

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH  
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Heaven on Earth\_ Ephesians 3 & 4 Walk the Wire  
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On June 15, 2012, Nik Wallenda walked a tightrope that was suspended over Niagara Falls. That 1500 foot steel wire could not be stabilized so it swayed back and forth and it dipped 35 feet so he had to walk downhill then uphill on a soaking wet wire that was six centimeters wide. Fun fact, he carried his passport and presented it to border guards on the Canadian side. Now, Nik Wallenda holds 11 world records including a wire walk over the Grand Canyon but Niagara Falls presented a unique challenge because it is an ecosystem unto itself. The waterfall produces a constant mist and you get 60 mile an hour updrafts and side drafts and not to mention the deafening sound of 600,000 gallons of water cannon balling 167 feet every second. Now to prepare for that stunt Nik Wallenda used airboats to produce 90 mile an hour wind gusts, oh and fire trucks to hose him down while he was on the wire. Somehow, some way he pulled it off. In the words of Wikipedia he slowly inching his way across the slippery wire, get this, praying and praising Jesus Christ as he went. Now, I'll be honest, I feel a little bit like Nik Wallenda these days. Whether it's racial tension or political polarization, it feels like we are on the high wire and with the rise of cancel culture and shaming on social media. It is not easy keeping your emotional or relational or political balance. So how do we walk the wire?

This weekend we continue our series 'Heaven on Earth'. We are wire walking the book of Ephesians verse by verse and I feel like chapter four is this tightrope over Niagara Falls. In the first half of Paul's Epistle, he describes this reality called the heavenly realm. This is where we establish our identity - chapter one, discover our destiny - chapter two, exercise our authority in chapter three. And the second half of this letter is about that heavenly realm becoming our earthly reality. It is the key to unity in chapter four, maturity in chapter five and finally security in chapter six.

Now let me zoom out wide angle lens, we live in a culture that politicizes almost everything, including masks, right? I'm not telling you anything I don't know that you don't know. But just as there is nothing that we don't politicize, I would suggest that there is nothing that the Apostle Paul does not theologize. And I love this word to theologize is to treat things in theological terms. Listen, theology, it's a noun, it's the study of God but we've got to turn that noun into a verb.

In his book, 'Thou Shalt Not Be a Jerk', I kind of like that title, Eugene Cho says, "cultural Christianity is held captive by our politics rather than our politics being informed and even transformed by our theology." And so let me ask a question up front, are you filtering your political ideology through your biblical theology or are you filtering your biblical theology through your political ideology? Because there is another name for that? Idolatry. This has huge ramifications.

And so let me give you a simple example. If you subscribe to Darwinism, and by that I mean the absence of an intelligent designer I mean, evolution by random chance, I mean, survival of the fittest.

There is no path to equality, or morality, or dignity. I mean, Darwin said it himself, "Man with all of his noble qualities still bears in his bodily frame the indelible stamp of his lowly origin." I could not agree with anything less, okay. We are fearfully and wonderfully made Psalm 139 - We are a little lower than the angels crowned with glory in honor we are created in the image of God. Ephesians one now, now wait, wait a second wait, wait a second Pastor Mark are you saying you don't believe in evolution? Gasp! Listen, I am well aware that science is another one of those things that we have politicized okay, this is not a commentary on that. And for the record, I subscribe to the same school as Albert Einstein. He said, "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind." Every 'ology is a branch of theology.

