PEOPLE THE GOSPEL CREATES · WEEK 2

Living Worthy of Your Calling

October 4, 2026 · Ephesians 4:1–6 · Pastor Bart Denny

THE BIG IDEA

A holy life is visible in the way we love, endure and remain united with one another.

This guide works two ways. On your own, take one section a day through the week, or use the daily readings near the end. In a group, plan on about an hour: read the passage aloud, talk through the background, then choose the questions that fit your group. Nobody has to answer every one.

Read **Ephesians 4:1–6** at least twice, once quietly and once aloud. If you have time, read Ephesians 2:11–22 too, because Paul builds on it. Last week we saw that grace creates a holy people: we were dead in our sins, and God made us alive with Christ and calls us His handiwork. This week Paul turns to what that new life looks like, and he starts with the way we treat one another. This Sunday also included the Lord's Table.

Where this passage sits

Ephesians has two halves. Chapters 1–3 tell what God has done: chosen us, raised us with Christ and made Jews and Gentiles "one new humanity" (2:15). Chapter 3 ends in a prayer and a doxology. Then 4:1 opens with "then" (some translations say "therefore"), the hinge of the letter. Everything in chapters 4–6 rests on chapters 1–3.

After all that, Paul could have started anywhere: prayer, Bible study, evangelism, money. He starts with humility, gentleness and patience. Following Jesus gets very real when other people get involved, and that's especially true in a church, where God puts together people who probably wouldn't have found one another otherwise and says, "You belong to one another."

A few words worth a closer look

"Prisoner for the Lord" (4:1)
Paul wrote from custody, probably in Rome. He's asking them to be humble and patient while he's in chains.

"Worthy" (4:1)
The word pictured a balance scale, two sides that match. Paul isn't asking us to earn God's call. He's asking us to live a life that matches it.

"Calling" (4:1)
God's invitation and claim on us. He called us before we did anything (1:4; 2:8).

"Humble" (4:2)
In the Greek-speaking world, lowliness was usually considered a weakness. Christians made it a virtue because Jesus "humbled himself" (Philippians 2:8).

"Gentle" (4:2)
Strength under control, not weakness. Jesus called Himself "gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

"Bearing with one another" (4:2)
Putting up with each other patiently. Paul assumed Christians would find each other difficult.

"Keep" (4:3)
To guard or protect. The Spirit creates the unity; we guard it.

"One" (4:4–6)
Seven times: one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, God and Father. Father, Son and Spirit are all there. Our unity is rooted in God Himself.

---

1 Let your calling shape your posture

READ Ephesians 4:1–2, Ephesians 2:8–10, Exodus 19:3–6 and John 13:1–17

"Worthy" can make us nervous if we hear it wrong. Paul isn't telling us to make ourselves worthy so God will save us. He has spent three chapters saying the opposite: "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith" (2:8). He's saying, *Let the way you live fit what God has already done for you.* The calling came first.

That pattern runs through Scripture. God didn't stand on the far side of the Red Sea and tell Israel to prove themselves before He'd come get them. He rescued them first, then reminded them, "I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself" (Exodus 19:4), and only then taught them how His people should live. Rescue first, then the life that fits the rescue.

And Paul's first stop is our posture toward other people: "Be completely humble and gentle." One of the clearest signs that grace is at work in us is that we don't have to make everything about us. Humility means I don't have to be the center of every conversation, have the last word or make sure everyone knows I was right. Gentleness shapes what I do with whatever strength I have.

John 13 gives the clearest picture. "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power" (13:3). He knew who He was, where He came from and where He was going. Then He got up, wrapped a towel around His waist and washed His disciples' feet. The One with all authority took the lowest job in the room. He could kneel because He knew who He was. Humility grows more easily when we're secure in who we are.

Pastor Bart pictured the room after a church dinner: cups on the tables, crumbs on the floor, a trash can one paper plate from disaster. You can notice it all and think, "Somebody ought to take care of that." Or you can grab the bag. Nobody stands up to announce that their spiritual gift tonight is taking out the garbage. You just do it, whether you're

the pastor, a board member or anyone else. Grace doesn't make us more impressed with ourselves. It frees us from having to prove ourselves all the time.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is it important that God's call comes *before* Paul says to live worthy of it? What goes wrong if we reverse the order?

