

Ephesians: Forwarding God's Care
God's Care Forwarded
Making the Most of Every Opportunity
Ephesians 5:15-21

Intro: I spoke to the Secular Humanist Society yesterday. They had questions about how they should relate to people who really believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. I was making the most of every opportunity.

This is one of the texts where the close relationship with the letter to the Colossians throws light on the thought. "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity" (Colossians 4:5). Christians are "outsiders" to the secular humanists, and they are outsiders to us.

Occasional openings for witness in word and deed may be the most fruitful of all such opportunities, particularly in the lives of those who are otherwise barricaded inside their own prejudices about Christ and the church.

The Apostle here describes his own approach to life—Paul's secret for a happy and fulfilling life. I have reduced it to three simple points: WISE TIME, WILL FILL, SING SONG.

I. WISE TIME: *Be very careful, then how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil* (Eph. 5:15-16).

A. Be very careful, friends. Your life matters despite the murderous message we receive with the morning news. Paul here uses again the word "walk" for your manner of life. "See then that you walk circumspectly" (KJV)—accurately, diligently, carefully, with discipline, following BEST PRACTICES.

B. Be wise, friends, not unwise (asophos). Every time I read about being wise, I want more explanation. What do you mean, Paul, by wisdom? How do I get it?

He makes two comments that follow the charge to be wise:

1. Make the most of every opportunity. That sounds to me like a TIMING thing. Snap up the opportunities. What are these opportunities? They are chances to LOVE, to care for God and for one another, to demonstrate and propagate the love of God.
2. Why? Because the days are evil. Everyone knows there is evil in the world. No one is denying that. Times are evil. The word "days" indicates again that Paul is addressing this matter of time usage, time management, and wise time. We live in evil times in our own city when gunshots sound out through the night and people bleed out in our streets. Are we to respond to this onslaught of evil with despair or withdrawal? No! We are to make the most of every opportunity to do what is good, to share the love of Christ, to draw people the Savior.

C. WISDOM passages are everywhere in the Bible:

1. Wise and foolish builders of Sermon on Mount
2. Virtuous woman who brings the Book of Wisdom to a great crescendo in Proverbs 31. She is disciplined, thoughtful, caring, skillful, and true. This is wisdom.

II. WILL FILL: Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:17-18).

A. WISDOM is knowing and doing GOD'S WILL. Paul is continuing the discussion about wisdom, but he is making a new point. Don't be a fool. Get some understanding.

B. YOU ARE GOING TO FILL YOUR DAYS WITH SOMETHING.

1. Some fill their days with intentional stupor. They are self-medicating. What they mean by that is they are "checking out" of life and relationships. They prefer the artificially induced fog to the harsh realities of life. Their choices result in DEBAUCHERY. The word refers to "excess," to an "abandoned" life—a wasted life, a life poured on the ground like a can of gasoline and consumed in a moment of pointless burning. ***THE PRODIGAL SON is the perfect story of this excess. The word "prodigal" is a synonym for excessive, wasteful living.
2. Some fill their days and brains with PORNOGRAPHY, as we heard about last Sunday. They prefer their fantasy ladies with no brains or personality to the real women with whom they could relate. They could be loving. Instead they are lusting. It's another way to abandon your true life for the illusion.
3. Some fill their lives with GAMBLING—one silly, thrilling chance after another until their God-given resources are strewn along a staggering path that no sane person could predict or understand.
4. Some fill their lives with FICTION—hours and hours of NOTHING and more nothing—so many romances and action thrillers they all bleed together in a gradually deadening brain and spirit. Television, movies, video games, and all manner of entertainment are not evil in themselves anymore than alcohol is evil in itself. It is the abandonment of your God-given time and talent and your calling from Christ that is evil, wicked, foolish, and sad. It is the EXCESS that steals you from your true Master and makes you the slave of folly and nothingness—dissipation and distraction. Disregard for the reason God saved you to

become the devil's fool, popping your poisonous pills through ears, mouth, and eyes until your whole life is nothing but borrowed chemicals and pulp fiction.

YOU CAN DO BETTER THAN THIS!

C. BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT. Do something else. I am not saying that you should take all these things out of your life—your liquor, your games, your porn—and face every day and night with NOTHING. I am saying that NOTHING is what you're trading your TIME for.

INSTEAD—this means that God has an alternative for you, his child. The alternative is to fill your life with HIM. Give yourself to him. FIND HIS WILL and DO IT.

III. SING SONG: Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks... (Eph. 5:19-20).

A. AN INTERACTIVE LIFE—not in a drunken stupor, but in relationships with people and with God.

1. SPEAK TO ONE ANOTHER with your songs. Now this is how the Southern gospel music really works. We sing our testimonies to each other. We encourage each other. Rather than joining together in the wholesale abandonment of life, we join together in the celebration of life and love in God.

We do not tear down one another's music in the church of Jesus Christ. We listen to each other's music. We have psalms that are scriptures put to music. We have hymns that are aimed God-ward and talk to him, as our worship music often does. We have songs that share testimonies, theology, and mutual concerns and challenges. We listen carefully to each other's messages in music. We seek to learn about and from each other.

2. SPEAK TO GOD with your HEART MUSIC. I think this is my favorite way to sing. I love to sing "How Great Thou Art," "Lord, I Give You My Heart," with all my brothers and sisters joining with me at the top of their lungs. I aim my song to God, and make my part as earnest and honest as it can be.

3. MAKE MUSIC IN YOUR HEART TO THE LORD (v19). Did you ever see that phrase in the Bible, really see it? This is what Paul recommends for you as a style of living, a way of life. This is WISDOM. This reflects UNDERSTANDING. This is a powerful, productive, and faithful way to fill your mind, heart, time, and life. Fill it all with praise to the Lord. LIVE FOR THE GLORY OF GOD, whatever you are doing.

4. ALWAYS GIVING THANKS TO GOD THE FATHER FOR EVERYTHING, IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST (v20).

a. ALWAYS is a time word.

b. GIVING THANKS is a perpetual attitude.

c. EVERYTHING encompasses all aspects of life

d. in the NAME means we live our lives under the BANNER OF CHRIST AND OF HIS CROSS.

5. What is this kind of life? It is wisdom. It is understanding. It is faithful. It is productive. It is full of love, joy, and peace. It is steady, ready every day.

This is the way to live. Walk ye in it.

CONCLUSION: What is your life filled with? Let's get this straight—if Jesus is not Lord of your time and walk, he is not Lord of your life, and you are wasting his gift. We can do better than this, and we must. Let's rise up against the darkness and make the most of the opportunities before us.