And so let me go back to the original question with a little bit of nuance. I believe that the capacity to evolve is a testament to God's creative genius, no doubt. That said, I don't believe in macro evolution by random chance. For starters, it violates the second law of thermodynamics. In the words of Sir Fred Hoyle, he said, "Let's be scientifically honest, the probability of life arising to greater and greater complexity by chance through evolution is the same probability as having a tornado tear through a junkyard and form a Boeing 747 jetliner." By the way, same guy who coined the phrase, 'Big Bang'. Now the problem with Darwinism is not just cosmology, teleologically Darwinism is an ethical dead end and if your starting point is the survival of the fittest, there is no argument against things like racism or infanticide, or eugenics or imperialism. Why? Because it's the survival of the fittest. We have a very different cosmology a very different teleology. Our starting point is Genesis 1:26, "*We are created in the image of God.*" We have a theology of dignity that underwrites the sanctity of life from womb to tomb. And so we don't politicize people we theologizing people. And that means we love people that we don't like. Why? Because everyone is invaluable and irreplaceable. Why? Because everybody is stamped with the imago dei.

Long story short, what the Apostle Paul does in the second half of Ephesians is theologize things for this church. He tells him how to put Kingdom principles into practice, how to shift the atmosphere, how to walk the wire, praying, and praising Jesus.

Now let me back up a little bit. We'll get a running start. And if you have a Bible, you can meet me in Ephesians three. I should not do what I'm about to do.

{singing}  
Ooh, baby, do you know what that's worth?  
Ooh, heaven is a place on earth  
They say in heaven, love comes first  
We'll make heaven a place on earth  
Ooh, heaven is a place on earth  
{end singing}

I'm going to regret that it was the lead single on the 1987 album by Belinda Carlisle get this same name as our series 'Heaven on Earth' - couldn't resist. Now I'm not a musicologist but that song supposedly contains one of the greatest key changes in music history. Not what I just did - the song itself the original okay. Now, I might add pretty good theology, we fixate on heaven as some future destination - we get it backwards. No, no, no heaven is invading Earth right here right now. How? Well when we love our enemies, when we bless those who curse us, when we worship, when bodies are healed or relationships are reconciled, when we act justly, love mercy, walk humbly, when we exercise faith, hope and love heaven invades Earth.

Now, what does any of that have to do with Ephesians three? Well, right before halftime, the apostle Paul hits this Mariah Carey high note. In order to break glass with the human voice, you have to reach what is called resonant frequency. When a substance encounters a frequency that matches it, the energy is absorbed, rather than reflected. But you have to reach an octave above middle C, you have to hit 556 hertz and you have to turn up the volume to 105 decibels. In my opinion, what happens at the end of Ephesians three, Paul doesn't just break glass, he shatters the glass ceiling

*"<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen."*

Does that not get you a little fired up? All things are possible, nothing is impossible. It's our high note. It's our resonant frequency. May we absorb that this weekend, then and only then are we ready to come out of this locker room and into the second half of Ephesians and begin to theologize.

So ready or not here we go. Verse one, *"Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord..."* Now, I love this Paul is writing from a Roman prison. I've been in the prison cell where Paul is purported to have been, not where you want to be but Paul doesn't identify himself as a prisoner of Rome. No, he sees himself as a prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*"Therefore, as a prisoner for the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have been received, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love..."*

The apostle Paul underscores four core convictions four cardinal virtues. It's almost like the Apostle Paul is teaching the Ephesians how to walk the wire, how to live countercultural, how to be grace givers and peacemakers and tone setters, how to navigate racial tension and political polarization in their day, how to walk the Jesus way. And so what I want to do this weekend, with the Lord's help is to unpack these four cardinal virtues. And we'll start with humility. I might encourage you to just grade yourself as we go.

Now we have a core value, if you stay humble and stay hungry, nothing that God cannot do in you or through you. What I find fascinating is that in this original context, humility was not celebrated. Survey, ancient Greek literature and pride is celebrated as the virtue. Humility is absolutely countercultural and it still is. Now humility doesn't mean thinking less of yourself. Okay? That's called false humility. It's thinking of yourself as anything less than who you are in Christ. We talked about our identity in chapter one, do you remember these seven things, you're blessed, you're chosen, you're blameless, you're adopted, you're redeemed, you're sealed, your stamped. "Humility is not thinking less of yourself", said CS Lewis, "it's thinking of yourself less" and that is a key distinction. In other words, it's not about you. Now, the more you make it about you, the bigger burden you have to bear and the harder it is to walk the wire.

