

EPHESIANS: GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR OUR SPIRITUAL MATURITY
EPHESIANS 4:1-3
2ND STREET COMMUNITY CHURCH
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This morning we're looking into the words of the Apostle Paul in **EPHESIANS 4:1-3**. While Paul was in prison in Rome between 61 and 63 A.D., (or roughly 30 years after the beginning of the Christian church as recorded in **ACTS 2**), he wrote four letters ... **COLOSSIANS**, **PHILEMON**, **EPHESIANS** and **PHILIPPIANS**. Three of these four letters **COLOSSIANS**, **EPHESIANS** and **PHILIPPIANS** each contain what I call a hinge point.

By a **hinge point** I mean that these three letters have a **time**, or a **hinge point** (about in the middle) where they shift from the **TEACHING OF THEOLOGY** to the **APPLICATION OF THEOLOGY** in the day-to-day stuff of life. I love this pattern Paul uses, because it mirrors the experience of so many of us as followers of Christ. **FIRST**, we need to **LEARN TRUTH**, and **SECOND**, we need to **DO TRUTH**. And we've got to keep this order straight. Ever try to do something you haven't first learned how to do? Ya, it's frustrating to you and to everyone else around you.

So, following this pattern, in the first three chapters of **EPHESIANS** Paul has been giving us **knowledge**. But now that we get to the last three chapters, he switches gears and talks with us about applying that **knowledge** in the form of **wisdom**. Let's think back to what we learned about **knowledge**, **understanding**, and **wisdom** in our study of *The Old Testament* book of **PROVERBS** last winter.

1. **knowledge** is taking God's Word into our hearts and minds. God has given all His followers a **DESIRE** for knowledge.
2. **understanding** is studying, wrestling with, grappling with, internalizing, and praying through the portions of God's Word we've taken into our hearts and minds. Understanding take **DISCIPLINE**.
3. **wisdom** is living out the portions of God's Word we've come to know and understand in the day-to-day circumstances of our lives. Living out wisdom gives God, others, and us, **DELIGHT**.

Wisdom is the correct application of **knowledge**. In **EPHESIANS 1-3** Paul admonished us and trained us to be **hearers of the Word**, and now, in **EPHESIANS 4-6** he's going to exhort us to become **doers of the Word**. Here's how Jesus and His half-brother James each talk about the importance of the two halves of this same coin ...

MATTHEW 7:24, 26 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

²⁴ Anyone who *hears* and *obeys* these teachings of Mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock.

²⁶ Anyone who *hears* My teachings and doesn't *obey* them is like a foolish person who built a house on sand. [*emphasis added*]

JAMES 1:22-24 (CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH VERSION)

²²⁻²⁴ **Obey God's message! Don't fool yourselves by just *listening* to it. If you *hear* the message and don't *obey* it, you are like people who stare at themselves in a mirror and forget what they look like as soon as they leave. [*emphasis added*]**

In **EPHESIANS 1-3** Paul gives strength to the spiritual infrastructure of our hearts and minds, to what he calls our **inward man**. And in **EPHESIANS 4-6** he gives us practical instruction about how to live out that strength. Like I told you two Sunday's ago, this is the work of **transformation** and **sanctification** that God calls His followers to ... the work of taking on more of the character of Jesus Christ, so that His thoughts, His words, His actions, and His priorities, become ours, so that we can live out the will of God more fully and more consistently.

This is what we refer to all the time here at 2nd Street as **THE GREAT EXCHANGE**. It's what happens when the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ takes up residence inside our spirits, and begins the process of **transformation**, or **sanctification**, of changing us from the inside out, from the old us, to the new creation God has had in His heart and mind for us to become since before the foundation of the world. The teaching two Sundays ago from **EPHESIANS 3:14-21** really focused on this. If you don't have it, you might want to pick it up at the Community Center before you leave today.

And gang, this **GREAT EXCHANGE** won't begin to happen until we move through these stages of **knowledge**, **understanding**, and **wisdom** with God's Word ... and until we begin **hearing** and then **obeying** God's Word in the day-to-day, moment-by-moment circumstances of our lives. This is where change takes place, and nowhere else.

Listen to me, the things Paul **TEACHES US TO DO**, and in fact, **TELLS US TO DO** in the second half of **EPHESIANS**, are impossible for us to do in our own strength, and in our own, so-called *human wisdom*. We can't do it. We can't do it. We can't do it. Because in case you haven't noticed, living the Christian life in our own strength is impossible. Which brings us to our **FIRST FAITH LESSON** this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

It's only when we really connect with the power of God, that living the Christian life, and making the choices the Apostle Paul calls us to in **EPHESIANS 4-6** become possible.

