

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 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. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the name of the One who lived and died that we might live FOR him now and WITH him in eternity—Jesus Christ our Lord, dear friends,

Many, many people are chasing wisdom—and I’m not saying that’s a bad thing. You kids have gone back to school now—some of you for a couple weeks already—and college students around here now have the first week of a new year under their belts. What are you doing if you’re in grade school or high school or at the U of A or Pima Community College? Chasing wisdom.

If you’re a younger student, you have to go to school—it’s the law, but maybe you love learning—even if you have to be there. If you’re older, maybe you feel you have to so that your parents won’t be disappointed in you. Maybe you know you need to so that you can get a certain kind of job later on. Maybe you love learning and see each class as a fresh opportunity to take in something you didn’t know or discover something so far unrealized. Others chase wisdom in different ways. They like to read. Some like to improve their lives with the kind of advice they can find on TV or the internet or through therapy or counseling. Getting your finances in order, losing weight, stopping bad or destructive habits—all are ways to chase wisdom. None of this has to be bad. Really, there is a lot of good in most of that.

While God wants us to manage our whole lives well, there is something else that is of utmost importance. It is spiritual wisdom. That’s really what he’s talking about in the book of Proverbs, as we heard in our first lesson. It’s what he meant in the Gospel as he talked about believing in Christ. It’s what he’s after here in Ephesians chapter 5. Spiritual wisdom is behind this message that comes to us through the pen of the Apostle Paul. The message is this:

BE VERY CAREFUL HOW YOU LIVE!

God shows us how you, the spiritually wise person, can go about this:

- 1. KNOW THE LORD’S WILL (15, 17)**
- 2. MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR OPPORTUNITIES (16)**
- 3. LIVE YOUR THANKS (18-20)**

If you want to BE VERY CAREFUL HOW YOU LIVE, the place to begin is to KNOW THE LORD’S WILL and there is only one way to do it—be in His Word. You must let God speak to you in his Word. You’re not getting any more spiritually wise if you’re not. One of the ways you can do that is to do what you’re doing now! You’re here in God’s house for worship. While many people only think of worship as their opportunity to sing about what God means to them and give him praise, we understand that while we do that too, the more important thing that happens here is that we are spiritually fed by God through his Word.

Bible Study is also very important for the person who wants to KNOW THE LORD'S WILL. You may not think that a Bible class is for you, but there is a reason God says in the Bible that **“he gave some to be...pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11)** so that we can know him better and understand his will for our lives. Your pastors love the opportunities to sit with you in smaller groups like the Women's Bible Study or a little bigger groups like the Wednesday Bible Classes or the Sunday night Campus Ministry Bible Studies or the big groups like Sunday morning Adult Bible Study between the services. We enjoy helping you to get to know better what Christ has done for you and what the Lord's will is just like Sunday School teachers and Youth Instructors love to help you kids and young people do the same thing. I know we might mention some application in the worship reading introductions and we definitely point out how God's Word applies to our lives in the sermon, but if you're looking for more of an opportunity to KNOW THE LORD'S WILL and how to apply it in your life, Bible study with brothers and sisters in Christ is maybe your best opportunity!

Reading Scripture between worship and Bible study opportunities is another way to receive the wisdom that comes from God as the Holy Spirit works through the words of Scripture. KNOWING WHAT THE LORD'S WILL IS is the first step toward being wise and it prepares you to LIVE CAREFULLY.

It is true that we haven't always made a great attempt at knowing God's will. We've sometimes assumed how God felt about things without actually studying it or maybe we've simply held to our opinion instead of investigating to see what God's will really is. How grateful we can be that Jesus not only set the example for us in these things by going to the synagogue or temple regularly for worship, listening as Scripture was read, talking with the religious teachers even as a child, and reading and teaching the Word, but he also, by doing so perfectly, paid for our sins in this area.

We haven't always been careful about knowing the Lord's will but Jesus paid for these sins with his obedient life and with his perfect death. We are forgiven and strengthened to pay more attention to this from now on.

I'm sure you realize how important it is to pay attention, to be aware of what's going on around you. There's nothing like having your car break down late at night in a rough area of a big city to increase your awareness, right? You're on the lookout for danger.

God says that the days that we live in are more than dangerous; they are evil. They are intensely wicked. But it is not with fear that we are to be looking out into this viciously wicked world. No, he says that we are to make **the most of every opportunity**. Your Lord, your Savior, wants you to live God's will every moment of every day and that includes helping others to know God better and especially helping those who don't know Jesus as their Savior at all. You see, there is an urgency here in Paul's words. Since things are so bad in the world—and because we know that the end of this world is just around the corner—we need to make the most of every opportunity to tell people about Jesus Christ their Savior.

