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***Lead a Life Worthy
Ephesians 4:1-16***

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^[a] 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.

So far in this letter to the Ephesian church,
Paul has laid out a ***call to unity***—
not a unity that we ***create***,
but one that ***has been created***
through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Paul says that ***Christ has broken down*** the dividing walls of hostility between us, he has made us one new humanity,
and he has blessed us with unimaginable love, mercy and grace!

It's a letter about God's abundance,
and today in chapter 4, the abundance continues
as Paul encourages us to ***lead lives worthy of the calling*** of God in our lives.

Why do you think that Paul begins this section
by reminding us that he is ***a prisoner in the Lord?***
What difference does that make in us hearing his words?

Think about ***other writings from someone in prison***—
Martin Luther King Jr wrote from a Birmingham Jail about civil rights.
Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote Letters and Papers from Prison
as he was fighting Hitler's regime in Germany.

It takes courage to write from prison,
to inspire others as you are being persecuted.
So as the church in Ephesus, and other churches, are listening to this letter
being read, Paul wants them to ***stop and really listen***
to what he is about to say.
Because this is important.

And where the first three chapters of this letter felt like really good news
about Christ breaking down dividing walls, making one new humanity of Jew
and Gentile, and showering us with love.
This chapter is a ***challenge***.
Paul is challenging those who hear to what?

To lead a ***life worthy*** of God's call.
Do you ever think about that—leading a life worthy?
What does that ***mean to you?*** To the church?
What does ***Paul mean*** by this?

Paul has some very specific ideas about a life worthy of our calling. He says:
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.*

A worthy life can be described with these words:
humility, gentleness, patience, love, and peace---
and it's ***result is Unity***.

Why is **unity so important** for Paul?

Why doesn't he say that getting the facts right is important?

Why doesn't he emphasize correct doctrine?

Why is **unity** so important?

And **what kind** of unity is he talking about?

Think about what makes unity in our lives.

Common ideas and causes.

In fact, when we think of unity I think most of us default to a picture of people who **act and believe the same** way.

But is that what Paul is talking about?

Or is it something **deeper**?

What about a unity that comes in the **midst of great diversity**?

When you think about it, **true unity is fragile** if it means everyone has to believe and behave the **same way**.

What if Paul is calling us to something deeper?

After all, church at Ephesus had different **factions**, people from different backgrounds, presumably people with different opinions and politics in such a metropolitan city.

So **what kind of unity is Paul talking about**?

It's not based on sameness.

It's not based on similarities.

It's based on the **SAME God**.

The one Lord, one faith, one baptism, -the 7 ONES in verses 4-6.

True Christian unity comes from the **unity of God**.

We believe in a unified God--the Trinity.

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

Father, Son, Spirit.

Three persons---One God.

That **foundation for unity** leads to something **more** than people being the **same**.

It leads to people who are *leading lives worthy* of the call of God upon them.

When we *ground ourselves in the love of God in Christ Jesus*,
when we remember that we have *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*,
It doesn't matter our differences,
because we have this *fundamental* thing in common.

We all follow Jesus Christ.

We all want to be like Christ—in humility, gentleness, patience,
forebearance, love and peace.

That is unity.

True unity.

In verses 7 to 13 there's an interesting *allusion to Psalm 68:18*,
which would have reminded the people of Moses going up on Mt. Sinai
to get the 10 commandments,
and then bringing them down to the people below.

In a similar way, **Jesus came down** from heaven,
bringing the gifts that are necessary for us to be his body on earth
after his ascension back into heaven.

And **what are those gifts?**

Paul mentions a few in verse 11.

But the list is not exhaustive.

Paul wrote often about spiritual gifts for the good of the body of Christ.

On Sunday night we heard some of those words from **1 Corinthians 12:**

Paul says there:

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

He goes on to talk about each of us being a body part—ears, eyes, feet, and yet all one body who suffers together, and rejoices together.

This is what we saw at the ***Volunteer Appreciation Dinner***—
all different parts of the body of Christ,
working together, rejoicing together.

You know the best way I've ever seen to fit into a church?
Find a place to serve.
A way to Give.
Use your spiritual gifts.

Unity comes when people are giving of themselves.
When they are ***servicing*** together.
That's what I see in this church.

We are ***vastly different*** in this church.
We come from all different backgrounds, and beliefs
when it comes to politics, or social issues.
This is not unlike ***the greater PCUSA***,
which is very diverse in its population,
yet unified in following Jesus Christ.

This is incredibly ***counter cultural***.
We live in a world of red OR blue.
Right OR Left.
Not both together.

The vast majority of churches are ***either blue or red***.
They are made up of people who are very ***likeminded***.
But ***not this body of Christ***.
Which is one reason I'm still here.

The ***diversity is life-giving***.
You can come here and find different viewpoints, and learn from different
perspectives.
Our Sunday and Wednesday classes have such ***spirited discussions***,
and our volunteers are folks that otherwise might not come together in the
community—
but they are here ***servicing right alongside*** each other here.
Because of the One Lord. One Faith. One Baptism.
One calling to lead a life worthy.

