Ephesians 4:1-16

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 October 2026

Preacher: Rev. Ryan Spear

[0:00] and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Amen. Have a seat. My name is Ryan Spear.

It's a privilege to serve here at St. John's. And as Jacob mentioned, we're in a sermon series here in Ephesians. You can see the caption there on the screen behind me, God's good plan, God's new humanity.
And our passage in chapter four takes us right to that pivot point, the pivot from God's good plan to God's new humanity. So in the first three chapters, you could say that Paul has been building a foundation.
Now we live in Vancouver or roundabouts. We know exactly what foundations look like. They're everywhere, always digging, always building something. So it's not easy for, not too hard for us to imagine what this might look like.
This is going to be a great passage for those of you who like to doodle. So if you've got some blank space in front of you, you're gonna have the chance to draw two things, a building and a tree. So that's my hope is that we get a sense for a vision of what Paul is leading the Ephesians into, what God wants to build, wants to do in their midst.
[1:11] So just very brief recap. He just ended chapter three with this soul expanding prayer. He was praying in a way that they would be filled with all the fullness of God by a God you can do far more abundantly than all they can ask or think.

And now he gets super practical. So if we're using this analogy of a building, chapters one to three are the foundation. You might want to like scribble in God's good plan on the foundation there, right?
Now he's going to start laying some floors and he does this with a series of five walks. And the walk that we have tonight is walk in unity. You can think of these as each successive floor that he's building.
Okay, do you have that image now? Foundation, floors. The first one is unity. And then he's going to talk later about holiness, love, light, and wisdom. Now, why is this important? Why am I obsessed with this image?
Well, because he's going to get to where life happens and life happens inside. He's going to start to talk about marriages, families, children, parents, workplaces, how we treat one another.
[2:22] That's the life that's happening in this building, the lights that are on, the rooms that we live in. But to see what he wants to call the Ephesians to, what God calls us to, we have to see the structure where all that life happens.

And where we're starting in chapter four, he's urging them to walk in unity. He's basically saying two things, get along and grow up.
Now, that sounds harsher than it actually is. He says it much more eloquently, but that's my Ryan paraphrase. Get along and grow up. The first thing on their list after this amazing foundation has been laid is a call to unity.
He says it much better. He says, be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. That's verse three. And the grow up part, he says it this way, attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God.
That's verse 13. All right. So that's the big idea. The big idea is he's urging them in light of everything he's just laid out for them to get along with one another in their shared faith and to grow into a Christ-like community.
[3:31] All right. So let's get into it. Let's get into getting along. Look with me at the first six verses of chapter four. I'm pulling this from verse three, which we just read.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

And we're going to focus mostly on the middle part, our conduct in unity. But I want to just briefly sketch what he's doing in these first six verses. So first he calls them to unity.
Notice it says, I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called. Now to potentially torture this analogy or metaphor I'm using of the building, think of this calling to unity as the blueprint.
It's the pattern. It's the whole reason why God has been after them since the beginning of time. He wants their life to show that they belong to Jesus.
It's been his plan before creation. He wants to make them into a new humanity. It's what he described earlier as the eternal purpose realized in Christ Jesus.
[4:34] So that's their call to belong to Jesus. Now I'm going to skip over the part we're going to focus on and look at verses four to six. He launches into a confession. Notice there's seven times in these few verses he uses the word one.

One body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all. So he starts with unity because unity is where we start.
Now this past year we just went through a sermon series in John, the book of John, and we looked at Jesus during his last meal and conversation with his disciples.
He was in the upper room. It's a really intimate setting. It's the night before he's crucified. And in his final words to them, he's praying to his father.
And the disciples get to hear this. They get to hear this intimate prayer. And he prays to his father that they may be one, even as we are one.
[5:39] So that's why Paul starts with unity. Because it's the first thing Jesus prayed for for his disciples. And he prayed that the result would be so that the world would believe that you have sent me.

So that the world would believe that Christ was sent by the father. So if you want to think of the call as the blueprint, this unity in their confession, think of that as like the concrete.
It's poured everywhere. It surrounds the whole structure. It holds everything together. That they may be one as Jesus and the father are one.
Unity is nothing less than the purpose and heart of God for us and for the world. So that's what he's doing around the parts we're going to focus on. Calling them to unity. Showing them that it's their confession that brings them unity.
Now it's the part that we're responsible for. We'll call it the conduct of unity. I love my alliteration. Many of you know I'm a preacher's kid. I get it from my dad. He loves alliteration.
[6:40] I kid you not. He performed my wedding. And he used the acrostic garden. And the R stood for raccoon.

