

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Eph. 4:1-7, “Walk Worthy”**  
**By Pastor Matt Johnson, 8/1/2021**

What is your sense of calling in life?

It’s a question I had to learn how to answer with some level of comfort while going through the ordination process.

I’ve found benefit from returning to that question  
as I’ve gone through different phases of being  
a pastor as well.

We have a nominating committee that extends calls to serve as an elder or a deacon, but it’s not the kind of thing that often gets tossed around in normal life for most of us.

Thinking about our calling is a topic that carries a lot of weight with it, because the subtext asks an extremely uncomfortable question:

- Am I doing what I’m supposed to be doing with my life?
- Or, even more uncomfortable, “Does the fact that I cannot stand the circumstance that I’m in indicate that I’m doing the wrong thing with my life?”

What is my *calling*? What is *our* calling?

It’s a question that is deeply connected  
with our understanding of God’s will,  
and how God’s will is experienced  
in our decision making.

So before we explore this wonderful text from Ephesians about calling, I want to set the stage with a story about listening for God’s call and discerning God’s will.

MY STORY from UMIN with Mike.

- Discerning a sense of call to go to Bible College (EXPAND)
- Mike said, “God’s will is not a what, but a how.”
  - My friends and I cried out, “HERESY!”
  - My evidence came from Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “Plans to give you a hope and a future!”

Where had I gone wrong?

I had individualized what Jeremiah thought of as corporate.

- Plans for the group, yes. But for every single person? That's certainly not what the text indicates.
- Does God have plans to give a hope and a future to the body of Christ in the 21st century? Yes. But that doesn't mean there's a blueprint for each individual Christian or even each church that requires us to follow it precisely or risk being, "outside of God's will."
- Of course there are many stories of God giving specific instructions to his followers, but these are recorded because of how miraculous and unique they are.
- These are not the normal experience of most followers, but the amazing exceptions that proved God's unique involvement in that situation.
- Let's not exclude such revelations from the possibility of God's work in our lives. But at the same time, let's not expect it to happen every time we need to make a difficult decision.
  - For me, this sense of knowing God's will in the specific led to a false sense of surety that what I have decided is without doubt God's will.
  - On the flip side it can lead to a sense of fear about knowing God's will for my decisions.

#### **Eph. 4:1-6**

Paul tells the church to "live a life worthy of the calling you have received."

Calling here can easily be construed by us in the 21st century as,

"go be a teacher," "you should marry this person,"

"go be a pastor or a missionary."

It is the broad category of knowing God's will for your life.

But once again, I think we miss the emphasis of Paul entirely if we understand calling in that way.

In fact, Paul has already been very explicit about what kind of calling he's talking about -- it comes from the first 3 chapters of Ephesians.

- Chapter 1 – we are called to live for the praise of God's glory.
- Chapter 2 – we are called to live as one people, with Christ himself as our peace.

- Chapter 3 – (immediately before Paul’s prayer), we are called to live in a way that displays God’s superior wisdom in the face of rebellious powers on earth and in heaven.

Out of this rich, communal calling to live for God’s praise,  
to live as one people centered around Christ,  
and to live showing God’s wisdom,  
Paul says in 4:1, “live worthy,” or more accurately, “walk worthy.”

“Worthy,” is a word with a picture in it.

AXIOS is the Greek word for “Worthy,”  
but it also makes reference to a scale which compares two weights.  
(Like you see in a courtroom...)

So Paul’s saying that our calling puts a weight on one side of the scale,  
and on the other side our lives should balance that calling out,  
our way of living should match up to the weight of our calling.  
That is walking *worthy* of the calling.

We do this, Paul says in 4:2-3, by being humble, gentle, patient,  
and bearing with each other in love.

- By keeping the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
- First of all, wow. What an amazing set of characteristics for us to consider as we interact with one another. Humble. Gentle. Patient. Bearing with one another in love.
- You know that Paul wouldn’t say these things if he thought it was an automatic. They aren’t normal things to experience apart from God.
- Additionally, I really want to stress that this calling is something that rests upon us as a group -- not merely as individuals.
- We share together – with our local congregation, and with the churches in McMinnville, and with the church of Jesus Christ around the world – in a tremendous calling that has great implications for the way we live each day.

