**Shallow: Commitment
Pastor Wynne Lankford
February 21, 2021**

**Week 2 –**

Bumper:

Welcome to Southside Church my name is Wynne Lankford and it is my privilege to serve here as lead pastor.

You have just heard from Helen Hess.

Helen has been a part of Southside Church since it began.

In 1953 a small group of faith filled people began meet in a barber shop and on Easter Sunday in 1954 Southside Church was officially organized.

And Helen’s parents, Larkin and Gladys Birch were charter members.

**SLIDE 1 (history)**

Can you imagine the amount of change that Southside Church has experienced over her time here?

She was present for the first relocation from the Barber Shop on Jeff Davis Road to a new location on Concord Avenue.

She had a front row seat for the second relocation to Cogbill Road and she was an active participant in the third relocation to our

**SLIDE 2 (current location)**

now Courthouse Road campus.

She has witnessed over the years the birth of our campuses in Chester and Amelia!

**SLIDE 3 (growth and agencies)**

The birth and growth of Guardian Christian Academy, the launch of the XZone and increasing impact of Footsteps counseling ministry.

She was here six years ago when we launched our online campus!

Where she faithfully attends each week!

She has known and prayed for all nine of the lead pastors, including me. That have served this local church over the last 67 years.

In fact Helen is active participant in our Tuesday night and Thursday morning prayer groups that meets on zoom.

If you want to be inspired, then join in on one of our prayer groups and hear the heart of Helen who prays diligently for God to keep moving in our midst.

It would be difficult to distill in a single phrase words that sum up Helen’s heart for Jesus!

But I know part of that description would include…..

**Faithful obedience and consistent direction..**

Knowing Helen the way I do I can say that with integrity.

She has made up her mind that she is going to serve Jesus and has committed to be an active part of the mission Jesus expressed through a local body of Christ.

Helen has committed to live out the challenge the Apostle Paul extended to the church in Ephesus when he said!

**SLIDE 4**

***Ephesians 4:1 (NIV) 1As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.***

Helen is an example of that kind of commitment.

A Commitment to Jesus, Commitment to relationships, commitment to unity in the body of Christ!

It hasn’t always been easy!

Helen has shared with me personally the challenges she has faced in life as she processed and dealt with hurt, difficulty or even disagreements with others over the years.

Helen is fallible human being - yet she has made her commitment to live in a real authentic deep relationship with God and with others!

If we want to move from the shallows of thin relationships with God and others……

Then we have to venture out of the shallow end of the pool and into the space of deeper commitment.

**SLIDE 5** We must live lives of ---- **faithful obedience in a consistent direction!**

In fact I would argue that we often miss out on God’s best in relationships because when friction comes, we bail too quickly.

When things get hard we run. When things don’t line up with what we want, we quit.

When we get hurt we clam up and shut down.

When we wrongly commit to these evasive maneuvers.

We fail to live a life **“ worthy of the calling we received”** and we find ourselves in the shallows ---- missing out on God’s best for our relationships!

Commitment to a life worthy of the calling is what the Apostle Paul is encouraging us to aim toward.

Paul, in his letter to the church in Ephesus, is trying to inspire us to move from the shallow existence of thin relationships --- into the deep end of relational experiences that can show the world the power of Jesus.

Today I want to encourage all of us to **RENEW OUR COMMITMENT** to Paul’s challenge of living a life worthy of the calling!

By diving deep into excellence Paul encourages in our relationships.

When we do this, we will discover the deep joy that can come through authentic, real deep relationships with both God and others.

How do we measure excellence?

The other week, my wife and I went to a new restaurant, when we paid the bill they requested I go to their website and rate their service.

You’ve had that request before.

When you go to their website you have an option to rate their service by giving them an online grade.

There is usually a scale of 5 stars and we grade their performance by giving them 1 to 5 stars.

1 for awful and 5 for excellent.

Have you ever had a five-star experience that blows your mind?

Several years ago my wife Caryl and I flew to Korea to visit our middle daughter and her husband who were there teaching for two years.

We flew to New York City and then boarded a Korean Air flight bound for Seoul Korea.

This was a 15 hour nonstop flight!

I had no idea what to expect during a flight that long. It didn’t take very long for me to be very impressed with their service.

Shortly after getting on the plane.

The impeccably dressed flight crew lined up in complete unity and with amazing coordination walked us through the flight safety protocol.

Then as if preforming a choreographed dance.

Each member of the flight crew walked through the cabin and gave each of us booties for our feet and blindfolds so we could sleep better in the lighted cabin.

Then about every hour and a half the lights would adjust and the highly polished flight crew would appear in organized fashion bringing us some “goodies” which were different each time.