I'll tell you about that later. But this helps us remember. So he calls them to unity. He talks about their conduct and their confession. We're looking at the conduct here. How are they to go about maintaining the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace?
This is in verse 3. Sorry, it begins in verse 2. So look with me at verse 2. He says, With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.
So if the foundation is what he laid in chapters 1 to 3, if his call is the blueprint, if our confession is the concrete, this is the part that we're responsible for.
This is the preventative maintenance. It's what those of you who are in stratas know, the things you have to do to keep things up. The things you need to do to keep things moving, keep things from deteriorating.
[7:48] It's not something they're creating. They're not creating the unity. They've received it. But they are expected to maintain it. So it's the conduct of their life. Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love.

So let's look at each briefly. What do these things mean? Humility. So humility at its heart is an other's first mindset. Others first mindset.
C.S. Lewis said this very well. Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. Not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less.
So the opposite of humility, in a word, is pride. It's a me first attitude. So to put this in youth speak, my son said I shouldn't do this, but I'm doing it anyways.
The opposite of humility is main character energy. Anyone know what main character energy is?

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

[8:48] You guys know? You don't know what this is? Okay, you do. Main character energy. It is what it sounds like. Believing that you're the star of a show or a movie. That's all about you. Everybody else in your life is just a supporting actor.

You're on the stage. Me first. Main character energy. So that's the opposite. If humility is what maintains unity, pride or main character energy is what corrodes it.
Secondly, he talks about gentleness. Classic definition of gentleness is self-control. It's not weakness, but properly used strength.
One way to think of this is it's one of the fruit of the spirit. And the opposite of gentleness is forcefulness. It's getting your own way, forcing your way around.
I wonder if the youth can guess what word I used or phrase I used to describe what forcefulness is. The opposite of gentleness is forcefulness. I used the phrase of try hard.
[9:53] Being a try hard. This is somebody who is so about their own agenda that they're willing to force their way through anything, even at the expense of others. So first humility, then gentleness.

And the opposite of things are those are things that corrode and destroy the community around us. It's my way or the highway. I don't care who I have to offend or hurt. I want to make sure that what I want goes forward.
All right. Third is patience. Now, the Greek word for this communicates the idea of being slow to anger or long suffering. So it's close to the heart and identity of God.
Remember when God revealed himself to Moses on the mountain? He revealed his character to him. And he described himself this way. He said, I am a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger.
In another word, he's patient. And the opposite of patience is, of course, impatience. Another way to think of this is uncontrolled anger.
[10:57] You have power. You have strength. But it's just out of control. So translation of this is just crashing out. Not being able to control your emotions. Just flying off the handle.

That's what's corrosive to the unity that we've been handed. And finally, bearing with one another in love. So the word bearing with literally means like putting up with, enduring.
Notice that it doesn't say you're supposed to bear with one another begrudgingly. It says in love. The opposite of bearing with one another is breaking up.
Ending the relationship. Refusing to engage with someone or a community. So what this might look like, and one commentator put it this way. His words, not mine. When we're called to bear with one another, it means, quote, I'm not sure if I saw any of you turning and looking or giving the side eye or nudging someone next to you.
But what Paul is communicating here is that, yes, being a part of a community of faith does mean that we will grate on one another. It does mean that we will be hard to get along with from time to time.
[12:10] But we're called to bear with one another in love. And my last Gen Alpha-ism, I apologize for all the cringeworthiness of this, will be opping. Just being so opposed to someone that's your personal agenda to not relate to them, to look for ways to undermine them, to leave the community.

So this is the conduct of our unity. The part that we play in maintaining what God has graciously given us. This is our toolkit. And we don't create these things.
These are divinely given resources that we're to use to maintain this beautiful thing that God has entrusted us with. And notice that there's a relationship between all of these things, between humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another.
So if you still have that image of the building, it's like if humility weakens, right, if you start being me first, you're more likely to not be gentle.
You're frustrated. I'm not getting my way. Well, I could better force my way. If you're not being gentle, you're more likely to lose your patience. And if you lose your patience, you're more likely to not bear with one another.
[13:24] So these things relate to each other. There are successive floors in a building in which we then participate in the life God calls us to. All right. So to pause here for a bit of application, I think the good news is that for most of the time, through the grace of God, this is happening all the time among us.

We are practicing humility, gentleness, patience. We do bear with one another in love. Not in heroics. I tried to think of like a really clear example of this positively, and I couldn't, and then I

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

realized actually that's good news.
Because what Paul calls us to is just the ordinariness of life together. Living day in, day out, joining together in this community. So let's apply this to something that we might be facing.
You know, I've seen this same dynamic just briefly operate not well, not at this church, previous church, as I said, pastor's kids, so I'm privy to some insider knowledge. It's been long enough, so I think I'm okay with sharing some of these stories.
But the church I used to be a part of, there was this whole dust up about a door. There was a building project going on, and someone thought it would be best if they had this door that they found that was on sale.
[14:44] So they brought it to the church. Didn't ask the building community, the committee, didn't ask if it would fit, didn't ask if the architect could work it in. But they bought that door, and they brought it in, and they said, this is our great way of benefiting this community.

