

# Worthy of the Calling

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Ephesians 4:1-6

**Sermon Series:**  
**Calling People to Faith**

*In our free market economy, the idea of worth carries economic implications.*

One March morning four years ago, Elizabeth Gibson was on her way to morning coffee on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. During her walk, she happened to notice a large, colorful, abstract canvas nestled between two big garbage bags. She had a real debate with herself about whether to take the painting home with her. She liked its colors, but what could she do with a 38 by 51 inch painting in her tiny apartment? She didn't suppose the painting had any commercial value, but, just the same, she took it home with her and hung it on her living room wall. She became curious about this mysterious painting, so she researched it through the PBS program Antique Roadshow. It turns out this artwork, called *Très Personages* (Three Persons), was painted in 1970 by a Mexican artist named Rufino Tamayo, whose artwork has soared in value in recent years.

This painting was stolen in 1987 from a Houston couple, who had bought it ten years previous for the tidy sum of \$55,000. The husband had since died, but his widow, who was contacted about this discovery, decided to put it up for sale. The painting is in remarkably good condition and may be worth a million dollars. On November 20th, if you are interested, the painting goes on sale as

one of the highlights of Sotheby's Latin American Art Auction. Elizabeth Gibson received the \$15,000 reward the couple had originally offered for its return, plus an undisclosed percentage from the sale of the painting.

Someone in the apartment building at the corner of 72nd Street and Broadway must be kicking himself. What one person cast aside as worthless is actually a one-of-a-kind masterpiece. One person's trash became another person's treasure.

In our free market economy, the idea of worth carries economic implications. In salary negotiations, we bargain for what we think we're worth. The name for our accumulated assets is rather telling—we call the aggregate of our bank accounts, stocks, IRAs and 401ks our net worth. Or we speak of our worth to society. We measure our worth by the value we add to society.

St. Paul, in his letter to the church in Ephesus, calls upon Christians to “lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called” (4:1). When I read this verse, I feel, well, unworthy! Can I ever really lead a life worthy of the call?

I find these feelings of unworthiness rather common in the Bible. In last Sunday's Scripture lesson, Peter reacted to a miracle Jesus performed by falling prostrate and

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- Ian Pitts-Watson

exclaiming, “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8).

Next Sunday, we will be examining God’s call to the prophet Isaiah. When Isaiah experiences God’s transcendence, he echoes Peter’s reaction to the holy: “Woe is me, I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:8).

There is a scene from the movie *Wayne’s World* that comes to mind. Wayne and his sidekick Garth attend an Alice Cooper concert. After the concert, Wayne and Garth are permitted backstage to meet the famed rock star in person. They are star-struck at the prospect of meeting Alice. They are introduced to the legendary Alice Cooper and make small talk with him. His handlers motion that it’s time for Wayne and Garth to leave, but Alice waves them off, insisting that the pair stay longer. This unexpected invitation by such a revered figure inspires them to genuflect. They fall to their knees, exclaiming, “We’re not worthy. We’re not worthy. We’re scum.” While the whole scene is made for comedy, I suspect it’s a common reaction in the presence of revered person-ages.

Our worth to God is not based on human merit; our worth is the result of God’s grace. Grace is God’s unmerited favor. Paul writes in Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not the result of

works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

We cannot buy this grace. We can do nothing to earn or merit it. And, like any gift, it must be received. Grace is a gift which we receive in faith.

I am holding in my hand a 50 dollar bill. If I wad it up and offer it to you, would you take it? If I throw it on the floor and step on it, do you still want it? Yes, of course you do. This 50 dollar bill has intrinsic value regardless of whether it is wrinkled or worn. Its appearance doesn’t matter; what counts is that it’s legal tender of the U. S. government.

We don’t have to prove our worth to God, God determines our worth. You may feel crumbled up or stepped on, but you matter to God.

Ian Pitts-Watson once said, “Some things are loved because they are worthy and some things are worthy because they are loved.” We love gifted athletes, attractive models, brilliant scientists and successful businesspeople because they are worthy of our respect and admiration. But other things in life are loved because of their intrinsic worth. We ascribe them worth simply because they are loved.

Maybe you had the benefit of being raised by parents who understood the value of unconditional love. Parents who love unconditionally do not love their children because they are worthy of love. Rather, they regard their children as worthy because they are loved. Perhaps one reason why we have so

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many dysfunctional families today is because parents love children only when they are worthy of love.

C. S. Lewis once wrote to a friend in a letter, "God loves us; not because we are loveable, but because God is love." We may not be loveable, but God is love.

When Paul writes in his letter about "living a life worthy of the call," he surely doesn't mean we have to earn God's love. To do so would contradict everything else Paul has written about grace in his New Testament letters.

This call of God originates in the heart of God. It has nothing to do with our worth; this call is the result of God's sovereign initiative. God calls us into relationship because God is love. Sorry, folks, but this call has absolutely nothing to do with your meritorious behavior. God's call is an act of pure, unmitigated grace. Any thought of human merit is altogether excluded.

To live a life "worthy of the call" summons us to a way of living that is consistent with the call. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians to "live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:27). In Paul's letter to the Colossians and Thessalonians, he summons us to "lead lives worthy of the Lord" (Colossians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 2:12).

Paul enumerates the kind of behavior that is worthy of the call in verses 2-3, "...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."

All the resources we need to complete this task God enumerates for us in verses 4-6. God gives us the church (His body), our faith, baptism, the Spirit, the Lord Jesus Christ and even the Father Himself who is "above all and through all and in all."

We've been preaching this fall (please tell me that you've noticed!) on the Biblical concept of call. God calls people. To speak of a calling presupposes a Caller.

We are called first and foremost into relationship with God. As we've said before, we are called first to someone (namely God) before we are called to go somewhere or do something.

There is one big C call. When we profess Jesus Christ as God's Savior from sin and endeavor to follow him as Lord of our lives, we are entering into the one calling that is consistent for every Christian. Every Christian experiences the call, yet not every Christian receives the same calling. There is one call, yet many multiple callings.

What do you do when someone calls? You answer, of course, unless you don't recognize the one who is calling. Maybe you don't answer God's call because you don't have God on caller ID. The call comes, but you don't pick up, because you don't recognize the call.

I want to give you an opportunity today to answer God's call. Maybe you are hearing the call to

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open your life to God and enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ. If so, I invite you during this closing prayer to indicate your desire to open your life to God by standing at the appropriate time.

Perhaps you are sensing some particular calling in your life right now. God may be calling you to reconcile with someone in your life with whom you are estranged. God may be calling you to correct a pattern of life that is destructive to you. God may be calling you to pursue a new career path or become involved in a new kind of ministry. Maybe you have this sense that God is calling you, but you don't know quite yet what it looks like. Yet, you are willing to surrender your life to whatever God has for you. If this expresses the desire of your heart, then I will also give you opportunity to stand as we close in prayer.

This call is high privilege, my friends. God offers us the gift of salvation. This invitation is extended to anyone who will answer. What this demands in return is high responsibility. Will you answer the call?