

Walk This Way

Ephesians 4:1 August 23, 2023

Ephesians 4:1 - Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received

Be All You Can Be is one of the most effective marketing slogans of all time. Many of you can probably sing the jingle from the commercials where we were told, “[The army does] more before 9am than most people do all day!”

I didn’t realize the U.S. Army had retired *Be All You Can Be* as their slogan back in 2001. It was replaced for five years with *Army Of One*. Since 2006, the army slogan has been *Army Strong*.¹ The government paid an ad agency \$200 million a year for that campaign, by the way.²

But, here’s some good news: It was announced in March that the classic is back. The army’s slogan is, once again, *Be All You Can Be*, which was voted the 18th best ad campaign of the 20th century.³

We’re focusing in on one verse tonight for a couple of reasons. First, it is the book’s pivot point, where Paul moves into more direct, practical application after three chapters of mainly doctrine.

Second, since we’re people who *want* to apply these truths, this verse serves as a really good slogan for us as individuals and as a church. The slogan is this: *Walk worthy of the calling*.

Now, Paul wasn’t *recruiting*. It’s important to remember that his listeners *were* faithful saints already. The rest of Ephesians is *not* about how you make yourself worth saving or how to make yourself worthy of God’s love. He *already* loves you and, if you’re a Christian, all of these things we read in chapters one through three are *already* true about you.

One source calls this verse the church’s mission statement.⁴ In it, Paul gives direction in *how* to walk in God’s power - how to be what God has made us to be. It’s not just because we “should” or because God wants to heap obligations on us. Chapters 4-6 are practical insights into how we can cooperate with the Lord in His world-changing work, how we can stay undefiled as we move about in the world, and how we can enjoy more and more of what God wants to give us.

Paul begins with the word *therefore*. It’s a term that means “accordingly,”⁵ or a “marker of result.”⁶ Reading through the letter, we’ve heard all this doctrine, we’ve heard all these truths about the mystery of God, and *now*, according to those things, there should be a marked result in our lives.

¹ https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Slogans_of_the_United_States_Army

² <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna15197720>

³ <https://recruiting.army.mil/News/Article/3327601/in-with-the-old-the-army-rebrands-with-a-familiar-slogan/>

⁴ *CSB Study Bible Notes*

⁵ *A Concise Dictionary Of The Words In The Greek Testament And The Hebrew Bible*

⁶ *The Dictionary Of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)*

Imagine you were born with no legs. You lived many years without the ability to stand or walk or move around on your own. Then you go to a doctor, the doctor is able to perform a surgery that not only gives you legs, but also the ability to use them. You wake up from the anesthesia and the doctor says, "The surgery was a success. You can stand and walk." That surgery would bring you into a new reality of living - a marked result.

Paul has been speaking about what God has done to give us life and power and purpose and strength. Now, in chapter 4, it's time for those truths to begin to operate and empower us. God's revelation is not just abstract or metaphysical. It's given for your day-to-day life. *Therefore*, what should I do? Paul's going to elaborate for the rest of the letter in some very specific ways. But it boils down to *walk worthy*.

Paul is going to talk to us about many aspects of life - as church members, as neighbors, as spouses and parents. He's going to talk about our speech and our interaction with society and our business relationships. But, of course, he can't cover everything.

The good news is that, no matter what situation you find yourself in, this simple principle is your guiding light. Walk worthy of the calling.

F.F. Bruce writes, "*There are many situations in which we shall find no detailed precept of Scripture to tell us what to do, but here is a principle to guide us in every situation: which course of action will be most worthy of the calling with which God has called us?*"⁷

Paul *urges* us. His first audience was the Gentile Christians in the church at Ephesus, but already this letter has widened its scope to *all* the saints, all Christians, including you and me. Paul *urges* us to walk worthy. This was an important message to him. He thinks this is absolutely needful.

But notice the grace of his plea. He could have said, "I demand," or "I command," but instead he uses a term that can mean, "I exhort, I encourage, I comfort, I warn."⁸ Another dictionary gives this definition: *to call you near*.⁹ Come near to the Lord and follow after Him. Paul used the same word that Jairus used when he fell at the feet of Jesus and asked Him to, "Come and lay Your hands on my daughter so she will get well and live."¹⁰

Now, Paul *is* speaking for the Lord, this is Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit. We *are* commanded by God to do what He's asking, but Paul comes not as a drill sergeant, but as a personal friend and says, "I urge you to walk worthy." It's an invitation.