Well, that door never got installed, and that family left that church over something as silly as a door not being chosen for a project.
So we can see how tentative, how tenuous this thing we're called to can be, but it's often lived out in the ordinariness of being considerate, of showing humility, of putting others first.
All right, so making it personal here at St. John's, what might this look like here? Well, we have a building project of our own underway, the Reach Campaign, looking for a long-term home for St. John's. We've just started a new liturgy tonight.
This is a great opportunity for there to not be humility, and gentleness and patience, and bearing with one another. So one way we can address this is taking a quick inventory to notice.
[15:47] Have you ever seen those feelings wheels? Many parents have them, right? Helping your kids describe their feelings. But you can do that through the Holy Spirit, to pray and to say, Lord, help me notice where I am angry and frustrated, and be curious about that.

Sometimes the Lord will show you, yes, I am angry and frustrated about that as well. Sometimes they'll show you, well, maybe it's because something in your heart is not getting your own way. Maybe there's something about a relationship that needs some prayer on your part.
So take a little inventory. Pray through those things. And after you've done so, look back at the end of Ephesians 3, and pray once again to be filled with the fullness of God.
Ask Jesus to help you see your brother and sister as he does. So that's Paul's first call, to get along, get along, maintain the spirit of unity and the bond of peace.
Secondly, he says, grow up. Grow up. This is in verses 7 through 16. He says it again more eloquently, more positively. It's not an insult. He says in verse 13, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood, mature humanity.
[17:06] So in the first six verses, we use this building analogy, right? Foundation, chapters 1 to 3, this structure of the five walks. Now we're going to switch. So if you've been sketching or doodling, you get to draw a tree now, you know, full of like roots, trunk, branches, leaves.

So we're switching mindsets here. First, they're called to maintain unity. Now he says, attain it. Grow into it. And this starts in verse 7.
I'm going to try to briefly just sketch what's going on in these verses. Notice in verse 7 how it begins. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.
He knows they're going to need a lot of grace to pull this off, to live in unity. In humility, in gentleness, in patience, bearing with one another in love.
And then what he does next is he quotes Psalm 68. He takes a little selection from a psalm to show them that the grace that you need for this is going to come from the highest possible place, from the Lord who has conquered everything that they're afraid of.
[18:12] You see, Ephesus was a city known for its worship and practice of magic. That's how you controlled things. That's how you worked for things to come out the way you wanted them to come out. Things you were afraid of with the spiritual forces in the world.

And Paul reminds them in this psalm that Jesus has conquered all of those things. So he's asked them to do. He's giving them out as gifts. He reigns above it all.
So if you're drawing this tree, maybe you can draw, like I imagine, grace is like the sunlight beaming down on this tree, coming from outside, given to us to grow into the community he calls us to.
In verse 11, he then tells them that the gifts they've been given, this grace that's been given, comes in the form of people. He names four kinds of people.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, teachers. That's five, actually. One, two, three. Yep, that's five. People who have brought the message of faith to them and nurtured its growth.
[19:13] Verse 12 tells us that all of these roles are to do the work of ministry themselves and only them. No. It says what? To equip the saints for the work of ministry.

That's all of us. And the work of ministry, he continues, is the building up of the body of Christ. That's all of our roles as a priesthood of believers.
So the church isn't or shouldn't be a special place where a few gifted people get to offer an experience to all of you wonderful people. I used the word audience a couple weeks ago.
You're not an audience. We're a congregation. It's something we do with one another. We minister to each other. We equip one another so that the whole body grows. So I imagine that these people, and again, I know I'm just working too hard on this analogy.
I like to think of these as maybe like the tree helpers, right? The growers, the arborists. Is that the name for people who help trees grow well? Recruiting other arborists to help the tree grow to full maturity.
[20:20] So that brings us to the focus. I just want to sit with this a little bit in verse 13. The goal to which our growth is pointed. So if we are to grow up, to grow in Christ, what are we aiming at?

What's our target? And there's a progression here, just like there was a progression from humility to bearing with one another. It starts in knowing Christ, stability in Christ, and maturity in Christ.
So three parts, knowledge, stability, and maturity. So we live near Pacific Spirit Park. And after big wind storms, I like to kind of go on the trails every once in a while and see what's changed.
And after a really big wind storm a couple years ago, maybe two or three, there was a number of really large trees that were down. I noticed something interesting about them. They were often at the edge of the forest.
And most often, where other trees had recently been cut down for development. And I was looking at why that might have been the case, and I just noticed things about the trees.
[21:23] They tended to be younger trees. They tended to have shallow root systems. So this image of the tree growing up begins with this idea of rootedness. Knowing Christ, these would be the roots that provide the foundation from which the stability grows.