When you and I get into God's Word, and invite God's Word to get into us, and when we begin experiencing the infilling power of the Holy Spirit, **THEN** we can start living the transformed lives Jesus calls us to live as His followers in this busted-up, sin-soaked world.

If you own a motor home, don't get upset with me for this next illustration of what Paul is teaching us here about the kind of **transformation** God wants to bring about in our lives. It's only an **ILLUSTRATION**. And I might even want to borrow your motor home some day, so I want you to understand that I'm not mad at you for owning one. So go ahead and forgive me ahead of time. Any questions?

ILLUSTRATION ... The motor home has allowed us to put all the conveniences of home on wheels. Campers no longer need to contend with sleeping in a sleeping bag on bumpy ground, cooking over a campfire, and hauling water up from a stream. Now campers can park a fully equipped “moveable home” on a cement slab in the middle of a few pine trees and hook up to a water line, a sewer line, electricity, and in some places, even cable TV.

And because cable TV isn’t always available, more and more motor homes now come with their own satellite dish too. And because there’s no more bother with dirt, no more smoke from the fire, and no more drudgery of walking down to the stream, it’s now possible to go camping and never even have to go outside.

People buy motor homes with the hope of seeing new places, and getting out into the wild blue yonder ... and then they deck it out with the same furnishings they have in their living rooms. And in the end, little really changes. They may drive to a new place and set themselves up for a night or two in new surroundings, but the newness can really go unnoticed, because of the fact that they’ve carried along their old setting, their old possessions, and their old distractions.

GANG, THE REAL ADVENTURE OF EXPERIENCING NEW LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST BEGINS WHEN THE COMFORTABLE PATTERNS OF OUR OLD LIFE ARE LEFT BEHIND.

When we come into relationship with Jesus Christ, He calls us to lay aside our **former manner of life**, and our **old self**. And as we learn the way of Jesus Christ, as we go through this **transformation** of heart and mind He calls us to engage in His Word and empowers to us to experience through His Holy Spirit, we discover that Jesus didn’t come just to change our shirt, He came to change everything about us, and to teach us a whole new way to be human. Years ago now, my friend Nancy Thomas wrote a poem that came to mind as I was pondering these truths this past week ...

AT FIRST I THOUGHT (By Nancy Thomas)

at first I thought
it was just another
reclamation project -
a simple reconstructing
of the slums of my soul
to meet the Management's
specifications.

this rough and tender
Carpenter
has splintered my sturdiest beams,
torn off all supports and
blasted down to the very basement.
and out of the ruin
is currently (or so the rumor goes)

but, no ...

laying the groundwork
for a new and royal temple.

The **transforming of our minds** the Apostle Paul talks about in **ROMANS 12:2** is what’s going on in our lives as our intimacy with Jesus Christ grows and our trust in Him deepens. And the fruit of this **transformation** is a growth of both **discernment** and **courage**, so we’re equipped to know and live into God’s will for our lives more fully.

And as we begin to put on this new way of thinking, talking and acting, this new lifestyle eventually becomes who we are. **THINK WITH ME FOR A MINUTE ABOUT PEOPLE YOU KNOW, IN WHOM YOU SEE THE CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST.** Okay, now how did they become like Him? It didn't happen because they just tried harder, or just pretended with great stamina. They've done it by making a conscious decision to **put on the new man, to put on Christ ...** and along the way, they've become **who** and **what** they've put on.

Have you ever been stood up? You made an appointment with somebody and they were a "no show". It's a drag. You remembered the appointment, but they didn't. What gives? Well with that scenario in mind, let me ask you a couple important questions about how this spiritual transformation process is going in your life ...

When it comes to God's desire to pursue this transformation in us - what poet Nancy Thomas calls a *beam splitting, blasted down to the very basement renovation* in your heart and mind, God has shown up to hold up His end of the deal, are you showing up or are you *standing God up*?

There was a time when you told God that you wanted Him to teach you a whole new way to live, a whole new to think, a whole new way to talk, a whole new way to act ... and a whole new way to prioritize what you'd pick up and hold onto in this life, and what you'd lay down, let go of, and move past.

How are you doing at living out those vows, those commitments, those covenants, you made with God? Are you *surrendering* to the work God wants to do in you, or are you *standing God up*, and turning away from the marriage vows you took when you were first yoked with Him and became His bride?

