

FGBC: Become Who you Are: Worthy of the Call

Ephesians 4:1-16

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Please grab your Bible or open the one on your phone. We are back in Ephesians after a couple weeks of break. And today we are picking it up in Ephesians chapter 4.

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If you know Paul's letters you know that most of them have two sections: they start with a theology section where Paul lays out who God is and what He has done for us. And his goal in this section is to inspire us with the radical love of God for sinners. And then his letters end with a practical section about what it means for us to live this out now. And Paul's goal here is to inspire us to throw 100% of our energy and passion into imaging Christ and fulfilling His mission. Those are the two things Paul cared about.

And today we are starting the doing side of Ephesians. Ephesians 4,5 and 6 are all about what it looks like to live out a life transformed by the radical mystery of Christ – the mystery that through Jesus we all have gained access to the God of the universe.

And Paul says a life like this needs to look distinct. But this doesn't happen automatically. A Jesus honouring life is an intentional one where we are continually seeking to bring new aspects of our life into line with His glory. And the language Paul gives to someone who is 100% in, who is imaging Jesus, is that they are living a life worthy of the calling they have received.

And so Paul's challenge, and really Jesus' challenge to us today could be summed up by saying "You've only got one life to live, so don't waste it. Make it count."

Look with me at Ephesians 4 starting in verse 1.

[Read Ephesians 4:1]

We need to see right away that Paul is a prisoner as he writes this. He's writing to the church in Ephesus and encouraging them while he is in chains. Now this is backwards. You would think the church would be writing to Paul. But that's not what we get. The encouragement goes the other way. And in this there is a parallel that we can enter.

While Paul was suffering, life was relatively good for the Ephesians. There was persecution going on around them. They were living in a world hostile to Christ. But the choice was theirs how much of this hostility was going to touch them, like it is for us.

What I mean is they could slide by being Jesus followers and good citizens of Rome at the same time. All they had to do was separate their Sunday faith with their Monday life. So if they showed up at their weekly gathering and sang songs, and had communion, and encouraged themselves with stories of faith everything would be fine, as long as on Monday they went to work and lived as good Roman citizens.

And lots of them were doing this. It's always been the norm for most people who claim the name of Jesus to live divided lives. We believe in Jesus, but we also maintain our commitment to ourselves.

So we believe in God, and we give some of our money to church, and we do some devotions, and we go to Bible studies. But then we also turn around and give ourselves to making sure we find a good spouse, and get the right job, and drive the right car, all the while saving enough so that we can enjoy our long weekends and retire without worry. We want to get both God and comfort.

And the church has always struggled with loving two things, with serving two masters. We do love Jesus, but we also love ourselves. We are committed to God, but we are also committed to our own comfort and safety. We want Jesus' kingdom to grow, but we also want our own kingdoms to grow. Do you feel this tension?

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Well it isn't just us. This is a problem the church has struggled with since its inception.

Jesus told His disciples:

You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. (Matthew 7:13-14 NLT)

Jesus said that to His followers. And His call to them and to us is make sure you are on the narrow road because there are lots of people who think they are following Him who aren't. So don't be okay fitting in with the crowd, even here at church. Make sure you are living an all-in life for God because this is the only kind that counts. This is the only way to live worthy of the call we have received.

And so the Apostle Paul calls the Ephesians and us to this here. He says "I'm a prisoner for Christ. I'm in jail for this. Why? Because the kind of life I was living was a threat to Rome.

So in the early years Rome wasn't super concerned with Christianity. History tells us that Roman magistrates offered Jesus followers the option of simply throwing a pinch of incense into the fire and saying, "Caesar is Lord."¹ That's it. You don't have to deny that you love Jesus. You don't have to spit on the cross. Believe whatever you want but just throw a pinch of incense too. And lots of Christians did.

But then along comes Paul and the life he is living is in radical contrast to the values of Rome. He wasn't preaching about believing the right things so when you get old and die you go to heaven. He was living and proclaiming a life of radical commitment to another Emperor.

¹ Polycarp was offered this 155AD, but responded "Eighty six years have I served Christ, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?"

