Walking Wisely

Believers are to walk wisely, depending on the Holy Spirit for direction.

EPHESIANS 5:15-21

If you were traveling in an unknown remote area and could select only one form of navigational help, which would you choose? Would you prefer a map, a GPS device, or an experienced guide who had frequently traveled that area and was thoroughly acquainted with it? The wise choice would be a personal guide who possessed complete understanding to reveal the best path for you.

Who or what do you consult when planning a trip? How do you know this is a trustworthy source?
UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 5:15-21

A key characteristic of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is His divine and personal nature. The Holy Spirit is not an “it” or an impersonal force. Ephesians 4:30 speaks of grieving the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Godhead, and is to be revered and worshiped in that fashion. His work is to manifest the active presence of God. In the Old Testament, there is a frequent connection between the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Ex. 31:3; 35:31; Isa. 11:2). In Ephesians 5, the work of the Spirit is to provide wisdom for the performance of practical tasks in the service of the Lord God.

We find a robust teaching about the Holy Spirit and His ministry in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. As a seal, the Spirit marks and authenticates every believer, providing a spiritual proof of ownership (Eph. 1:13). As the down payment of our heavenly inheritance, He communicates to us the reality of the age to come (1:14). The work of the Spirit also is one of revelation, bringing enlightenment to those who believe (1:17).

The Spirit is the source of strength to believers (3:16). He is associated with both Scripture (6:17) and prayer (6:18). It is in these classic and timeless Christian disciplines that we receive wisdom from God, the guidance that we need to walk through life.

God doesn’t simply give His children a smattering of wisdom; He pours it out on them in abundance (1:8) as a part of a new life found in Jesus Christ. In some way that is beyond our complete understanding, believers declare this wisdom even to rulers and authorities in the heavenlies (3:10). It seems reasonable to conclude that this communication is modeled through wise living that is observed by angelic beings. A wise walk demonstrated by believers is part of God’s eternal purpose and glory.

Read Ephesians 5:15-21, looking for the commands given by Paul. How is each command related to being filled by the Spirit?
EXPLORE THE TEXT

BE WISE (EPH. 5:15-17)

15 Pay careful attention, then, to how you live—not as unwise people but as wise—16 making the most of the time, because the days are evil. 17 So don’t be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.

VERSE 15
Wisdom in the Old Testament always had a practical dimension to it. It is really more of an approach to life than an intellectual capacity. According to Proverbs 1:7, a wise person is essentially someone who respects and fears God. God is the ultimate source of true wisdom (Prov. 2:6). As a repository of this divine understanding, the Book of Proverbs begins with a series of warnings to live carefully and avoid situations and persons of destructive influence (Prov. 1:10-33).

Trained in the Hebrew tradition of wisdom literature, Paul applied those teachings to the Christian experience. It is imperative for every Christian to pay careful attention, then, to how you live. Life is full of dangers and threats to a person’s well being. We shouldn’t assume that the greatest of these are physical or tangible. Paul would later warn the Ephesians of the spiritual warfare raging around them (Eph. 6:12-13). It is to the status of our souls that we must give constant attention. Nothing matters more than our relationship with Christ. Wise believers understand this.

VERSE 16
One of the primary areas to which wisdom should be applied is that of time management. A wise person pays careful attention to his or her time. In fact, we should guard our time as carefully as we do our finances. The old adage “time is money” is well intended. However, the truth is that time is actually more valuable because of its scarcity.

When Paul instructed his listeners about making the most of the time, he used a word that painted a vivid picture. It is a Greek word that was used for purchasing a product and it carries with it the idea of vigorous bartering or trading in order to make a profit. Many people simply spend their time; followers of Christ
are to invest their time, using it in intentional ways to see a more profitable and lasting result. If we invested and protected our time with the same intensity that many people do their financial resources, we might be amazed at the good that could be done for the advancement of the gospel.

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Paul had a particular and clear view not only of time but also of the times. He saw that the days are evil, and the same is true of the times in which we live. The word for evil in verse 16 can carry the idea of worthless. Living in an evil manner is unwise for many reasons, including the fact that those activities are transitory and fleeting. It is a mark of wisdom to live for things that will outlive us—for eternal truths and things of the kingdom of God.

Describe the difference between spending your time and investing your time.

KEY DOCTRINE: Holy Spirit
At the moment of regeneration the Holy Spirit baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ (Gal. 4:6).

BE FILLED (EPH. 5:18)
18 And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit:

VERSE 18
Paying careful attention to one’s life (see v. 15) includes avoiding reckless living. Paul urged the Ephesians to walk in wisdom and avoid wild living. Sadly, there is a segment of our culture that values reckless behavior and encourages people to “just go crazy!”
This is an unworthy attitude for believers. One expression of immoral excess that God forbids among His children is to become *drunk with wine*. It has always been a problem in the world, both in Paul’s time and in ours. In the world of the Ephesians, worship of the Greek god Dionysus included participation in drunken orgies. To put oneself under the influence and control of a substance is unthinkable for the child of God.

There is a better and wiser way. Paul described it as a lifestyle in which a believer is *filled by the Spirit*. Essentially, this consists of putting oneself under the control of the Holy Spirit. As mentioned previously, Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians contains extensive instruction on the Spirit. Believers are sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). The verb “to seal” was used for the tomb of Jesus (Matt. 27:66). It conveys securing something so that it cannot be opened and thus subject to theft or loss. Part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to secure believers in their salvation. This is a work in which Jesus Himself and the Father also participate (John 10:27-30).