Last Sunday night, we had a ***Volunteer Appreciation Dinner*** to honor all the humble, gentle, patient servants here for the work that they do in this place and this community. Out of 130 members, including our 30 kids and youth, we had ***89 people recognized***.

Now that's amazing!

They say that usually 20% of the church does 80% of the work, but not here.

Here we have ***a majority of people*** keeping things going— from keeping the coffee on, the trash picked up, the lawn mowed, projects completed, people visited, cards and calls sent, and that's just a sampling.

When I think about what it means to ***lead a life worthy of the calling of God***—I think about all of humble, gentle, patient, and loving servants here. And I think about their ***one Lord and Savior Jesus***.

Paul says that particular word ***7 times in three verses***— *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.*

What's the common word?

ONE.

Different in backgrounds and beliefs, but brought together in ***one body of Christ***.

Isn't it interesting that Paul doesn't say one belief? One idea?

One set of ways to live?

It says one Lord. One Faith. One Baptism.

This is not about us being the same.

This is about God.

As Rick Warren says in *The Purpose-Driven Life*:

"It's not about you".

How true---***It's not about us.***
 That's the point we have to learn.
Life in Christ is all about God.

Think about that for a minute.
We want it to be about us!
 Our ideas.
 Us being 'right'.

And in our world, it's very common, and easy for us to hang out with folks who ***believe just like we do.***
 This is what most of us do.

But I was reading recently about the ***dangers*** of that—
 it's where ***mob mentality*** comes from at its most extreme.
 When talking only to those who believe like us,
 people tend to get ***even more dug into*** their ideas—
 and ***less able to see other viewpoints.***

Which is hard if you want to ***engage with the world,***
 and the ***body of Christ.***

For Paul, ***unity is NOT uniformity.***
 He shares a list of ***different spiritual gifts,*** not a whole list,
 but a representation of what he says elsewhere, like in 1 Corinthians 12.
 But these different gifts, all come from ***One Lord. One Spirit.***
 And they are all for ***One Purpose.***
 To help us ***grow up into a mature body of Christ.***

When Paul says we should ***lead a life worthy—***
 he is moving us toward
 the ***unity of the body of Christ.***

We are now the hands and feet of Christ.
 Jesus has no body now on earth, but ours.
 And we have to ***work together, in unity, to make that work.***
 We have to ***come together, to grow it into maturity.***

Which isn't easy.

None of this is easy.

It's a **challenge**.

Way easier to just hang with folks like us, right?

Way easier to do our own thing, and just worry about yourself, not others in the body of Christ.

And then there are the **obstacles to unity**.

What does Paul say they are?

Listen to this in verses 14 and 15:

He says 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*

The obstacles to unity are all the different **fight**s about who's right, who's the most clever....

And Paul says **stop**.

Just **speak the truth in love**, and **grow up** into a mature body of Christ.

"Speak the truth in love."

Those are some words that have been used **way out of context**, to justify people saying all kinds of things.

So let's consider them **in context** of what Paul is saying all throughout Ephesians.

where do we get the truth?

You guessed it.

From the **One Lord**.

Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

it sounds like a no-brainer.

But it's **challenging**.

We don't get the truth—**the truth that brings unity**—

from the world, the news, the culture, or our friends and neighbors.

It comes from **God**.

Just like our **unity comes from God**.

Have you ever heard the American motto *E Pluribus Unum*?

It means **out of many, one**.

Or in our case, ***One nation of many people***.... Indivisible.

Those almost seem like ***lost words*** today.

Isn't it totally ***counter cultural*** to think about ***UNITY*** in America?

And yet we were created to be ***one nation***.

Out of many, one.

Unfortunately, we are divided into our tribes.

So how do we discover ***any unity*** amidst all the divisions?

We find it in our dedication, and discipleship,

To the ***One Lord Jesus Christ***.

In humility, gentleness, patience, and love.

Have you ever thought about the ***context of humility***?

Humility is putting others first—which assumes there are ***others***.

Gentleness and patience also assume something—

that there are difficult people and circumstances in our lives.

Love assumes relationship, otherwise who are we loving?

Unity takes work, and it's done in ***community***.

We can't do unity on our own.

And we ***can't just talk about unity***, if we are Christians.

We need to live it.

Unity is ***central to Paul's*** theology.

And it was ***central to Jesus***.

If you remember he had a pretty ***diverse group of 12*** disciples—fishermen, a tax collector, a Zealot, different people with different ideas of who he was and what kind of Savior he should be.

And yet ***what did Jesus pray for*** at the end of his life?

In the longest prayer we have recorded he prayed for—you guessed it—***unity***.

He prays in John 17, that we may be ***one***.

ONE.

He prayed that we would be one, so that the ***world would take notice***.

I wonder if the ***world would take notice*** if they found unity, ***here*** in this church?

What if they knew that all are welcome to this body of Christ,

Not because we all agree,
but because we ***all follow ONE Lord and Savior?***

Friends, that the ***Good News of the Gospel.***
We have One Lord. One faith. One Spirit. One baptism.
We have ***so much that makes us one in Christ.***
And when we realize we are one,
the love we have truly ***tells the world we are Christians.***
That's the ***best way to lead a life worthy of our calling.***
And to that, all God's people said, Amen.