So Paul said “If you believe in Jesus then this is the way you need to use your money.” Your paycheque isn’t primarily for you, it is primarily for the advance of God’s kingdom and secondarily for you.

So work hard so you don’t starve to death, but then live with a wartime mentality. Here’s what I mean: when your country is being attacked so that your freedom and the lives of your loved ones are in jeopardy people become incredibly focused. So young people go to the line and give their lives for freedom. But everyone else is in the game too. So you don’t throw your pants out every time they get a hole – so you can buy new pants with holes. Instead you keep wearing your old ones just so you can donate every resource to the cause. This is a wartime mentality. Is that your mentality?

I grew up thinking being cheap was a virtue, but it’s not. Christianity isn’t about being cheap, it is about recognizing that we can live with less in order to give more to the cause of Christ. We are in a war, and it matters what we do with our money.

...

But it isn’t just our money, it is our bodies and our sexuality. So the world around us screams out that sexuality is no big deal, and it should simply be enjoyed. And we buy into this. And I’m not just talking young people, I’ve spoken with 70-year-old single Jesus followers who don’t see what the big deal is with having sex outside of marriage.

But Paul says:

Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:18-20)

So what’s the big deal with sexuality? The deal is that the primary job of our bodies is to bring glory to Christ. We exist for His pleasure, not ours. A Jesus follower’s body isn’t their own, it belongs to Him. So Christianity isn’t about not having fun, it is about realizing that we need to be all in. It’s not okay to worship Jesus and worship our own pleasure. If we are going to live worthy to our calling we need to be 100% in the game.

This is what Paul was preaching, and this is why Rome locked him up. They saw him as a revolutionary. Everything he said was a contradiction of what culture believed.

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I came across something this last week that perhaps you know but was fresh for me. When Jesus died on the cross He was hung between two thieves – this is the word the King James version uses. But more recent studies into Greek have found that a better translation is rebels or revolutionaries.²

² See the Matthew 27:38 and Mark 15:27 in both the NIV and the NLT for example

Rome didn't crucify people who stole bread, they crucified people who threatened the integrity of the nation. And in this the message was clear; Caesar is Lord here. He is the one who brings salvation. He is the author of peace – “*Pax Romana.*” And so He is the one who demands your allegiance.

And what Jesus was selling flew directly in the face of that. He said:

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me;
anyone who loves their son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.
(Matthew 10:37)

Jesus just wasn't apologetic for demanding everything from us. He says He will either be God in our lives, or He won't have anything to do with us at all. And so in Ephesians 4 Paul says: take it from the guy in prison, I've bought in to what Jesus says. I've found it to be true that:

If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for [Jesus'] sake and the sake of the Good News, you will save it. (Mark 8:35 NLT)

So don't waste your life. Give yourself to living worthy of the calling you have received.

And friends, Jesus is still calling us to the same thing – He wants your life to count, but He won't make this happen. He just asks, will you live a worthy life? Are you going to live a life that matters? Are you going to save your life, or are you going to lose it?

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Recently I came across an excerpt from a John Piper sermon he preached at a youth conference a few years back.

He told the story of two women; “Ruby Eliason and Laura Edwards, a nurse and a doctor – who had spent their lives serving the poor in Africa in the name of Jesus. One of them had been single all her life. One of them was married but a widow by then. [Both] in their eighties; they were still serving. [And then one day] they're driving a car, and their car's brakes give out. They fly over a cliff in Cameroon and both of them go to heaven and meet Jesus in their eighties after a lifetime of serving the poor.”

And then Piper looked out at his audience and asked “Okay, was the death of [those two ladies, those] servants of Christ entering heaven in their eighties through a car crash a tragedy? Was that a waste?” What do you think? No!