So this is coming for following along in the passage in verse 13 and following. He says, until we attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. That's the roots.
That's our common faith and identity in Christ. Knowing Him from His word and in our community together. That's what it's getting at in verse 13. We grow up as we're grounded, as we're rooted, by growing in the teaching of our faith and of our Savior, Jesus Christ.
Knowing what we believe and in whom we believe. And drawing from the deep wells of real spiritual food. So Paul continues in verse 14. He presents a contrast.
He says, no longer being like children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine. This is the image of that tree that's just buffeted about by those strong winds, not deeply rooted enough to handle it.
[22:37] So again, if you're drawing or sketching, you can draw like little swirlies and squigglies. These would be the winds and waves of every wind and wave of doctrine. I want to comment on these three things he mentions because it's instructive for us to be aware of when these forces are at play.

So what is human cunning? Human cunning is this idea of manipulative persuasion that often relies on charisma or appealing to your emotions, perhaps.
And they're promising to fulfill some kind of deep longing you have. So your feelers should be up. When you're listening for the winds of human cunning, you should have the idea of saying, it looks like they're actually trying to play off of my emotions or intellect in some manipulative way.
Secondly, he says craftiness. This can be seen as like the intentional twisting or misrepresenting scripture or selectively quoting it. You can be wary of this.
This is those, I've heard some recent arguments, some classics. One of my favorite classics for craftiness is called the argument of absence. Well, Jesus never said anything about this.
[23:47] So therefore, we have complete freedom to do that. The argument of absence. Jesus never said anything about smartphones. That's a bad example. But if you pick something absurd that would have never made sense in his context, it's then twisted out of context and made to apply to things that lead us away from the heart of gospel, away from the heart of what it means to be his

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host

community.

And finally, deceitful schemes. These are the hidden agendas that serve the one behind it, whether it's money, whether it's power, whether it's fame, whether it's influence.
I've come across a number of prominent spiritual leaders who have stepped away, who walked away from the faith. And this is not a critique of those who doubt and wrestle.
But what I've sometimes seen happening is instead of just saying, I no longer believe, I'm living a different life, they then monetize their new way of life, their methods of disbelief or deconstruction. I don't belong in that. I don't believe in that nonsense anymore. So come to my three-day conference and spend $1,000 to, oh, I no longer believe in that. So subscribe to my blog so that you can get my latest newsletters and updates.
[24:57] It's a deceitful scheme meant to pull you away from the roots of Christ and who we are in Christ. But with these deep roots, we develop the ability to not buckle under these winds.

Yes, we may sway. Yes, we may be put through our paces. But in Christ, we won't topple. And for our last step in our growth, if the winds are swirling around the trees, verse 16, Paul says, before he gets to the ending of verse 16, he says in verse 15, we mature into Christ's likeness.
Imagine this as the branches spreading out, leaves reaching to the sky as we speak the truth in love to one another. This phrase literally means truthing in love. In our words, in our ways, as we grow in Christ, we mirror him.
We become the new humanity together, reflecting his truth to the world around us. So you might want to, you could maybe draw like truth and love spiraling, I imagine it's spiraling up the trunk, holding everything together.
Instead of swaying back and forth through the winds, it's what gives us structure and strength. And we need both together. Truth and love always belong together.
[26:11] Truth without love is just dogmatism, rule following. Love without truth is just sentimentalism. And in Jesus' prayer I mentioned earlier, as he prays for unity, he also prays that they would be made holy, made more like Christ in truth.

So that's the progression of growth. How we're to grow up to attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God through knowing Christ, stability in Christ, and maturity in Christ.
So what does this look like at St. John's? Well, it means ministers have a role to faithfully preach Christ from his word in truth and love. And we exist to equip one another, build one another up for the work of the church, all ministering to one another.
We aim to help each other become more like Christ, becoming truly and fully the humanity we're called to be as we await Jesus to bring us into the fullness of that forever.
And we pray for eyes to see the kind of growth God wants to see in you and in me. So as we close, we started with the building. This is the unity we're called to maintain, get along, built on this strong foundation, holding up the life that we'll have together.
[27:28] This is just going to be so important for the next few sermons in this series to remember that it's building on this foundation. We move to the image of a tree growing, building itself up in love.

And Paul ends with an image of a body in verse 16. He says, from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped.
When each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Not flailing about, not the feet deciding to go one way, the hands another, but strengthening one another.
God's creating this new humanity. We're called to maintain it. We're growing together in Christ and the whole body is building itself up in love. So let us walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called.
Getting along in Christ, growing one another up toward Christ-likeness. Amen.

Downloaded from https://yetanothersermon.host