God gave us two ears, one mouth, use them in that proportion. Now, I'm not sure who said that first but let me push that envelope a little bit. I think humility is listening with your right ear and your left ear, a little play on politics right there. (There is) way too much binary thinking going on right now. When we think of problems in either / or categories. It's hard to come up with both / and solutions. True wisdom, has two sides, Job 11:6. Truth is found in the tension of opposites but that takes tremendous humility. Now, Jesus was genius at this. In John eight, there's a man born blind. And the religious leaders frame it as a binary problem. They say whose sin; his parents are him that he was born blind. It's got to be A or B, right? Wrong. Jesus says, this happens so that the glory of God might be displayed in his life. See, Jesus isn't just the way, Jesus is the third way. It's the ability to see, the ability to hear both sides.

So critical right now, with so many philosophies and ideologies, and hashtags, we need a both / and understanding of critical race theory, of implicit bias, of identity politics, and of every other ism out there. We need to know the difference between nationalism and patriotism. We need to know how to define bigotry and misogyny, words matter. And if your definition is wrong, the entire algorithm is off and so we end up using words in the wrong way. And now we're politicizing instead of theologizing. And I'm going to keep you hanging. We'll double back to a few of those next week.

Now, the second virtue is gentleness. It's this Greek word, *praiootes*, and it means gentle strength. It's this divinely balanced, Sorry, I'm watching Cobra Kai. It this divinely balanced virtue which brings us back to walking the wire. I recently read a book by Scott Saul's titled 'A Gentle Answer: Our 'Secret Weapon' in an Age of Us Against Them'. No one wins a shouting match. I absolutely believe in radical candor, another great book, by the way, but let me define it. Radical candor is two dimensional, it's caring personally and challenging directly and this is as old as John 1:14. Jesus was full of grace, and truth. Grace means I'm going to love you no matter what. It's caring personally. Truth means I'm going to be honest with you no matter what. It's challenging directly. By definition, radical candor is speaking the truth in love. (There is) so much trolling and baiting and shaming on social media. We need to flip the script. How? I think it goes back to Proverbs 15:1 "*A gentle answer turns away wrath.*"

Words matter more than ever, but so does posture and tone. Now, a few weeks ago, Lora and I adopted a little puppy that we named Pernella. You want to see a picture? She is awfully cute. She's 11 weeks old. She weighed four pounds when we picked her up. And here's what I've learned in a few short weeks, okay. The average dog has the capacity to learn 165 words. Now super dogs, the top 20% can learn up to 250 words. I have no idea where Nella is gonna end up on that bell curve. But right now she does not respond to words. She responds to posture. She responds to tone. Come on. People are no different than puppies. It's the old aphorism people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. And so let's not win intellectual arguments while losing relationships because we would rather be right than righteous.

Timothy Gambass says something so counterintuitive in his brilliant book on Ephesians. He says, "The church has its greatest relevance to the world when it is most unlike the world in its corrupted forms." Love that. Now we talk a lot about operating in the opposite spirit. When you encounter pride, operate in a spirit of humility. When you encounter hatred operate in a spirit of love. When you encounter fear, operate in a spirit of faith. That is how we walk the wire. That is how heaven invades Earth.

Now, let me make an application right here - average person spends 142 minutes on social media every day. That represents 15% of our waking hours. Now, I'm looking at you, some of you are a bunch of average, okay? And so Marshall McLuhan said, "We shape our tools, and thereafter, our tools shape us." And this is especially true of technology. So many studies, in fact, this week, I was reading a study about trolling, when it happens, why it happens, and it's crazy. I mean, they have this thing down to a science. Now I want to highly recommend a documentary Lora and I watched it a few weeks ago, *The Social Dilemma*. It identifies five dangers, objectification, radicalization, racialization, polarization and commodification. Bottom line, a lot of virtue signaling, a lot of tokenism, a lot of canceling, and we need to operate in the opposite spirit in that space.