And then he said “I'll tell you about a tragedy.” And he pulled out a story from Readers Digest and read an excerpt about a 50-year-old couple named Bob and Penny. This couple had worked hard and been successful so they were able to take early retirement and move to Punta Gorda, Florida, a place they had always dreamed about, “where they devoted themselves to collecting shells and playing softball and riding their thirty-foot yacht.”³

³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/reflections-on-the-seashells-sermon-18-years-later>
John Piper's sermon snippet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mfpmbmsvu3A>

That's a tragedy. Two healthy fifty-somethings wasting the elongated last chapter of their lives collecting shells. Paul says I urge you; I'm pleading with you: You've got one life, and nobody knows how much of that life is left. So don't waste it. Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

And that's what the rest of Ephesians is about: what it looks like to live out a worthy life. What it looks like to win at life Jesus style?

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Did Jesus win at life? Was His life the best life ever lived in human skin? Turn to the person beside you and ask them: what do you think, was Jesus' life the best life ever lived in human skin?

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To answer this we need to know what winning looks like. Our world says winning means finding the best spouse and getting the best job and enjoying long weekends at the cabin and vacations on the beach collecting shells until you get old and die painlessly in your sleep. And if that is what winning is then no, Jesus didn't win.

But if winning means living the most meaningful life possible that positively affects the most people then the story is different. If winning means getting to do what you were designed to do and as a result feeling the pleasure of God all over you. If winning is getting to see God working in and through and around you. Then yes, Jesus was the greatest winner of life.

And that's the kind of winning Jesus calls us into as well. Are you hoping just to get into heaven when you die, or do you want to win? Do you want what Jesus wants for you? Do you want to hear His "well done!"

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In our text today Paul gives us two things people living lives worthy to their calling do: they commit themselves to Jesus' church, and they use their gifts.

First look at verse 2 – 1 verse down 15 more to go today. Don't worry we are going to pick up speed.

[Read Ephesians 4:2-3]

So this isn't news, but the church is full of sinners. And this means when we spend time with each other very quickly we get opportunities to practice humility and gentleness and patience. If you are brand new at church and you think this place is perfect, just wait, we are going to let you down soon. And you are going to have a choice.

And Paul says people who are living out a life worthy of their calling don't stomp out of Jesus' church when Jesus' people hurt them. When you get hurt Paul says don't strike back, don't tear the person down in revenge. When someone does something you don't like at church, it's your opportunity to live worthy of your call.

In fact Paul says “make every effort” and “bear with one another in love.” Bear with one another does not mean “Don’t worry. The person who offended you is going to come around and apologize – they might not.” It means endure the jerks you find at church. Put up with one another. This is what it means to love Jesus church. Just take a sideward glance at the jerk beside you and smile.

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Now why do we have to do this? Why not just go somewhere else? If you get hurt or offended, why not just leave?

Paul says we don’t have the option to run because our reality, the reality of the church, is that there is nowhere else to go. Look at verse 4

[Read Ephesians 4:4-6]

The call for Jesus followers is to become who we are. And the reality is that when it comes to being “in Jesus” there is only one place to do it - church. When we get to heaven there aren’t going to be options to shun the annoying people who don’t like it like we do. We are all going to be together.

Oh, you say, I’m not worried about that. All the people I’ve been surrounded by are finally going to stop being sinners, so I’ll finally have some peace.

Friends, the Bible says nothing about waiting for the day when everyone else stops being sinners. It says take on the attitude of Christ now. Prefer one another. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. You don’t have to like it – Jesus didn’t like dying on the cross – but we aren’t called to collect shells, we are called to war. So if you are going to live a life worthy of your calling prepare yourself to do it at church because this is the front lines.

...

In North America right now church is an optional activity that Christians do if we’ve got nothing better going on. But Jesus loves the church. Jesus speaks of it as His bride. And if we are going to love Jesus we need to love the things He loves.

If you tell me that you love me but you just can’t stand my wife I’m not going to be very understanding. And Jesus isn’t either. So make every effort – go to the extreme – to love the people Jesus has put beside you at church. Easy? Not easy! But worthy.

Paul keeps going. Look at verse 7

[Read Ephesians 4:7-10]

The ascended descended part just means Jesus came to earth and ascended back to heaven. We aren’t going to get into that. What I want you to see is the gifts. Paul says if we are going to live worthy of our calling we must use the gifts we’ve been given.

