

EPHESIANS

WHO I AM AND WHY IT MATTERS

Welcome back to Ephesians 5! In our passage today, we will see that as followers of Jesus, we need to be people of wisdom and intentionality if we are going to make the most of our lives for God's glory and experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in days marked by evil.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-21

Discussion Questions:

1. Looking back at your sermon notes, what encouraged or challenged you the most?
2. In verses 15-17, Paul instructs us to be careful and live wisely for the sake of pleasing the Lord. What does it mean to act/live thoughtfully rather than thoughtlessly? As an example, consider how you spend your time. Are you thoughtful or thoughtless?

Similar to our discussion last week, when it comes to living thoughtfully, we need to slow down to consider the choices we're making with our lives. Most of the time, we move so fast that we thoughtlessly say "yes" when we should say "no." When we're moving fast, we get tired; when we get tired, we lower our guard and standards.

Time is a good context for evaluating how we live. Are we making the best use of our time? For the sake of our family? For the sake of our soul? Pastor Tyler Staton writes, "Many people are pretty comfortable with the spirituality they've got." His words are not a compliment. It's no wonder so many Christians experience a dispassionate spiritual life – they have time to squeeze one more thing into their lives – unless it's intentional time to sit in the presence of the Lord each day.

Life comes at you fast – we need to be wise about what we do with what we have. Parents: If you still have kids in your home, they won't be there forever. Likewise, if you have aging parents, they won't be around forever. There are scores of other examples we could discuss when it comes to living thoughtfully.

3. Why is it that we're most concerned with the will of God when we're facing life's big decisions but not so much with the more minor ones? For example, have you ever considered the Lord's will when making entertainment choices?

When was the last time you considered God's will when watching or bingeing a television show or series? I'm guessing it's never really happened. We usually only consider God's will when there's a

more series choice in front of us. The problem with this line of thinking is that we rarely consider how the scores of little decisions we make add up to influence our souls significantly. Let's never forget these words from Hwee Hwee Tan, "You become what you contemplate."

4. In his book, *Live No Lives*, John Mark Comer writes, "The poet Mary Oliver once said, 'Attention is the beginning of devotion.'" How do these words from Oliver align with what Paul is saying about living wisely and pleasing the Lord?

If we're going to live lives devoted to God and living in His experienced presence, we must consider the choices we make with our lives – carefully and thoughtfully. Every decision we make, intentionally or passively, leads us toward or away from the things of God.

5. Read John 15:18-19. As followers of Christ, when we choose to live differently, our choices can be viewed as an unintentional judgment by those making the opposite choices. Have you ever experienced this personally? Give some examples of how this could happen regarding how we spend money, organize our schedules, and make entertainment choices. How can making personal choices to please the Lord be viewed as legalism? How could we be tempted to use this argument to justify our choices?

John 15:18-19, "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

C.S. Lewis once said the beginning of any friendship starts with the words, "You too?" In other words, common ground is the beginning of a great friendship. On the other hand, when we don't share a "You too?" moment with someone because of our convictions, they can feel less like friends and more like enemies.

For example, if you say, "No, thanks, I'm watching my weight," as someone offers you a dessert they're eating – it's easy to see how your comments could make them feel judged as unhealthy – whether you intended them to take it that way or not. The same thing can happen regarding more significant matters in life. Whether we mean to or not, people quickly feel judged when we're not in the same boat as them on a topic or choice. This is why Jesus' words are important to remember – "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."

Among brothers and sisters in Christ, we like to declare someone a legalist when we deem their standards unnecessarily high. Likewise, when we lower our standards, we often hide behind the phrase, "Well, I'm no legalist." We need to be careful not to deceive ourselves into walking down a path that may ultimately lead us away from the things of God.

6. In verses 18-21, Paul calls us to be filled with the Holy Spirit. According to Paul, what are the signs of someone under the influence of the Holy Spirit? How do we nurture the presence of the Spirit in our lives so that we experience His ongoing presence and power? What role does thoughtful living play?

In these final few verses of our passage, Paul commends us to live a life pleasing to the Lord by calling us to be filled with the Spirit. Rather than being under the influence of anything else, we should intentionally see to it that we're living under the power of the Spirit, namely that our choices aren't grieving the Spirit. In verses 19-21, Paul gives us a glimpse into the lives of those living under the Holy Spirit's influence; they're people compelled by worship, filled with joy and thanksgiving, and free to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

The Holy Spirit's power in our lives is something we need to nurture. With every choice, passive or intentional, we fan the flame or quench it. The closer we move toward the things of God, the more of the Spirit's peace and power we experience in our lives. The opposite is also true – the more we wander into the things of this world and further from the things pleasing to God – we grieve the Spirit.

Again, let's never forget these words from Hwee Hwee Tan, "You become what you contemplate."

7. What's one personal takeaway from today's study you can focus on applying in your life this week?