The Scripture speaks clearly about the Spirit’s nature and ministry. At conversion the Holy Spirit indwells every believer, never to leave him or her. It is a thorough and once-for-all experience, with no need of a subsequent completion or update. However, there is the need for every believer to continually be filled by the Holy Spirit. The verb translated *filled* has three important characteristics that help a believer understand this important dimension of the life of a follower of Jesus. First, it is in the present tense, which means that it is to be continual, not just a one-time experience in the past. Second, it is in the passive voice, and this reminds us that we receive this filling. It is not something we accomplish in our strength but rather something that comes as we surrender to Him. Finally, it is an imperative requiring a response from us.

**Being filled with the Holy Spirit is to surrender to His control and direction.**

In summary, being filled by the Holy Spirit is to surrender to His control and direction. We place ourselves under His influence, in contrast with a person who is drunk and under the influence of alcohol. This submission necessitates an attitude of humility, a recognition of one’s need to be filled and guided by the Spirit.
While God certainly has a plan for each of our lives, it is even more incredible to realize that He gives us a perfect Guide in the Person of the Holy Spirit. Wise believers lean heavily on Him as they navigate their way through life.

*How does being controlled by the Holy Spirit compare to and contrast to being controlled by alcohol?*

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**BIBLE SKILL: Read passages to create a summary statement**

Read Luke 1:15, 41, 67; Acts 2:4; 4:8, 31; 9:17; and 13:9, 52, looking for what each passage teaches about the filling of the Holy Spirit. Are these one-time experiences or something that is repeated over time? Are these experiences that are earned or given freely by God? What are the results of the Holy Spirit’s filling in these verses? Write a summary statement based on what you discover.

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**BE GENUINE (EPH. 5:19-21)**

19 speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

Jesus used the illustration of the wind to teach about the Holy Spirit and His work (John 3:8). This is an apt metaphor in light of the invisibility of the Spirit and yet His obvious impact on life.
While the Spirit cannot be seen, His impact can be witnessed in the actions of those whom He indwells. Paul set forth for the Ephesians some results of being filled by the Spirit.

**VERSE 19**

The first expression of the filling of the Spirit involves music and singing. There is a horizontal direction *to one another* and a vertical direction *to the Lord* in our singing. The church teaches doctrine and theology through its music (Col. 3:16), and this is most likely what Paul meant when he wrote about the Ephesians *speaking* to each other through musical compositions.

We can see a rich variety of melodic expression outlined by Paul. The types of music mentioned are *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*. Psalms represent the praise songs from the Old Testament. Hymns were lyrical compositions of praise. Some Bible commentators believe there are examples of early Christian hymns located in the New Testament itself. It is less certain exactly what a spiritual song consisted of, but possibly these were more personal musical arrangements. All worship music should be sung *with your heart*.

*How does a variety of musical expression in the church edify believers in their walk with God?*

**VERSE 20**

Gratitude is a hallmark of Spirit-filled living. One dimension of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to flood our hearts with an understanding of the depth of God’s love. In this way we are moved toward *giving thanks* for all that *God … the Father* has done for us. As offered in *the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*, this gratitude is grounded in all that He has done for us. Part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to highlight the work of Jesus on our behalf (John 15:26).

This gratitude is to be *always* present and offered *for everything*, in every circumstance of life. While this is not to say that we should be glad for tragedies that sometimes invade life, we can still be grateful for those experiences which elevate God’s
sustaining grace and steadfast comfort. This impulse to thank God in both bright and dark moments of life is not natural to any of us. It is a distinctive indication of the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

VERSE 21
If gratitude is an attitude toward which every person must be gently nudged, then perhaps submission is an action into which every person must be firmly compelled through the Word and the Spirit. It seems that at times those who most loudly proclaim the filling of the Spirit in their lives are the most brash and boastful. If there is one definitive indicator of the presence of the Holy Spirit, it would be humility. (See Eph. 4:2.)

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Humility is the precursor to the submitting that takes place within the body of Christ. While there is certainly a place for submission for duly instituted leaders (Heb. 13:17) and within the appropriate family relationships, Paul also called for a mutual submission directed toward one another. This submission would include learning from others, serving them, and receiving correction from them.

Can a person live in submission without humility? Explain.

Mutual submission within the body of Christ does not do violence to the cherished axiom of equality. The church is the body of Christ and as such is to be a living embodiment of interdependence. However, there is an even higher calling to which a Spirit-filled Christian will respond: the fear of Christ. This reverence for Christ is the prerequisite for wisdom. (See Prov. 9:10.) Because of our reverence for and confidence in Christ, wise believers are both able and willing to give preference to one another for the advancement of the kingdom of God.
IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers are to carefully live their lives in light of God’s wisdom.
- Believers are to surrender to the control of the Holy Spirit.
- Believer’s attitudes are impacted by the Holy Spirit living in them.

**In what ways could your small group establish relational connections that tap into the collective wisdom of the entire group?**

**What marks of surrender to the Holy Spirit could be identified in your life by a neutral observer? What needs to change in your life and how?**

**What present attitudes in your life could be used as “proof of ownership” by the Holy Spirit? What adjustments do you need to make to your attitudes?**

Prayer Needs