



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

Sunday, July 31 - August 6 (B) – Ephesians 4:1-16

Focus: *Grow up in Christ*

word of life

“But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...” (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV)

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

Christians are begged, encouraged, and urged “to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” (Ephesians 4:1 NRSV) Too often, we can resemble young children who quickly move through toys, being tossed to and fro by the colors, sounds, and sights of what is put before them.

Life is full of things to distract us from our calling. Before we know it, days, months, and years fly by. Time passes and we have not led the life worthy of God’s calling to us.

1. *Has anyone ever begged you to lead a life worthy of God? Describe the situation.*
2. *Where do you hear that urging today?*

But it is not too late. Each of us is urged to offer our gifts within the body of Christ so we might “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV) Our lives are not our own. In baptism, we have become connected to the body of Christ. Just like in a human body, there is a variety of parts and each part contributes to the whole.

Some people are given gifts to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. No matter the particular gift given to an individual, all are to offer their unique gift, “... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. . .” (Ephesians 4:12 NRSV) God does not give a gift to an individual merely to be hoarded. Gifts are given so that others might be equipped for ministry.

It takes a certain maturity to realize God gives gifts to individuals so that the whole community might become stronger.

3. *In addition to the list of gifts found in verse 11, what are other gifts given to individuals?*
4. *Without the guidance from the community, how might we view our God-given gifts and talents?*

Everyone is given a gift from God, but not all gifts are the same. There are times jealousy and resentment seep into a community of Christ. Sometimes, individuals neglect offering their gift for the sake of community and pursue a path of self-gratification. This passage provides important words of guidance for those called to follow Christ. Live “...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:2-3 NRSV)

5. *How can the attributes of humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance help maintain unity?*
6. *What human attributes tends to disrupt the bond of peace?*

Unity is rooted in the shared body, Spirit, hope, calling, Lord, faith, and baptism. The Christian is not alone. Consider when all parts of the body are working well and properly. “But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV)

7. *How do you encourage others to grow up in Christ and accept their calling to lead a life worthy of Christ?*

word among us

Like so many times before, the congregation was caught up in conflict. Nobody quite understood why this particular congregation had such a difficult time. But this conflict seemed different. There was a sadness about it.

Finally, on one Sunday morning, Miss Agnes, an older white-haired woman said, “Enough. Before I die, we are going to be the church Jesus intended us to be in this community. I want everyone to attend a Bible Study on Wednesday night. If you don’t come, then I don’t want to hear you complain, whine, or criticize.”

Now Miss Agnes had welcomed almost every new member with her home-made sourdough bread, delivered a meal to their home during difficult times, and taught every child in Vacation Bible School. This was *her* church and she was tired of the dissension.

Sure enough, as soon as Miss Agnes got home, she began to dig through her closets, drawers, and boxes. She was not an organized person, but she saved everything. So, she kept searching until she found a Bible Study used at one of her women’s Bible Study classes about 25 years ago. The focus was on Ephesians 4:1-16. She was determined to have her congregation study this passage until she felt there was unity and peace – hopefully within her lifetime.

1. *Why are there so many conflicts in the church?*
2. *How often do churches discuss leading a life worthy of the calling of Christ?*
3. *How have you embraced humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance in your own life?*

Living as part of a Christian community is not necessarily an easy thing to do. Not everyone has the same gift; not all use their gifts to build up the community.

faith practice in daily life

Live among God’s faithful people

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4 NRSV) In baptism, God has claimed us and marked us with the cross of Christ forever. We share that mark of baptism with others who have been baptized.

Our past, present, and future are connected to this one Lord, Spirit, and God. We are to use our God-given gifts to build up the faith community to be a healthy, loving body of Christ.

4. *Share your favorite verse from this passage.*
5. *How do you hope to use your gifts to build up the body of Christ for love?*

Prayer

God, we hear your calling. Now show us the way to lead a life worthy of your calling. Guide us in offering our gifts for ministry to build up the body of Christ. Amen

last word

Send a thank you card
to at least five people in your church
who offer their gifts to build up the body of Christ.