2. Read Exodus 19:3–6. How does Israel's rescue from Egypt show the same pattern as Ephesians 4:1?

3. Paul could have started anywhere. Why do you think he started with how we treat each other?

4. Jesus washed feet *because* He knew who He was. How does being secure in God's love make humility easier?

5. Which is harder for you: not having the last word, letting someone else get the credit or admitting you were wrong?

6. Pastor Bart asked, "What happens inside you when you're not treated like the most important person in the room?" How would you answer honestly?

2 Make room for people who are still growing

READ Ephesians 4:2, Exodus 34:6–7, Nehemiah 9:16–21 and James 1:19–20

"Be patient, bearing with one another in love." Patience sounds like a wonderful virtue right up until somebody gives us the chance to practice it. Paul is talking about being slow to anger when someone frustrates or disappoints us, or when someone grows more slowly than we think they should. "Bearing with one another" is wonderfully realistic. Christian community will include people who see things differently, people with habits that irritate us, and people still working through things we think they should have figured out by now.

Before we get comfortable thinking about *those* people, notice the words "one another." Somebody is bearing with me, too. We're all works in progress, and God seems to do much of His shaping while we're in relationship with other unfinished people.

This patience comes from God's own character. He told Moses He is "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). Nehemiah 9 looks back over Israel's history, and it isn't flattering: God provides and they rebel; He gives His law and they refuse to listen. Still, "you are a forgiving God . . . slow to anger and abounding in love. Therefore you did not desert them" (9:17), and "you gave your good Spirit to instruct them" (9:20). God's patience isn't indifference. He corrects, disciplines and tells the truth, but He doesn't abandon His people when they fail.

James adds, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires” (James 1:19–20). Sometimes anger feels productive. We raise the temperature, say something sharp and make sure everyone knows where we stand. Human anger has a poor track record. The holier response is usually slower: listen first, give room to explain, leave space for repentance, and let God work on someone without assuming we have to finish the job by Tuesday.

Think about a child learning to tie a shoe. The loops come apart, the knot lands in the wrong place, one lace ends up three feet shorter than the other, and nobody says, “You’re hopeless.” We say, “Try it again.” Yet we expect spiritual growth to happen instantly. God could ask us the same question we ask others: *Why are you still struggling with this?* How many lessons has He taught us more than once?

That doesn’t mean ignoring sin or calling harmful behavior acceptable. Love sometimes needs a hard conversation. Leviticus 19:17–18 puts correcting a neighbor right beside “love your neighbor as yourself.” Biblical love can tell the truth and still stay at the table.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who taught you something patiently, a parent, coach, teacher or friend? What did their patience make possible?

2. Read Nehemiah 9:16–21. What do you notice about how God responded to Israel’s repeated failures?

3. Why does “one another” change the way we hear “bearing with”? Who might be bearing with you?

4. When has anger felt productive to you in the moment? What did it actually produce?

5. How can we tell the truth about someone’s sin and still “stay at the table” with them?

6. Pastor Bart asked, “Is there someone I’ve stopped giving room to grow?” Is there a “file” you’ve been keeping on someone?

3 Guard the unity God has given

READ Ephesians 4:3–7, Ephesians 2:14–18, Ezekiel 37:15–24 and John 17:20–23

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Two things stand out. First, *make every effort.* Unity takes work. Churches don’t stay united because everyone agrees on everything. Sometimes someone has to make the phone call, walk across the room, say “I was wrong” or decide that winning the argument isn’t worth damaging the relationship.

Second, Paul says to *keep* the unity, not create it. The Spirit has already done that. Back in chapter 2 Paul addressed one of the deepest divisions in the ancient world, between Jews and Gentiles: Christ “himself is our peace, who has

made the two groups one" (2:14), reconciling both to God "through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (2:16), so that "through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (2:18). Christ has done the reconciling. Now live like the reconciled people you are.

God has been after this for a long time. After Israel split into northern and southern kingdoms, God told Ezekiel to take two sticks, one for Judah and one for Israel, and "join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand" (Ezekiel 37:17). "I will make them one nation . . . and they will all have one shepherd" (37:22, 24). On the night before the cross, Jesus prayed "for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one . . . Then the world will know that you sent me" (John 17:20–23). He was praying for us.