And every Christian has a gift from Jesus. But Jesus' gifts are different from the kinds of gifts we give each other. Look at verse 11.

[Read Ephesians 4:11-16]

Paul wants us to desire with everything in our being to stop being infants tossed back and forth by our culture, and instead give ourselves to becoming mature women and men who kick butt and take ground for the kingdom. And Paul says the difference between being an infant and being mature is using the gifts we've been given to build up Jesus' church.

Now there are all sorts of gift lists in the New Testament. So elsewhere the Bible talks about gifts of serving and exhortation and giving and mercy and wisdom and faith and miracles and tongues and a bunch more.⁴ But here Paul lists five specifically geared towards leadership.

So Jesus gives His church five different kinds of people to lead it. He gives apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

So just a word on each of these. The apostles Paul is talking about here aren't the 12 big "A" apostles who wrote scripture. Those apostles are dead. Paul is talking about small "a" apostles. People who are anointed and sent as missionaries or church planters. These people are uniquely gifted with courage and boldness to start new things. Some of you are initiators. You need to use your gifts.

And then there are prophets. And again we need a bit of clarity here. Throughout scripture there are two kinds of prophets. A few people throughout the Old and New Testaments were gifted to tell the future. So last week we looked at Jeremiah, he was one of these guys. Once he was having a fight with a false prophet. But when two prophets fight it's hard to know who is the false one. And so Jeremiah said: "God says you are telling lies, and to prove it He's going to remove you from the face of the earth." If that comes true then I'm the real deal." And the guy died.⁵ That's one kind of prophecy.

But the other way prophecy occurs throughout scripture is much more common, and that's truth telling. So prophets boldly proclaim the truth in love regardless of whether it offends people. Now some of you are like "great, that's totally me, I love offending people." That's not what Paul is talking about. God's prophets engage people who have been lulled into complacency and are missing the mark of what following God looks like. And prophets challenge them with their sin and call them to repentance.

Some of you need to start calling out the brokenness you see in the church, not judgmentally – any infant can throw rocks – but with a desire to work towards bringing health here. That's maturity.

⁴ See Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

⁵ Jeremiah 28:15-17

And then there are evangelists. These are people who are gifted at drawing secular people to Christ. Some of you are people of influence. People come to you. And you need to use this to draw them to Jesus.

And there are pastors. The word here is shepherd. These are people who love people. And walk along side them. They've got the gift of mercy. Some of you hurt when your friends hurt. You need to be in a Missional Community Group, not to get, but to give. The church needs you.

And teachers who are gifted at expounding scripture. If this is you we are going to have a preaching class in the fall. You need to get trained and you need to do it.

But the big thing here is in verse 12. God has given these leaders to the church to equip the people for ministry. So it isn't the job of these five to do ministry, it is our job to build up and empower the church to do ministry and reach maturity. So the gifts you've been given aren't for you, they are for you to serve the church with.

In our culture we are used to coming to church and watching other people and living vicariously through them. So when we watch movies the good ones draw us in, and leave us feeling excited and pumped. But no matter how many times you watch Avengers you still can't fly or fling webs. So the goal of entertainment is to make you feel like you have been part of something great.

But the reality is you've been slouching in a comfy chair sipping sugary beverages and chomping popcorn. You've tricked yourself into thinking you did something.

And that's what's big in our culture. We are used to consuming performance – being emotionally affected by it – but then walking out without having to do anything.

But this was never Jesus' idea for how things were supposed to work at church. So living a life worthy of our calling isn't about believing the right stuff, or even getting excited about the right stuff. It is about living out what Jesus says. Paul calls this "living a life worthy of the calling we have received."

So brothers and sisters, don't give yourself to collecting shells. Don't waste yourself on your own pleasure and comfort. Do something that counts. Live a worthy life.

If you are a Jesus follower you are part of His bride, so become who you are. Jesus doesn't want you to be a lightweight tossed around by the world, He wants you to be a warrior. So commit yourself to His church even though it hurts, and put your gifts to work preparing us for battle.