I hope that is an encouragement for all of us.  
But I don’t want to ignore the subtext we run into  
when we hear about calling.

Questions like:

What about the meaning of my personal life?

What about a very difficult circumstance in my life?

How am I supposed to be part of God's plan  
if I'm too young or too old or too busy?

I have two responses to these important questions:

First, I want to affirm that spiritual discernment for how we individually respond to our calling is hugely important.

- This can mean prayer as we weigh out alternatives, seeking the counsel of Christians who know us, gaining self-awareness so that we can make wise decisions about our education, occupation, marriage or singleness -- all of this is of great importance.
- God is pleased when we find joy in life because we have made wise decisions rather than unwise ones.

Second, in light of all that, don't ignore the obvious callings, and the callings that we have not asked for.

- Being a parent or a son or a daughter, being a member of a church, being someone's neighbor, having the responsibility of work, participating in society with an eye toward the oppressed, managing wealth and resources – these all have their own callings involved.
- There are also callings and conditions for life that we do not choose.
  - In fact none of us choose the conditions of the world we enter into, and few of us have the opportunity to change those conditions as we go on.
  - Sometimes there is an accident or an illness that comes upon us or a loved one, and suddenly what we thought was our life is no longer our life.
  - We've experienced a shift in our conditions, and as a result we must articulate our calling in a new way.
  - That kind of shift is rightly a source of grief, and rightly takes time to comprehend and search out.
  - God understands the way that our circumstances change our lives and force us into unique and difficult situations where we may feel far from any sense of "calling" at all.

But in the end, is there anything that could take us outside the grace of God and the God's Kingdom in the world?

- Before we answer, we should remember that Paul is urging the church, “as a prisoner of the Lord.”
- Paul’s context had shifted from freedom to imprisonment, but he remained compelled by his calling, even if he had to go about it in a new way.

G.K. Chesterton, the great British theologian and philosopher said,  
 “There are no uninteresting subjects, only uninterested people.”

Similarly I would say there is no shortage of compelling callings  
 in our world, only uncompelled people.

Paul is saying that if we are in Christ, we have received a deep calling  
 that emerges from the very core of God’s being and cuts like a knife  
 to the most important issues facing our world.

The adventure of life with God is breaking into even  
 the most inane workplaces, the most mind-numbing school-rooms,  
 and the most difficult circumstances we face.

How you live each day – humble and gentle, patient,  
 bearing with one another in love, producing evidence  
 of the Spirit’s unity – this way of living really matters.

Your calling in life is significant.  
 Not because you do / don’t have the perfect job,  
 not because you did or didn’t marry the right person,  
 not because of the kids that you do or don’t have.

Your calling in life is significant because the God of all creation  
 has called you beloved, child, ambassador, forgiven,  
 a bearer of the cross, a laborer for the cause of Christ,  
 a participant in the mission of God,  
 a sharer in the hope of glory.

That is God’s calling on *our* life which we live as one body  
 filled by one Spirit of God, serving one Lord,  
 and sharing in one faith and one baptism,  
 held together by one God and Father  
 who is over all and through all and in all.

This cosmic oneness that Paul articulates in v. 4-6 really puts  
our individual anxieties in perspective.

The life of God and the life of the church are so far beyond  
our anxious moments.

And yet they are present with us in those moments,  
and give us the ability to move through anxiety into freedom.

In verse 7 Paul begins a wonderful thought for us,  
“to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”  
Which is something we really need to hear.

Walking worthy of such a high calling sounds like more  
than most of us can take on by ourselves.

Thankfully, walking worthy of our calling isn't something  
we do by ourselves – it's grace. It's the surprise gift of God's love  
flowing through us and into the world,  
to each as Christ has apportioned it.

Every single one of us is a minister in the mission of God  
as we go about our lives, walking (by God's grace) worthy  
of the calling that we share together.

The result of all this is that we are able to remain steadfast through storms.  
We are a connected and growing organism with Christ as our head,  
each part of the body playing their part  
to fulfill our common calling.