not extended just to get you a ticket out of hell and get you ticket into heaven. Yes, salvation does grant you that. But Jesus calls you to a life that is so much greater than that. This is so much greater than just aimlessly going through life without any purpose or direction.

When the Spirit of God opens your eyes to see your need for Jesus, He calls you to a life that's different than the one you were living before you knew who Jesus was. He calls you depart from the standards you were living according to now embrace His standards. His purposes are now your purposes and His desires are now your desires.

You have been called to something better; so live accordingly. And this is not the only place in scripture that we're challenged to walk (or to live) in worthy manner.

1 Thessalonians 2:11-12 –“we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”

You can put a picture in your mind here of a parent cheering on a young child to take their first steps. *C'mon, you can do. Don't give up. You fell down, that's right. Get up and keep trying again.* This is a plead with the Christian to live the life they were meant to live.

Colossians 1:10 –“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God

A life that is fully pleasing to the Lord. Your life isn't compartmentalized where you've got your good Christian life over here all squared away and then you've got this part over here that barely even acknowledges that Jesus exists.

Philippians 1:27 –“Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ”

Above everything you else, you are a citizen of heaven. Before you're an American citizen; before you're an employee or an owner of a business; before a spouse, or a son/daughter... before all of that, at the core, you're a Christian. You're a citizen of the Kingdom of God and again and again we're called to look at our life and ensure that the actions of our life are conducted in a manner worthy of our Lord.

The way you live your life matters.

As we look at our Ephesians 4, you will see **5 characteristics of what a worthy life looks like**. I do not believe that you can completely separate any one of these items from another one, for they dependent on each other. Kind of like building blocks, if you take one out, the tower will come tumbling down. But let's go ahead and look each of these characteristics.

First, is Humility. I found it rather amazing in my study this past week that neither the ancient Greeks nor the Romans had a word for humility. To them, humility was something despicable and was a sign of weakness. But you fast forward to our culture today, has that much changed? Not really. The world that we live in celebrates putting yourself first; it praises the individual that is doing whatever it takes to make them happy and satisfied. It does promote you humility.

But humility is at the very core of the Christian life. You won't/can't come to Jesus without appropriately looking at your life and coming to the conclusion that you have nothing to offer. John MacArthur says that, “every person comes before God with nothing to commend him and everything to condemn him.” It's looking at your life appropriately with a clear focus. I will say that this really does take the pressure

off, that the value of your life doesn't rise and fall based upon the things you're able to accomplish.

I told my 7-year-old daughter Alaina a couple of weeks ago that she's really special. I asked if she knew that. And I asked her how she knew she was special. And her response was, "because God created me." She didn't rattle off a list of things that she can accomplish. She simply stated the truth.

I want to encourage you to look at your life appropriately. Not having an overinflated view of your self or having destructive view of your self. But correctly identifying your worth due to the fact that you are a child of God. So begin with humility.

These characteristics flow into each other, I believe that humility produces gentleness.

Second, is Gentleness. Gentleness is a word that means meekness, mild-spirited, self-controlled. If you are person that is characterized as gentle or meek, it does NOT mean that you a person without power. It means that you are a person that has learned to manage your strength.

Think of it like this, we live in a community that has a large number of horses. I know that some of you ride horses of your own as well. When animal of that size and strength as been trained to pulled a buggy or it has been taught to be gentle enough for you climb on top of it to ride it; the horse hasn't lost anything. That animal still possesses the strength and spirit it always had, but their power has been brought under control.

That's what gentleness is; it's power under control. It's a characteristic that remains disciplined even when you're inconvenienced and things don't go your way. As I said, gentleness is produced by humility. It begins with a right viewpoint of who you are and then that starts to shape what you do. Life is not all about you, so you bring your power, your demands, and your desires under control so that there's a gentleness to your spirit.

All of these characteristics deal with you living your life in relationships with other people. And gentleness is just as much for your good as it for everyone else. You know what it's like to interact with someone who has not been brought under control by the Holy Spirit and they lack this gentleness. They're rough and abrasive and domineering. Those are attributes that we need to repent of and ask for forgiveness for when they arise within us. Those are characteristics that are not worthy of Lord. So pursue humility and seek after gentleness... and include in there patience as well.

Third, is Patience. Patience is an outgrowth of humility and gentleness. You will not have patience without humility and without bringing yourself under control.

Patience means long-suffering; long-tempered. The patient person endures negative circumstances and never gives into them. When this characteristic is built into your life there's not a whole lot that can rattle you.

When you think through the people in the Bible that were incredibly patient is there any particular person that jumps to the forefront of your mind?

Abraham is the one that comes to my mind. In Genesis 12, God makes a promise to Abraham, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great." At the time Abraham is 75 years old, married, but has no kids. And God says that through you, Abraham, I am going to make a great nation. As an older guy, you would imagine, if you didn't already know what was going to take place, that his wife would have a child fairly soon. But she doesn't. God will be faithful to his promise but his promise doesn't necessarily come through on our timing.

Abraham had to wait 25 years before the promised child, Isaac, would be born. Now Abraham wasn't instantly patient the moment the promise was given. It was something that he had to learn along the way. The same thing is true for us. Patience isn't acquired over night. It takes a long time to learn.