Walking is such a helpful image when it comes to understanding the Christian life. Walking means movement, forward progress toward a destination. It means we're headed somewhere and

⁷ F.F. Bruce *The Epistle To The Ephesians: A Verse-By-Verse Exposition*

⁸ Markus Barth *Ephesians 4-6: Introduction, Translation, And Commentary*

⁹ CDWGTHB

¹⁰ Mark 5:22-23

experiencing all sorts of terrain along the way. It's also something that can be done at a variety of paces, sometimes with others, sometimes on our own. But no matter the circumstances, it's a step-by-step endeavor.¹¹ Paul could've used any analogy he wanted. He did *not* say, "I urge you to *fly worthy on eagles wings*." He didn't urge us to leap or pole vault worthy. *Walk* worthy.

When the Bible uses this walking analogy, it means our way of life. In fact, Paul has already used the word in this way back in chapter 2. "*You were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world.*"¹²

Psalm 1 famously presents life as a walk in one of two directions: Either the way of the Lord, leading to life, or the way of the wicked, leading to destruction.

To walk means our conduct,¹³ our thought and behavior,¹⁴ or "follow a prescribed way in a fixed order."¹⁵ It's not just a style of dress or a certain vocabulary list we're allowed to use or particular activities to avoid. One commentator says, "*[it's] comparable to the march of Israel under God's guidance in the wilderness.*"¹⁶ As the Israelites moved from Egypt to the Promised Land, they weren't just given the destination address and then left to their own devices. Earlier this week I had an appointment in Fresno, so I opened my Maps app and plugged in the address and had my choice of 3 routes. But our walk to glory isn't like that. We're led step-by-step along the way. That's what the Lord did for Moses and the Israelites. "Here's where we're going, but *this* is the first stop. And we might stay here for a few days or a few weeks, then move on over to this next location." God had a *prescribed* order for them. He had the route *and* the destination planned.

Remember what Ephesians 2:10 (NKJV) says: "*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*"

The way we walk, it's quality and character, should be *worthy*. The term means *appropriately*.¹⁷ It also is a term that means well-balanced. Does the way I walk *balance* with what I say I believe? Paul talked for three chapters about our calling and God's eternal plan, our incredible inheritance and the supernatural power we have in Christ. He piled up all these things, and we *believe* them, so then when it comes to my life, does my faith have legs? Does my creed match my conduct?¹⁸

Physical balance was something I took for granted before my stroke. Now, things just aren't quite the same. We had a hilarious experience last December. We were at a place where there was a suspended bridge that I had been on many times before. It's built with strong planks and steel cables, but it *does* sway and roll a bit when you walk on it, particularly if your kids run across.

¹¹ Darrell Bock *Ephesians: An Introduction And Commentary*

¹² Ephesians 2:1-2

¹³ *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*

¹⁴ *The Teacher's Bible Commentary*

¹⁵ Barth

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *CDWGTHTB*

¹⁸ R. Kent Hughes *Ephesians: The Mystery Of The Body Of Christ*

I got about half way across the 50 yards and the bridge started to move and my legs just stopped working. My brain was telling them to step and adapt to the motion, but I just couldn't. It felt very strange and it was absolutely hysterical.

The problem of imbalance is much less fun on the spiritual level. When our spiritual lives are unbalanced between belief and practice, then we end up becoming like the priest or the Levite in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. These two men were professionally religious. They knew everything you could humanly know about the Word. They oriented their lives around piety and religiosity. And, as they were walking, they saw a man, beaten and dying on the road, and they crossed to the other side so they could pass him by. No compassion. No balance between belief and practice. Their faith was *unworthy* of the love of God. It wasn't appropriate. It didn't *fit*.

Ok, then what are the things I need to do in order to walk worthy? Paul *is* going to give us direction. In verse 17 he says, "No longer walk as the Gentiles do," and will explain what that means. In chapter 5 he'll say, "walk in love," and "walk as children of light," and, "pay careful attention to how you walk." But the primary principle is to *consider* your choices and determine if they are *worthy*.

Worthy of what? Paul wraps up this verse by saying, *of the calling you have received*. You see, these believers had already been called, just as Paul had, just as we have. This isn't about how you earn salvation. This isn't about how to make yourself likable to God. These Christians *were* faithful, but they weren't *finished*. And that's, hopefully, where you find yourself tonight. Faithful, but unfinished. Following God, headed toward glory, being worked on by the Lord to be conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. None of us are going to be *finished* on this side of eternity. But we can walk forward in a way that is worthy of our calling.

God called you from eternity past. Paul discussed this in chapter 1. In Romans 8 he explains that we are called according to His purpose. Unfortunately, *calling* is a word that can easily be reduced down to people who go into specific types of ministry. We think of vocational missionaries being "called" to a certain place or tribe.

The fact is, *all* of us are called by God in more than one way. When we read the Bible we find that God's call is general, it is categorical, and it is personal.

