

Grace & Peace (March 11 - 15)

Lenten Devotions 2024

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Note: Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the English Standard Version.

Fourth Week of Lent—Monday, March 11

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:1-3

Walk Worthy

Lily choked back tears as she stood in line with the other first-graders waiting to enter door #3. It was her first day at this school where the other children had already been attending for five months. Then Molly came over and put her hand on Lily's shoulder. "Don't be sad," Molly told Lily. "You'll like it here. Our teacher is really nice, and I'll share my snack with you."

A simple gesture, but it made all the difference to Lily. It made someone else happy, too. Molly's dad was watching from the spot where he had said goodbye to his little girl. How glad he felt to see his daughter show compassion and kindness.

In today's reading, we discover what would have brought a smile to Paul's face, seeing his spiritual children acting with humility, gentleness, patience, and love. When the Ephesians were living this way, Paul said they were walking worthy of their calling.

As we continue through our Lenten journey, we remember that Jesus walked worthy of His calling. He showed love and compassion when He extended His healing hand to those in distress. He spoke with wisdom as He taught the crowds. He demonstrated care for His followers as He multiplied bread and calmed storms. He was patient as He awaited the right time for revealing His kingdom. Above all, He showed deep humility and great love when He laid down His life for His friends.

It makes me wonder how the heavenly Father felt as He watched His Son. Perhaps He was smiling.

Dear Savior, Thank You for walking worthy of Your calling. Thank You for walking all the way to the cross for me. Amen.

Tuesday, March 12

But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men." And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...

Ephesians 4:7-9, 11-12

Gifts of Grace

We may not think of spiritual gifts as connected to Lent or Easter, but they flow from these events. When Jesus was crucified, He broke the powers of sin, death and Satan that had held us captive. When He rose from the dead, He declared this victory to His followers who would form the beginning of the church, Christ's body here on earth. Then, after His ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit to indwell the new believers. He gave them spiritual gifts so that the church could mature in faith and grow in numbers.

Spiritual gifts are gifts of grace. Whatever gift one has been given; the purpose of the gift is to bless others. That might be through sharing the gospel with them, teaching them God's Word, praying for them, providing for their needs, showing mercy, or serving them with kindness. Spiritual gifts should bring peace to the body of Christ as each member humbly uses his or her gifts for the good of all.

So here is another way we can experience grace and peace—by being content with and using well the spiritual gifts God has given each of us.

Dear Lord, May I use the gifts You have given me to care for others and to help them grow in grace and peace as well. Amen.

Wednesday, March 13

... until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 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.

Ephesians 4:13-16

Growing Up

When you were a child, did you ever wish you could grow up faster? Perhaps you were eager to do the things an older sibling could do—ride a roller coaster or play baseball or drive a car. The frustrating thing about growing is that it happens so gradually, day by day, year by year. It also happens in very ordinary ways. The baby learns to sit up, then to crawl and then to walk. The toddler learns to dress himself and tie his shoes. The student learns to add and subtract, to multiply and divide. Each thing we learn is a building block for what comes next.

Paul wanted the believers in Ephesus to grow spiritually. In fact, he wanted them to grow and grow and grow until they attained *“the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”* Would this happen overnight? Of course not. Would it happen quickly at all? Probably not.

Thankfully, Paul gives a clue about how believers can grow toward this end. We grow when truth is spoken in love. That refers to the truth of Scripture, the truth of sound doctrine, the truth of how believers are called to live. We need this truth, but we need it spoken in love. Love that understands how hard it can be to grow. Love acknowledges our weaknesses and failures. Love that comes alongside with encouragement and prayer.

I hope you have someone in your life who speaks the truth to you in love. In fact, you do—He is your Savior and Lord.

Dear Jesus, Help me to grow and grow, day by day, so that I reflect You and Your love. Amen.

Thursday, March 14

But that is not the way you learned Christ!—assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:20-24

The Truth

Today's reading continues Paul's theme of spiritual growth. After naming the sins that are often part of the lives of those who reject Christ, Paul affirms that the believers in Ephesus have left all that behind. They have believed the gospel and are living a new way. They have grown! Paul uses picturesque language to describe this growth. *"Put off or take away"* the old way of life, he says, and *"put on or clothe yourself"* with your new nature in Christ.

In the midst of this call to Christian living, Paul throws in an almost-parenthetical comment: *"the truth is in Jesus."* Let's not gloss over that too quickly. That is not just a passing comment; it is an essential reality. The believers in Ephesus have been transformed not by a set of beliefs or guiding principles, but by a person—the Lord Jesus Christ, who declared of Himself: *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6). The truth is in Jesus, and Jesus is the Truth.

On our Lenten journey, we pause to remind ourselves of what is true, compellingly communicated in this thought from the late Timothy Keller: The gospel is this—we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever imagined, yet we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.

**Dear Jesus, Thank You for being the Truth and for revealing the truth of the gospel to us.
Amen.**

Friday, March 15

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:30-32

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a hot topic. Books, podcasts and seminars tell us how to grow in emotional intelligence so that we can be self-aware and pursue healthy interpersonal relationships. These can be useful for our growth, of course. Yet, as we continue to consider Paul's call for us to grow, I'm struck with the wealth of wisdom in Scripture that can help us spiritually, emotionally, and relationally.

In Ephesians 4, Paul contrasts what we should put off with what we should put on. In the verses that precede today's reading, Paul gives a list of both attitudes and actions we are to consider. For example:

- Put away falsehood. Instead let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor.
- Don't steal. Rather do honest work with you own hands. Share with those in need.
- Put off unwholesome speech. Only say what is good for building up each other.
- Put away bitterness, wrath, slander, and malice. Instead, be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving.

That's wise advice, and, if we followed it, our homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces would be wonderful spots to be. But it's also hard advice to follow in our own strength. It runs counter to our selfish human nature. But we needn't despair, because Paul shares the key with us: *"Forgive one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*

We forgive others, are tenderhearted, show kindness, speak truth, share generously, and so on because we have first received tenderhearted love and generous forgiveness from Jesus. His grace, mercy, and peace flow to us and then through us.

Dear Jesus, May the grace, mercy, and peace You have shown to me be extended to others this day. Amen.