We got a snack…..then a hot towel….then a meal….another hot towel…..another snack……then another meal…….then another hot towel.

Every time the lights would adjust I would experience a burst of joy knowing I was about to receive another goodie of some sort as part of this five-star treatment.

Caryl would look at me and laugh as I looked like a kid on Christmas morning waiting for my next treat!

I gave them 5 stars! And they earned 5 stars because of their excellence.

I believe the apostle Paul is challenging us to commit to that kind of excellence in our relationships.

Five-star excellence in our attitudes and actions through relationships that would shape our world for Jesus.

What if we committed to five-star relationships?

Relationships that are so deep, that we leave no doubt in the minds of those who encounter us, that we are being impacted by a supernatural power found only in Jesus.

That enables us to live in the deep end of the pool of relational authenticity.

The apostle Paul continues in Ephesians chapter 4:2 his challenge for us to live out five attributes that I believe lead to five-star relational excellence:

Today we want to explore these five attributes and actions the Apostle Paul is urging us to live that will create a life worthy of the calling!!

The first is:

1. **Humility**

**SLIDE 6 *Ephesians 4:2 (NIV) 2 Be completely humble***

Humility is thinking of the needs of others first. The opposite of humility is thinking of yourself first.

Pride says, “My needs are most important”

Humiity says, “Other’s needs are more important than mine.”

Humility doesn’t come naturally. What comes naturally is self-centered pride.

In fact, one of the consequences of the original sin is that we become “I” focused.

Even the middle letter of the word sin is “I”! When life is all about me then our sinful nature is probably driving our life!

This “I” focus shifts the axis of truth from what God says to be true to what “I” think is true.

When “I” is at the center of our relationships, it is impossible for us to be humble.

The “I” lens will forever skew our ability to see situations clearly.

This will tarnish our ability to approach God or others with humility.

The “I” attitude stiff arms our relationships and keeps us in the shallows where we will never experience God’s best!

The Apostle Peter joins Paul in calling us to humility:

***1 Peter 5:5 In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”***

Which would you rather have:

The opposition of God or the favor of God?

We have to come to the place where we admit “I” don’t know it all and “I” don’t own the corner of truth.

The only way we can come to this place of humility is to surrender to the one who reclaimed our broken lens with His humble sacrifice.

Jesus demonstrated humility by leaving the throne of heaven, becoming human, living a life that modeled humility.

Then surrendering to death so we might be reclaimed by His father in heaven.

Humility is foundational and is only found through a surrendered life to Jesus!

The second five star attribute that Paul points to is…

1. **Gentleness**

**SLIDE 7 Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle;**

Gentleness is mildness of disposition.

The opposite is roughness, bluntness, “let-the-chips-fall-where-they may” kind of attitude.

Gentleness puts bubble wrap around your words.

Gentleness effects the WAY that you talk as if you are aware that you might hurt others with your words.

That is what Jesus was like. The prophet Isaiah foretold about this characteristic of the Messiah:

**Isaiah 42:3 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;**

Have you ever held a skinny stalk of grass up in the air?

It will probably stay straight and tall.

But if you take your fingers and crease it in the middle, it will collapse after that.

That’s what this verse means when is says a bruised reed.

Jesus was conscious of the weaknesses and wounds of others and He was careful in how He acted and how He spoke to others.

That’s gentleness.

Look at what Jesus said about himself:

**Matthew 11:29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**

These two five-star listed together humility and gentleness are essential for Deep relationship!

The third five-star attribute Paul references is…………

1. **Patience**

**SLIDE 8 Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient**

Patience is the exercise of allowing time to have its effect on others.

God uses time as a vehicle for His changing power to work in us.

Patience is giving grace to others as we wait for God to work in them.

Aren’t you glad that God doesn’t allow everything to happen to you all at one time?

If God is good like this not to overwhelm us, then why won’t we be patient with others?

Did you learn everything you know instantly? Or did it take time for you to learn?

Patience is a fruit that comes from a connected relationship with Jesus!

Jesus said:

**John 15:5 (NIV) 5  "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.**

When we stay connected to Jesus He will produce fruit in our lives.

**Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) 22  But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23  gentleness and self-control……..**

We will never experience patience unless we stay connected to Jesus.

His spirit is the only one who can produce patience within us!

Who needs your patience in your relationships during this season of life?

Connect with Jesus and ask for the fruit of patience in your relationships so your relationships can go deeper!

Let’s go back to our text in Ephesians 4 to find the 4th attribute of our 5-star relationships.

**SLIDE 9 Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.**

The fourth action is

1. **Tolerance with love.**

Bearing with one another means tolerating one another.