I came across a story of a man desperately needed patience in his life.

The story goes that this young Christian man went to his pastor one Sunday morning after the service for help. And he said, "Will you please pray for me that I may be more patient?" So they found a quiet place together & the older man began to pray. "Lord, send this young man tribulation in the morning; send this young man tribulation in the afternoon; send this young man..."

At that point the young Christian blurted out, "No, no, I think you heard me wrong. I didn't ask you to pray for tribulation. I wanted you to pray for patience." "Ah," responded the pastor, "but it's through tribulation that we learn patience."

Romans 5:3-4

We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

What's another word for perseverance? Patience. This is so true. You don't even realize your lack of patience until difficulty comes. Even if it's a small difficulty. I mean, I used to think I was an incredibly patient person. Then I had kids. There are opportunities for me to learn patience all the time as a parent. You give my kid a balloon and within 5 minutes they're fighting with each other over it... there's a choice in that moment of whether I'm going to lovingly stop the argument and discipline appropriately. Or, I'm going to quickly go between, pop the balloon and not discipline, but just yell. "You kids knock it off. Why can't you ever get along? The things that you fight over are so ridiculous."

You might be going at this point, Luke that seems a little too specific to be a made up story. Well, that's because it's not. I am not automatically a patient person. And neither are you. You may have a higher level of patience than others, but all of have to be intentional in seeking to live a worthy life. The Holy Spirit is guiding our daily actions but it's our choice of whether or not we will follow Him to live the life we're called to live.

If I'm going to live a life that walks worthy of the calling to which I have been called, it is going to take a dependence on the Holy Spirit to strengthen me, to help, to uphold me, to walk the walk of intentionally living the life that God has called us to live.

We've talked about humility; gentleness; and patience. Let's talk about the fourth characteristic of a worthy life, A Forbearing Love.

Fourth, Forbearing in Love. "...bearing with one another in love." This is a love that gives continuously and unconditionally. It doesn't head for the door when something becomes difficult or when things don't go your way. It is relentless. The Bible has so much to say about a love:

1 Peter 4:8

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

You will be sinned against. That is an undeniable fact. People that love you, that care about you, will from time to time let you down. But above, as you walk worthy of the Lord, keep loving one another even at a great cost to yourself.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. This is a tough love. Typically when we say we're going to show them some tough love, that means we're going to give them what they need and not necessarily what they want. And I get that. But shouldn't the Christians love be insanely tough. So much of the world's love has a limit to it. *I'll love you to this point as long as you love me to this point.* It's conditional.

But the worthy life of a Christian is unconditional. It is constant when things are going really well and it is persistent when things don't go its way. It is part of the building blocks that lead us to our final characteristic, which is unity.

Fifth, United in the Spirit.

READ EPHESIANS 4:3-6

The ultimate outcome of humility, gentleness, patience, and a forbearing love is an all out eagerness to preserve unity. I love that it says to be “*eager*” to maintain the unity. Living a worthy life involves giving yourself wholeheartedly to be united with other believers. That’s going to take a whole of humility, gentleness, patience, and love. It does not come automatically. It is in fact supernatural.

This is a work of the Holy Spirit. He is at work to produce oneness within the body of Christ. If you look at verses 4-6, you’ll notice that it is one sentence, contains the word “one” seven different times.

- One body – referring to the church
- One Spirit – referring to the Holy Spirit Himself
- One hope –talking about the believer’s future hope of Christ’s return
- One Lord –which is referring to Jesus. There are not many paths to God it is through Jesus and Jesus alone; Jesus is the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus.
- One faith –which is the one gospel. And is faith alone in the gospel of Jesus that joins all Christians together
- One baptism – a reminder that, regardless of the believer’s background or experience, all believers serve the same Lord, shared the same faith, and have experienced the same baptism. (Side note: maybe you haven’t done that and we need to have that conversation so that you can be baptized)
- One God and Father of all –the source of all life and the one who is over all.

I think Paul does something significant here. Typically when you talk about the all three members of the trinity, what order do you say them in? Usually it’s Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. But he describes it in the opposite direction here. Paul moves from what the Holy Spirit is doing right now (uniting the church, working personally in believers, instilling hope in the believer) and Paul traces his way back to the source of all things flow from, which is God the Father.

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are at work within this world and have been at work for all the world’s history to bring God’s people to this purpose. To live united in God. I want to urge to live towards that end. I plead with you to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

These virtues and the supernatural unity to which they testify are probably the most powerful testimony the church can have, because they are in such contrast to the attributes and the disunity of our world.

Is there any question right now that our country is divided and not living united? One hand we look at the national landscape and there is an enormous political divide. But on the other hand, right here in this region everyone is united. But

they're united over what? To see a group of guys hit a ball with a stick. Or this past summer to see some guys put a ball through a hoop.

But if the people of God are going to be **All In** on something... shouldn't it be our Lord.

Nothing opens the door to the gospel like a group of believers that are genuinely humble, gentle, patient, forbearing in love, and demonstrating a peaceful unity in the Holy Spirit. So live a worthy life. Walk worthy of the calling to which you have been called.