Gang, when you and I just sit around and wait for this transformation to happen - it's going to be a long wait. God is doing His part, and now He's waiting for us to do our part. Here's a drama that illustrates what I'm talking about ... about how God longs to see us come to the place in this transformation process, in this adventure of **THE GREAT EXCHANGE**, where we begin to think about how to live out our faith in compassionate, practical, real-life ways ...

2ND HEART DRAMA ... "RIGHT WHERE I BELONG"

Gang, it's great to **GO ON A MISSION TRIP** - but it's another thing to begin viewing **LIFE ITSELF AS A MISSION**, where we're in step with God, responding to God, obeying God, where we're being transformed by God ... where we're letting our inward faith turn outward in ways that show others who Jesus is and what a transformed life looks like. Please turn with me in your Bibles to **EPHESIANS 4:1** ...

EPHESIANS 4:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

The word **walk** Paul uses in *v. 1*, is the Greek word **peripateo**. Paul uses it seven times throughout **EPHESIANS** (**EPHESIANS 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17; 5:2, 8, 15**). **peripateo** is a compound word made up of **peri**, which means **around**, and **pateo**, who means **to walk**. And when these two words are compounded together, the new word means **to walk around**, or to **habitually live in and carry on in one general territory**. It's like a person who's walked in one area or on one path for so long that they can almost walk around it blindfolded without bumping into anything or tripping. They know the area well because they've lived there and functioned there for a long time.

peripateo is used 88 times in *The New Testament* and is translated as **live** nearly as often as **walk**. So **EPHESIANS 4:1** could easily say "I implore you to **live** in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called. Keep focusing on who God is calling you to be, and on what God is calling you to do and you'll stop tripping up on everything else that keeps getting in the way."

Our **walking** or **living** illustrates, or is evidence of the fact that we've stopped being just **hearers of the Word of God**, and that we've begun the **transforming** journey of becoming **doers of the Word of God**. And just like **walking** requires one step at a time, the Christian life can only be experienced one day at a time. Here's what Jesus taught about this in **MATTHEW 6:34** ...

MATTHEW 6:34 (THE MESSAGE)

³⁴ Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.

Spiritual maturity and transformation involves many steps, all of them taken one at a time. Throughout *The New Testament* there are nine spheres of our Christian **walk** (maybe you can find more) that are addressed ... and we'll explore some of these spheres in more detail as we study through **EPHESIANS 4-6**. But here's a synopsis of these nine areas of life and faith where God calls you and me to begin **wisely** putting into practice the **knowledge of God's Word** we've taken into our hearts and minds.

THIRD JOHN 3

1. Christians are called to **walk in the truth of God's Word**. God wants us to store up His Word in our hearts and minds so we can then live it out in the day-to-day stuff of life.

GALATIANS 5:16; ROMANS 8:4

2. Christians are called to **walk in the Holy Spirit**, so that we'll be equipped, encouraged, and empowered to overcome the temptations of the flesh and the Enemy.

SECOND CORINTHIANS 5:7

3. Christians are called to **walk by faith and not by sight** ... we're to be led by faith and by the Holy Spirit, instead of being led around by our own senses, our own emotions, our own feelings, or our own fears.

EPHESIANS 5:2

4. Christians are called to **walk in love**. **Compassion is love lived out**. The one word that best describes how Jesus Christ thought, lived, and spoke, is **compassion**. Let's follow His example and **walk in compassion, in love lived out**.

ROMANS 6:4

5. Christians are called to **walk in newness of life** ... we need to live out the changes that are happening on the inside of us (**sanctification and transformation**) in ways consistent and obvious.

ROMANS 13:13

6. Christians are called to **walk in integrity and honesty**. The world doesn't need more hypocritical Christians, so let's stop saying we believe one thing, and living like we believe something else.

EPHESIANS 2:10

7. Christians are called to **walk in good works**. We need to let people see and hear that we're followers of Jesus. Our thoughts, words, deeds, and priorities have got to be different than the world, and than people who are not yet in relationship with Jesus Christ.

EPHESIANS 4:1

8. Christians are called to **walk in a manner worthy of our calling**. We must choose to live holy and precious lives - lives that are being set apart day-by-day for God's exclusive use, control, and direction.

COLOSSIANS 4:5 ...

9. Christians are called to **walk in wisdom toward people who aren't yet in relationship with Jesus Christ**. Gang, let's live out our faith for all to see, because when we do this we lift up Jesus Christ, and when Jesus Christ is lifted up, people are drawn to Him.