Third virtue is patience. Let me paint a picture - a few weeks ago watched a documentary about a man named Jadav Puyang. He lives on the island of Majuli, which has lost half of its landmass since 1917. Every year, monsoon season floods the Brahmaputra River and its eroding the island at this alarming rate. And so in 1979, Jadav Puyang start started planting trees, and he never stopped. 40 years later, his forest is larger than Central Park in New York City. His reforestation efforts have not only slowed the erosion, but it has repopulated species of animals that have almost gone extinct. In fact, there's a herd of elephants living in his forest. When I watch the news, it kind of feels like monsoon season, the erosion caused by sin, and suffering is overwhelming at times. It can feel helpless and hopeless. Can I exhort us this weekend? "Do not be deceived", Galatians 6:7 "*God cannot be mocked.*" "*You reap what you sow*" Two verses later, "*Do not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest.*" Don't let what you cannot do keep you from doing what you can. Come on let's plant those trees of grace. Let's plant those trees of peace.

Do you know what Noah did, when God gave him a vision to build a very big boat? According to the Talmud, the very first thing he did plant trees. Why? Because he knew he would need a lot of planks to build that boat. And he knew that those trees would take 40 years to mature that is patience. Patience is long obedience in the same direction. Patience is playing the long game. Patience is putting things into eternal perspective. And this is where we really struggle, especially because of where we live. We have these four year election cycles. Okay, but God's vision is so much bigger and better and longer. And so we tend to think right here, right now God is thinking nations and generations. Can I remind us we're not just trying to build a church? We're trying to bless the city to the third and fourth generation. We're trying to do things that will make a difference 70 years from now.

But I'm gonna make a little confession, okay. I won't tell you which election but there was an election, that I may have shed some tears. Elections are emotional and I might add, elections are important. I want you to hear when I'm about to say. Politics matter, because policy matters because people matter. We are not a direct democracy where everyone votes on every issue. We've got 100 senators, 435 representatives and nine Supreme Court justices; I guess technically eight right now. We are a constitutional republic, which means we vote for people who vote for us and there's a lot riding on every election. But we also have to keep it in perspective, administration's come and go, our primary citizenship is in this thing called the kingdom of God. And the last time I checked, the kingdoms of this world are becoming the kingdom of our Lord and our Christ. So what I'm preaching is, maybe I would call it urgent, patience. Okay, there are things that man may the Holy Spirit activate his gifts in our lives. Listen in action is an action. Indecision is a decision. Sometimes silence is a sin. And so I'm not saying sit back and wait. But I can guarantee you this it's going to take a lot longer than you think. We overestimate what we can do in a year or two, we underestimate what God can do in 10, or 20, or 70.

All right, let me touch on tolerance. This one's tricky because we live in a culture that says it values tolerance, but not really. If you dare disagree with the cultural narrative, if you use the wrong phrase, if you refuse to compromise your biblical convictions, there is no tolerance whatsoever. It's called canceled culture. And so what's interesting is that we live in a culture that espouses tolerance, but I don't think they know what it means there is a biblical concept here. Now, part of what makes it tricky is that there's a sin of toleration in Revelation chapter two, but Paul puts a very positive spin on this idea and so I want to be very careful. Let me tell you what biblical tolerance is not. It's not putting a stamp of approval on anything and everything okay, that's called relativism. Your truth is your truth, my truth is my truth. That is circular reasoning at best. Tolerance is not compromising your biblical convictions.

Let me tell you what it is. I think tolerance is giving people the same measure of free will that God gave you. It's allowing people their opinion. You know, I have some guiding principles you've heard me say these things all the time. As soon as I'm omniscient, I'll let you know but I would not hold your breath. See in that part of what I'm saying there is I reserve the right to get smarter. Um, I love this one. Oswald Chambers, "Let God be as original with others as he was with you." And then I might throw one more in for good measure. I read this one when I was 22. I think it was in 'How to Win Friends and Influence

People' might be an Emerson, he said, "Every person is my superior in some way in that I learned them." And so I think tolerance is this unique position where it's so tiring playing God in someone else's life. At the end of the day, you've got to give a little bit of latitude.