Then Paul gives the foundation: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. The deepest thing about the person across the aisle isn't that you share their taste in music, their opinions or their personality. It's that, if you both belong to Christ, you share the same Lord, hope, Spirit and Father. Those things should outweigh what divides us.

Pastor Bart compared it to a choir. A choir doesn't make harmony by having everyone sing the same note. There are sopranos, altos, tenors and basses, all following the same music and watching the same director. If each section decides its part is the only one that should be heard, you don't have harmony anymore. You have an argument set to sheet music. And the very next verse (4:7) turns to the different gifts Christ gives each of us. There's room in the body for different personalities, gifts and ways of doing things, as long as all of it lives under one Lord.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What kinds of effort does unity take in a family, a workplace or a church? Which is hardest for you?

2. Why does it matter that we *keep* unity rather than *create* it?

3. What divisions in Paul's day did Christ overcome? What divisions might He need to overcome among us?

4. Read the seven "ones" in 4:4–6 slowly. Which one means the most to you right now, and why?

5. In the choir picture, what does it look like when one section insists on being the only one heard?

6. Jesus said the world would know He was sent by seeing His people's unity. What might our community see in us?

Take it home

READ Hebrews 12:14, John 13:34–35 and 1 Corinthians 10:16–17

Most of us have someone who makes Ephesians 4 harder to live: someone who frustrates or disappointed you, someone you've started avoiding, someone whose name makes something inside you tighten. What would it look like

to live worthy of your calling in *that* relationship? Maybe you need to apologize without adding an explanation afterward. Maybe you need to listen to someone you've already decided is wrong, or give someone more room to grow.

"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy" (Hebrews 12:14). Peace and holiness sit side by side. That doesn't mean every broken relationship can be repaired right away or that trust comes back overnight. Some relationships call for wise boundaries, and some wounds take time to heal. If someone is harming you, being patient doesn't mean staying in harm's way; please talk with Pastor Bart or someone you trust. But for most of us, the questions are more ordinary: *Am I willing to take the lower place? To be patient? To make an effort toward peace? To remember God is still working on this person, too?* They could be asking the same questions about us.

"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Not because we never disagree or get everything right, but because people can see something of Jesus in how we love one another. This Sunday ended at the Lord's Table: "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf" (1 Corinthians 10:17).

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Without naming them, think of the person who makes this passage hardest to live. What is one step toward peace you could take?

2. What's the difference between an apology and an apology followed by an explanation?

3. How does the Lord's Table remind us that we belong to one another as well as to Christ?

Through the week

☐	**Monday**	Ephesians 4:1–3 and Exodus 19:3–6. Thank God that He rescued you before He asked anything of you.
☐	**Tuesday**	John 13:1–17. Look for one "trash bag" job today, something to do without being noticed.
☐	**Wednesday**	Exodus 34:6–7 and Nehemiah 9:16–21. Thank God for His patience with you, and ask Him to make you patient with one specific person.
☐	**Thursday**	James 1:19–20 and Leviticus 19:17–18. Before your next frustrating conversation, practice "quick to listen, slow to speak."
☐	**Friday**	Ephesians 4:4–6 and John 17:20–23. Pray for unity in Pathway, by name for anyone you find difficult.

Try this

Think of the person you're most tempted to avoid or write off. This week, take one step toward peace: a call, a kind word, a genuine question, or an apology with no explanation added. Then pray for them by name every day, asking God to keep working in them, and in you.

Close in prayer

Father, thank You for calling us to Yourself and giving us a place in Your family through Jesus Christ. You've shown us grace we didn't earn and patience we didn't deserve. Help us live in a way that fits the calling we've received. Make us humble when pride wants to take over and gentle when we're tempted to push. Give us patience with people who are still growing, and remind us that we're still growing too. Where there's tension, give us courage to pursue peace. Protect the unity You've created among us, and let the way we love one another make the character of Christ visible. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes

Watch the sermon online

Scan the code or visit **pathwaywes.com/sermons/living-worthy-of-your-calling** for the video, this guide and Pastor Bart's blog post on this week's message.

Pathway, A Wesleyan Church · 4960 Portland Rd, Saranac, MI · Sundays at 10 AM · pathwaywes.com