Okay, back to **EPHESIANS 4:1** ...

EPHESIANS 4:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

Here we come to the third verse in **EPHESIANS** that begins with the word **therefore** (cf., **EPHESIANS 2:11, 3:13**). And while you might be tired of hearing me repeat this basic Bible study rule, here it is again ... **When we see a therefore, it means that we need to stop and find out what it's *there for*.** The word **therefore** is always an indicator that we need to go back and review what's been said previously, because the idea we're about to be introduced to builds on the foundation of what's just been previously written.

In the case of the **therefore** in **EPHESIANS 4:1** we only need to go back one verse to be reminded that Paul has just said that **God must be always be given glory in the church**. Therefore, the **therefore** here means, ***Because God is to be given glory in the church ...*** I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to **walk [or live]** in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called ...

v. 1 ... the prisoner of the Lord ... remember that the Apostle Paul was in a Roman prison when he wrote this letter to the Christians in Ephesus. And yet Paul's attitude toward the difficult chapter of life he was going through was that because he'd given his **HEART**, his **SOUL**, and his **VERY LIFE** to the care, the protection, and the guidance of God, he wasn't going to let being a prisoner of Rome shape his identity or set the attitudes and the priorities of his life. What a great perspective to have. This is the kind of perspective you'll learn to build into your life if you get involved in ***Celebrate Recovery***. Remember that the **CR INFO TABLE** is by the coffee each week.

I mean seriously, if there was anybody who had the right to complain about his or her circumstances it was the Apostle Paul as he wrote these words. But Paul didn't view himself as a **prisoner of Rome**, but as a **prisoner of the Lord**. In fact, he teaches us in **ROMANS** and **PHILIPPIANS** that great things happened whenever he was in prison.

I have a feeling that each of Paul's prison guards there in Rome had the opportunity to say out loud, at least one time, **"Paul, you're chained to me."** But if he said those words, I bet he only said them once, because when he spoke those words, I can just hear Paul saying back with a smile, **"No way bro. You're chained to me. And now that it's your shift, you're MY prisoner and you've not going anywhere. Let me tell you about Jesus."** This is why I love talking about Jesus on airplanes with the people I'm sitting next to. I mean, really, where can they go?! And this truth brings us to our **SECOND FAITH LESSON** this morning ...

FAITH LESSON

When we're sold out to God, our identity will be rooted in God and all of our important life-questions will find their answers in God.

"Who am I?": I am a child of God and a follower of Jesus Christ. I belong to Him.

“Who is in charge of my life?”: God. I will follow God, and not society, or my emotions, my fears, or my ego.

“What is my purpose in life?”: To glorify God in all I think, in all I say, and in all I do

EPHESIANS 4:1 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

¹ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

Because God is to be given glory in the church (cf., **EPHESIANS 3:21**) Paul is imploring us to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called ... The word implore is *parakaleo*, which means to call someone next to us. And because it's not the command of a boss, but the request of a friend, I hear Paul saying to you and to me in this verse ...

Come here, friend, and let me put my arm around you as we walk. God is the One who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask from Him. He deserves glory, honor, and praise from us as His children, and so I'm challenging you to glorify Him in this.

Paul is calling us is to glorify God in a manner worthy of our calling. And what is the calling with which we've been called? Quite simply it's the fact that God has called you and me 1) to be forgiven, 2) to be restored into right relationship and fellowship with Him, and 3) to become His followers. This is our calling.

And so, to glorify God, Paul is telling us as a friend to walk worthy of this calling. And these words turn out to be, what I called at the beginning of this teaching, the hinge point of the book of **EPHESIANS** ... between the first half of the book, and the second half of the book. I love the simple, exact way that the 20th-century Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest explains this ...

In brief, God says in Ephesians 1-3, “I have made you a saint.” And then in Ephesians 4-6, He says, “Now start living a saintly life.”

The word worthy in **v. 1** means to be comparable to, or to weigh the same. And so our walk should weigh the same, or have the same importance to us as our calling. In other words, our Christian life, and our behavior before God should match the grace we received from God when He reached out to us with His love and grace, and when we made the choice to respond to Him and come into relationship with Him. Gang, God is expecting that you and I walk in a manner worthy. And Paul goes on in **vv. 2-3** to tell us more specifically about what he means by this ...