We must bear with one another not become bears with each other!

We must recognize that other people may irritate you to some extent or in some way.

Some of you keep hoping for a perfect world, where everyone is perfect and never annoys you.

Friends, that world is coming. It’s called heaven. Until heaven we are stuck with each other.

So, until heaven, we need to “tolerate one another in love.”

Notice that important qualifier “in love.”

We know that Greek word for love is agape. Agape is a divine kind of love that is self-giving for the good of others.

When we tolerate others we do it inside of agape-love NOT anger.

Agape-love is the driving force of tolerance.

Infact, agape-love is the driving force in living a life that is worthy of the calling!

When we say Yes to Jesus we begin to serve a God that demonstrates His power through our 5-star relationships with others.

His agape love will begin to fill you and shape your attributes and actions will reflect His nature!

Agape love generates humility.

Agape love generates gentleness.

Agape love generates patience.

Agape love generates tolerance.

We can only bear one another when we have agape love, and agape love can only come from being connected with Jesus!

You want to grow in tolerance, then pray for people by name! It is hard to build walls between the people your praying for!

And finally agape generates the fifth star in our five-star relationships:

1. **Unity**

**SLIDE 10 *Ephesians 4:3 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.***

The ultimate sign of a relationship worthy of the calling is to “make every effort to seek unity.”

There are some in our church who have been elected to serve on the church board.

The church board, and really any board that operates within the scope of church ministries, functions differently than secular boards operate.

Those of you who operate in the business/corporate world know that decisions are made by majority rule.

The same is true in government boards or the Congress or Senate.

They make a decision by arguing with one another until they finally take a vote to decide.

The majority vote wins.

There are sometimes power moves and threats and name-calling.

After the vote, the losing members often grumble and complain over the vote. A decision was made but there was no unity.

In fact, the members may criticize one another after the vote and talk against the motives of one another and actually hate one another.

This is NOT the way of church boards who honor God.

Church boards are composed of people who are trying to live a life worthy of the calling to serve the LORD.

So, after they have discussed an issue, they may delay a vote because they are not clear on the Lord’s direction.

They may have prayer times to seek God’s wisdom and direction.

This is done because Unity in a direction is more important that the outcome of the vote!

Unity means that we look for points of agreement.

Unity means that our relationship with others is just as important as the issue that is under discussion.

The same is true in our relationships.

**SLIDE 11** We are called to bring our unique perspectives into unity with others as we pull together and impact our world for Jesus!

We don’t operate with power moves or threats. We operate under the power of agape-love.

It takes work to live in unity.

That’s why the Scripture says**, “*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. “***

We are to work for unity. And work to keep unity. And work to keep unity through the bond of peace.

A five-star relationship lives in unity and the bonds of peace.

If you don’t have peace, you don’t have unity. If you don’t have unity you don’t have peace. They are linked together.

Do your relationships have unity? Do they have peace? Are you ***“making every effort to keep unity of the Spirit in through the bond of peace”?***

Don’t stay in the shallows of thin relationships go for a five star deep relationship!

This message from Ephesians 4 provides for us an opportunity to audit our lives. It’s a time for us to give ourselves a rating!

When I think of how I was treated on Korean Air it makes me want to fly with them again.

**SLIDE 12** Excellence breeds a desire to connect, and the deeper the connections the more the power of Jesus can be revealed in our lives!

Today, I want you to rate your relationships, how many of them earn a 5-star rating?

How do we rate our relationships? We look at the 5 attributes and actions:

**Humility** – Are you others focused?

**Gentleness** – Are you wise and careful with your words?

**Patience** – Can you wait with grace?

**Tolerance in agape-love** – are you sticking with your relationships and does your attitude point people to Jesus?

**Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace** – Are you pulling people together or driving them apart?

We need to live lives worthy of the calling we have to follow Jesus.

If you’re a Jesus follower this is our calling!

If you are not I want you to know that Jesus wants to give you the ability to live out everything we are talking about today.

I believe God wants is to go deep and experience five star relationships!

Let’s not remain shallow, let’s go deep!

**Let’s prayer**

Response time!

What steps do you need to take to renew your committed to 5 star relationships!

* Where do you need to be humbled?
* Which relationships in your life need gentleness?
* Who needs your patience?
* What situation requires your tolerance and love?
* Are you bringing unity or creating division?

**Humility** – Are you others focused?

**Gentleness** – Are you wise and careful with your words?

**Patience** – Can you wait with grace?

**Tolerance in agape-love** – are you sticking with your relationships and does your attitude point people to Jesus?

**Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace** – Are you pulling people together or driving them apart?