God's call is general in the sense that *every* human being is called to repent of their sin. God calls all people out of darkness, into His marvelous light. Not everyone will answer that call, but it is sent to everyone. God calls every Christian to take up their cross and follow Him. The way that works out in an individual's life will vary, but the call is for all of us. We are all called to one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. We are all called to be holy and blameless. We are all called, *generally*, to love the Lord our God and love our neighbor as ourself. And we are all called into fellowship with Jesus Christ.¹⁹ So in these ways, God's call is *general*. Any one of us can apply these callings to our lives right here, right now.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 1:9

But then we find that God's call is also *categorical*. Paul is going to spend time talking about some of these categories. Are you a husband? Here's what God calls *you* to do. Are you a wife? Ok, here's God's calling for that category. Are you a parent or a child, or a worker? The New Testament is full of callings that apply to you when you're in certain categories. If you're single, the calling to love your wife as Christ loves the Church does not apply to your day-to-day living.

And then we find that God's calling is *personal*. God has a *particular* route carved out for you - good works He wants you to discover and walk in as He leads you. At one point, Jesus revealed a little of this to Peter and Peter pointed at John and said, "Well, what about *that* guy?!?" Jesus said, "That's not your business." Not because Jesus had a different standard for John, but because, on the personal level, God had a specific calling for Peter's life and a different calling for John's life.

The Book of Acts is full of examples of personal callings. Philip, get up and go south to the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza. Peter, head to Caesarea. Paul, *don't* go to Asia, go to Macedonia. This is why it's so important to have a real relationship with God the Holy Spirit, Who gives us guidance for our personal situations. People sometimes say, "Should I take this job?" I don't know. And, you know what, in some cases, the *Bible* will not specifically tell you. Of course, Scripture does guide us and can be applied to specific circumstances, but there is no verse you can turn to right now that says, "Should I promote at my job or not." But the Holy Spirit will guide you into wisdom for your personal calling.

There are times when we've been told, "you guys need to do more direct application in your Bible studies." Maybe that's true. But, at the end of the day, *I'm not the Holy Spirit!* I don't know exactly what God wants to do in and through your life. So, what we think is *more* important is to present what the Bible says and then encourage *you* to take your life and God's word and to the Lord and say, "Lord, how do You want me to apply this in the life You've given me? I want to walk with You but I don't know the way unless You show me." And we don't want to tell you to turn right when the Lord wants you to turn left.

What we do know about personal calling is that it *God's* decision. The personal calling of your life is based on God's *gifting*, not our *wanting*. Now, as we conform to the image of Jesus Christ and our hearts align more and more with His, He gives us the desires of our hearts.²⁰ But that doesn't mean we get to choose what the Lord does with us. Your personal calling is going to align with the way the Lord has spiritually gifted you, with the guiding principles of Christianity, and with the character of this faith we've received. Meaning that, if we're walking worthy, we'll never bypass humility, graciousness, integrity, peaceableness, generosity, compassion, patience, self-control, unity.

Sometimes we see prominent Christians behaving in ways that bypass those qualities and, when that happens, they are outside God's calling on their lives. It doesn't matter if their ministries are successful or if they've sold a million books or have a ton of followers. If you look at the fruit of their

²⁰ Psalm 37:4

lives and see pride, malice, self-aggrandizement, these sorts of things, then they are *not* walking worthy. Because God has fixed a way and say, "This is the way, walk in it."²¹

Walking worthy of our calling is not always easy, but it is always possible. We know it's true because of the promises God has made to us, many that were explained in Ephesians 1-3. But Paul himself is an object lesson of walking worthy. There's one phrase in the verse I skipped. He said, *I the prisoner in the Lord*.

Paul had spent two years in Caesarea in jail. Now he was spending multiple years imprisoned in Rome - chained to soldiers around the clock. He was there because God asked him to be there. And it's a great reminder that you can walk with the Lord *even if you're shut up in your house*. You can walk worthy if you're inside, outside, weak or strong, lots of money, no money, sick or healthy. It's a *Green Eggs And Ham* situation. In the dark, in the rain, on a train, in a tree. In the corner office or in a prison cell. Because it's *not* just about doing things for God. It's about living life with Him - being led by Him. Responding to His calling on your life. He's calling each of us in all sorts of ways right now. Some we know, some we've yet to discover. But, as we live out these lives, we're invited to walk worthy - to live in balance - where our faith has legs, strengthened and empowered by the grace of God, to make progress on the path He's drawn for us, leading to glory.

We are His people, we are His army, and we can be all that He's made us to be as we walk worthy of the calling we have received.

²¹ Isaiah 30:21