Martin Luther understood this idea of making the most of every opportunity, which when Paul wrote it down in Greek sounded more to his readers like “buying up the time”. Luther said: *“Wherefore accommodate yourselves to the time to such an extent that you even steal or rob the time as you may. Nothing ought to be more important to you than these efforts for the building of God’s kingdom.”*

Is that how you’ve felt about the way you’ve been living? That nothing is more important than living for God and MAKING THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY to reach out to lost souls with the gospel? I think that we have not been like that all the time. Perhaps we haven’t even *wanted* to do that. Every Christian knows that this is our mission, this is our calling from God, but many of us don’t think of it often or do it. We don’t always show that we understand the urgency. We don’t always think of our friends and acquaintances as people who are damned because they don’t trust in Christ. We choose not to think about that so that and the problem goes away. But you see, if we don’t say something the problem doesn’t go away...our friend goes away—away from God for eternity. When you think of it that way, it makes you want to MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY, doesn’t it?

When Jesus lived in this world, he saw and acted on everyday opportunities. He spoke with the woman at the well. He taught the crowds that gathered around him. He reached out to the Pharisees who sometimes sneakily, sometimes viciously, confronted him. Jesus never missed a chance to share the law and gospel with others. He did this to save them and he did this perfectly to save us—to pay for our sins of not MAKING THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY.

We haven’t been careful about this, but our Savior has removed these sins of ours, nailing them to the cross. We are forgiven and strengthened to now MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY.

Speaking of sins, why does Paul mention drunkenness in the middle of all this? Why this particular sin? Perhaps it seems like a timely reminder to college students who face many temptations and pressures in this regard. Really it’s more than that. Remember that God is talking about living wisely, being careful with how we live for him, making the most of our opportunities. You kind of have to be on top of your spiritual game for that, don’t you? What does drunkenness do? It makes a person incapable of wisdom, doesn’t it? Are you going to take advice from the wasted college girl at the end of the bar? Do you think the guy sitting on the park bench with his bottle in a bag is going to serve as your spiritual guru—or a guru of any kind?! Absolutely not! Drunk people don’t exercise sound judgment. Their senses are dulled. Drunkenness produces senseless, ruinous habits and makes a person unfit to think or do anything good or useful. It can ruin your life. Some of you know this from experience. Not only is this sinful in and of itself, it doesn’t permit the person to do the good things God wants us to do. Wisdom is impossible for the drunk person.

And wisdom is what we need if we are going to BE VERY CAREFUL ABOUT HOW WE LIVE. The man or woman, the boy or girl, who is **filled with the Spirit** is totally different. That person is wise. That person's life looks like just the opposite of the debauchery that Paul mentions. That person's life overflows with the good things listed here. They **Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs**. They **Sing and make music in their heart to the Lord**. They are **always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ**. These things are unstoppable expressions of faith from the person who is filled with the Holy Spirit.

Really, spiritual conversations, singing, having the Lord in their heart—all those things reveal the thankfulness to God that is in a person's heart. Christians who are CAREFUL ABOUT HOW THEY LIVE "**always**" give thanks to God, it says. Christians who are CAREFUL ABOUT HOW THEY LIVE give thanks for "**everything**" in their lives. And they do it because of their love for our Lord Jesus Christ.

Is that you? Are you that careful? Are you ALWAYS giving thanks to God...or do you sometimes complain? Do you thank God for EVERYTHING...even the bad stuff? No, we haven't always been thankful about everything. We take God and his gifts for granted and we forget that even the bad stuff in our lives is used by God for our good.

We love Jesus because he led a pure life. Though Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding, he did not misuse it. He praised his Father in heaven with his words and with his life. He gave thanks to his Father for the earthly gifts he enjoyed. He didn't complain though we would readily admit he actually had something to complain about from our perspective! The perfect Son of God suffered for our sins, but he did it willingly to save us.

We haven't always been careful in our living and in giving thanks to God, but Jesus was perfect in these things and his perfection has been credited to us who have been imperfect. We are forgiven and strengthened to thank him in the way we live for him.

We love God because of Jesus Christ who lived and died to redeem us from our sins and who has promised us eternal life in heaven. God tells us to BE VERY CAREFUL HOW WE LIVE. He wants us to understand his will, to make the most of our opportunities to live for him and reach out to others with the gospel, and to live our thanks to him. We need reminders like we find in his Word today so that we can change some things in our lives or even begin to live for him, in some ways, for the very first time. The grateful hearts of forgiven souls look only at their own lives and consider how they can more carefully live for Jesus while they await the day he takes them to heaven—not because they lived just the right way, but because he lived and died for them and because their faith was in him. May the good Lord grant that to you. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.