Now in our early days, we had a cabinet member who was a part of this church and I loved the way he said it. He said, "It's against my religion to impose my religion on anyone else." Now that's in keeping with what our founders envisioned. They didn't advocate freedom from religion, which is the mistake that so many secularists make. Our founders believed that our democracy was only as good as the morals that undergirded it. It's called the establishment clause. The government does not promote or inhibit the free exercise thereof. And we might unpack that a little bit more next week.

Let me try to land this plane. I'm guessing that I said a thing or two or three, that made you go hmmm. You're trying to figure out where I land on a couple of issues, or maybe even who I'm going to vote for. Can I remind us, we are non partisan as a church? And what that means is this that we don't identify or align ourselves with a particular political party or a particular candidate. Now, it doesn't mean that we don't take a stand on issues. If the Bible says something, silence is a sin. And so that said, we've tried very hard over the years to walk the wire by reaching across the aisle. But I'm gonna shoot straight it's a little bit harder now than it was five years ago or 10 years ago, or 24 years ago. But we add a little addendum to Galatians 3:28 there's neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free male nor female, Republican nor Democrat. Blood is thicker than water. We are the family of God. Again, I don't want to get the impression that politics are not important. They are. We honor those who serve in the public square. I think it's a high calling.

But let me share the preamble to our core beliefs. 400 years ago, a guy named Rupertus Meldenius, said this, "In essentials unity, in the non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." Now we apply that to theology, I wonder if we can apply that to politics as well. I think tolerance is giving a little latitude on things that the Bible would call disputable matters. It's our four principles of peacemaking. Ask anything, listen, and well disagree freely, love regardless.

And so, we started with that high note right, Ephesians 3:20. Now to him who is able, let me end with middle C, which is Ephesians 4:3. It says, "<sup>3</sup>Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." Now unity is corporate humility, and it doesn't happen by default it happens by design it has to be disciplined.

Did you know that we have 28, small groups focused on racial reconciliation this fall? Why? Because this is something that has to be disciplined. Our vision, okay, is his diversity but a unity that comes out of that turning into this beloved community that God calls the church, and it takes some blood, sweat and tears. Dr. King said this; I'll give him the last word. He said, "There was a time when the church was very powerful—in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and

principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society." May God help us to be just that. There is one body, one spirit, one hope there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, there is one God and Father of all, who is overall and in all and through all, and that makes us black and white, Asian and Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, that makes us brothers and sisters in Christ. And so we take a posture of humility, we take a tone of gentleness, we exercise patience, and tolerance and as we do we believe, and we pray Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name. Amen.

I want to invite our worship team to come. I want to make an invitation. If you're here, at our online campus, maybe you're watching on demand, you are not here by accident. I don't know how this message hits you but here's what I believe. Somewhere between our lips and people's hearts the Holy Spirit does his work. I believe some of you, you want in, you want in on this thing called the family of God. You want that right relationship with the God who created you, who stamped you with his image. Jesus said, to as many as have received him to them, he gave the power to become the children of God.

We're gonna celebrate communion in just a moment and you have an open invitation. But today, if you want to make that decision, if you want to take a step of faith, if you would say, I want to follow Jesus, would you if you're at our online campus, just raise that hand, you'll see a button, it'll say raise a hand and we want to pray with you and for you. We want to help you take that next step in your spiritual journey. If you need prayer, our prayer team ready and waiting to pray with you and for you. And so the team is going to lead us as we prepare to celebrate communion. If you need to grab those elements you go ahead and grab whatever you want to use for communion. And then I'm going to come back in just a few moments. Let's worship the Lord together.