EPHESIANS 4:2 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

v. 2 ... humility and gentleness ... humility isn't about being doormat or a weakling ... it's about having a teachable spirit. ROMANS 12:3 says, “don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to.” But all too often, in our minds we read that verse and

we say to ourselves ... “Fortunately, my degree of greatness makes it impossible for me to think too highly of myself. I’m very proud of how humble I am.”

Gang, God hates **pride**, and none of us can compare ourselves to God and be **prideful**. And yet **pride** is something we all struggle against in different ways. Because Paul is talking here about being **humble** within the Body of Christ ... if we’re honest, we’ll admit that it can be pretty easy to be **proud** when we’re surrounded by other people ... because most other people can’t come close to measuring up to the opinion we have of ourselves. In our minds we’re better looking, smarter, more informed, funnier, better-connected, and of more value than most other people we know.

But let’s be honest here ... because in reality, we’re all pretty much the same. And it’s only when we start taking our minds off ourselves and start appreciating the great things about God and about other people, that we’ll begin walking in **humility and gentleness**. **Humility** is **looking at ourselves and others through God’s eyes**. And **gentleness** is **treating others with God’s compassion and grace**.

v. 2 goes on ... **patience, or longsuffering** ... ouch! James, Jesus’ half-brother, tells us in **JAMES 5:9-11** that other people will always try our **patience**. It can be easy to lack **patience** when dealing with people in our church, in our families, at school, and at work. And much of the time it seems like life itself, more than God, tests our **patience**. And in just about every situation, we get the opportunity to see how **mature and transformed** we are in our faith in Jesus Christ by measuring our level of **patience** against our level of **annoyance, intolerance, and anger**.

v. 2 goes on ... **showing tolerance for one another in love** ... to **tolerate someone in love** is to **endure** them. And it’s just a fact of life that some people have to be **endured** in love. But let’s make up our minds right here, right now that we’re not going to be the kind of person who has to be **endured**, and that stretch the **tolerance** levels of others. Jesus said in **JOHN 15:12** ...

JOHN 15:12 (THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE)

¹² This is My commandment: That you love one another [just] as I have loved you.

Being **tolerant** can also mean to **stand one’s ground**. In other words, we can be **teachable and patient**, and yet still have **convictions** and **stand our ground** for what we believe in and know to be true ... but Christ calls us to always do this in an **attitude of love**. This is the kind of person I see David describing in **PSALM 1:3** ...

PSALM 1:3 (NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

³ He is like a tree planted by flowing streams; it yields its fruit at the proper time, and its leaves never fall off. He succeeds in everything he attempts.

The trees David describes here are the strongest because they’ve tapped into a consistent water source. And they can outlive other trees because they’re not going

through seasons of drought every few years. A tree like this can bend in the wind and not get uprooted or snap. And I see a **THIRD FAITH LESSON** for us here this morning.

FAITH LESSON

As followers of Jesus Christ, we're trees planted by streams of living water. We're not rigid, but rather, fluid, and bendable. We don't have to listen only to what other people say, but we can weigh every decision we have to make against the counsel of God's Word, we can stand for truth, and we can carry out every action in our lives in love.

EPHESIANS 4:3 (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE)

³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul is calling us here to have **unity with other followers of Jesus Christ** when it comes to our **MISSION**, not when it comes to every single one of our doctrines and beliefs. We'll always have some doctrinal differences with other Christians, and that's okay. But as long as Jesus Christ remains first, and our commitment to the Great Commission in **MATTHEW 28:19-20** remains in tact, we can experience the **unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace** Paul calls us to here in **v. 3**. I love what 19th-century British pastor, teacher, professor and author, Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote about this beautiful and wondrous truth ...

We want unity in the truth of God through the Spirit of God. Let us seek after this; let us live near to Christ, for this is the best way of promoting unity. Divisions in churches never begin with those full of love to the Savior. [Charles Haddon Spurgeon | 1834-1892]

The word Paul uses here for **diligent** is the word **spoudazo**, which means to **endeavor**, or to **work hard**. **Maintaining or preserving unity** among people of diverse beliefs and backgrounds can be hard - and without the Holy Spirit, it's impossible. As a pastor, I love what I see of this happening here at 2nd Street. And what I attribute our success at this to is not to our own efforts first, but to our willingness to surrender to the power and the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

NEXT SUNDAY ... EPHESIANS 4:4-10 ...

God gives spiritual gifts to His children and followers. How do we discover our spiritual gifts and use them for the purposes and the glory of God? How does God want to fruit of the Spirit to inform and work hand-in-hand with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to mature us and to help mature and refine others through us?

COME PRAYING AND EXPECTING!