

Walking Together in Shared Life

Thomas Robinson, *New Year's Eve*, December 31, 2017

Ephesians 4:1-6

¹ I therefore, appeal to you, I the one in bonds in the Lord, **to walk** in a manner **worthy** of the **calling** by which you have been called, ² with all **humility** of thought and **gentleness**, with **patience**, bearing with one another in **love**, ³ making every effort to hold on to the **oneness** created by the **Spirit** in the shared bond of **peace**:

⁴ One **body** and one **Spirit** – just as you were **called** in one **hope** that belongs to your call – ⁵ one **Lord**, one **faith**, one **baptism**, ⁶ one **God** and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 2:1-10

¹ Even you, when you were dead in your wrongdoing and sins ² in which you once walked, in step with the present age of this world, in step with the ruler of the authority of the air, the spirit that is even today at work among those who reject God – ³ among whom we all once lived our lives ..., ⁴ but God, because he is so rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our wrongdoing, made us alive together with the Messiah – by grace you have been saved – ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Messiah Jesus....

⁸ For you have been saved by that grace through faith. And this is not from you; it is God's gift, ⁹ not from works (of the law), so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are something made by him, created in Messiah Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 4:17-18a

¹⁷ ... You must no longer walk as the nations walk, in a futile way of thinking, ¹⁸ since their understanding is unenlightened because they have become estranged from the life that belongs to God.

Ephesians 5:1-2

¹ Become imitators of God as beloved children, ² and walk in love, just as the Messiah loved us and gave himself up on our behalf, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Ephesians 5:8-10

⁸ At one time you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light! Walk as children of light – ⁹ for this light has its fruit in every form of goodness, justice, and truth – ¹⁰ as you recognize and approve what is genuinely pleasing to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:15-17

¹⁵ Watch carefully then how you are walking – not as foolish people but as wise – ¹⁶ by making the most of the present opportunity, because these are evil times. ¹⁷ Therefore don't stop thinking, but intelligently grasp what the will of the Lord is.

Genesis 3:8; 5:24

^{3:8} And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day...

^{5:24} Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

Deuteronomy 5:33

³³ You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live...

Micah 6:8

⁸ He has told you, Human, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love steadfast love (hesed), and humbly to walk with your God?

Going for a Walk Together

When Paul writes Ephesians, he can't walk, as he has through his ministry. He's in prison.

But he loves the image of walking, prominent in scripture, and uses it throughout his letter. For Paul, it's not where you go (travel, prison) but how you walk – “worthy” of your calling, the invitation you've received from God in Jesus.

Paul saw all kinds of people come into these communities shaped by the event of Jesus, and he saw transformations: Eph 2:1-10. We were dead people walking, in delusion, futility, shaped by the air we breathed. God in his Love gave us life in Jesus, raised us with him. It's Grace, a gift we receive by faith. A new creation, a new walk, toward every good action. Minds made new. Walking in love, as “children of light.” Becoming wise adults who learn to think for themselves, to discern God's will, “humbly to walk with God.”

Learning from a Shared Walk

It's not every Sunday that falls on our 49th wedding anniversary and New Year's eve.

Looking back and ahead, we've reflected on a few things we've observed.

Unforeseeable patterns of growth and change. From farm and small town we never imagined NYC. God has built a sense of surprise, even randomness, into our experience. We grow and learn from unexpected turns, open to being led.

We're distinct individuals who share life. Interdependence not dependence. Each of us is beloved by God, a mystery. Our journeys intersect, interweave, but are never the same.

Daily choices for love. It's today, this moment, in this action that we have a choice for or against grace, love, generosity, fairness, forgiveness. This moment shapes the future.

Valuing the other person. Learning the Grace of God's choice to seek our good. We gain life by giving it to others, not by taking from others. Good, true self-interest.

Worthy of the Calling

“Worthy” is a loaded word. Many struggle with self-worth. What would I write as life worthy of God's call? Why not challenge people to great deeds, building a great church, changing the Roman empire. Paul's list is unexpected, unless you have looked at Jesus.

Humility, self-forgetfulness. Freedom from self-assertion, perfectionism, fear, defensiveness.

God's vast love enfolds us; we're nourished and secure in him. Knowing that, we can begin to live Jesus' teaching about trusting God. The great story is God's work. We share it.

Gentleness. Freedom from hurting others. We made ourselves God's enemies, God responded with love: I'll live and die for you, take your sin on myself, give you healing, and my own life. Jesus' gentleness shines, shows how to honor every person. Illuminates our life choices.

Patience, slow to anger. We mess up. God's Spirit stays with us, picking us up, never giving up. We learn that anger is a choice we don't have to make. Free from a bad vulnerability.

Bearing with one another, love. This is giving grace to each other, learning the joy, delight, community that is the heart of God. We imitate God by walking in love, as we are loved.

Keeping a tight grip on peace. Jesus not only heals us, he heals us together. God loves the diversity of people but wants to heal the alienation and hostility that splits us on every level. We're not going to achieve unity, so he gives oneness/unity to us by giving us the same life – the Holy Spirit. Treasure that gift. Make peace as hard to break as shackles. That oneness fits the oneness of the gracious God who pervades over, through and in all.