

Ephesians 5-15-17

Walking wisely!

Scripture reading:

Ephesians 5:15–17 (ESV) — **15** Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Prayer for illumination:

Sermon introduction:

There are many ways to walk.

We walk a certain way when we are race walking.

We walk a certain way when we talk a leisurely stroll around the block.

We walk a different way when we walk up a steep mountain pass with a 60-pound pack on our shoulders.

We can walk backwards (we can moon walk).

We walk another way, when we want to walk very quietly up the stairs because it is 37 minutes after our curfew.

I recently started lifting weights. After squatting, for the first time in years, I could hardly walk anywhere for days.

How do you usually walk?

This brings us to this morning's text. Paul tells Christians that they must walk in a very specific way. Walking, in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, is a metaphor for the Christian life.

How should we walk as Christians? In other words, how should we live? What exactly does this look like?

Paul exhorts us to walk wisely!!! Again, Paul exhorts us to walk wisely!!!

Is this how you would describe your walk with Christ in the last six months? Would others say that you consistently and routinely walk wisely?

What does it look like to walk wisely? Walking wisely involves three components...

Walking wisely involves pursuing biblical wisdom

Walking wisely involves redeeming the time

Walking wisely involves understanding God's will

First, walking wisely involves pursuing biblical wisdom

Ephesians 5:15 (ESV) — **15** Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,

What is biblical wisdom?

The apostle Paul was steeped in the wisdom literature of the OT. As a good pharisee, he probably had large portions of Psalms and Proverbs memorized. Therefore, when he mentions wisdom, he is thinking primarily about the wisdom literature of the OT.

What is wisdom according to the wisdom literature of the OT? **Wisdom is the skill or art of Godly living.**

How does wisdom manifest itself? According to Proverbs...

This wise person manages time well.

They manage their money well.

They pick good friends.

They plan for the future.

They control their speech.

They control their anger.

They manage their families well.

They are skilled in their jobs.

They are growing in humility.

They are diligent, hardworking, industrious, correctable, any many other things...

Who doesn't want to be this person???

But how do we get wisdom?

Proverbs 1:7 (ESV) — 7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

When I was in the sixth grade, I got in big trouble. My punishment was memorizing Proverbs 1:7. (describe walking back and forth to my dad's study) This punishment was far worse than being grounded for two weeks. My dad knew that memorizing this verse was the key to wisdom, and he also knew that his son, me, was acting like a fool.

Proverbs 9:10 (ESV) — 10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

In these verses, the words knowledge and wisdom are nearly synonyms.

We get wisdom by fearing God.

What does it mean to fear God?

The Hebrew word for fear means more than respect. It means fear, but it is the healthy fear that a son has for his father and not the fear that a slave has for his master. We fear God because he is immensely powerful, he is holy, he is righteous, he is just, and he disciplines those that he loves. Almost every time God appears to someone in the Bible they fall on their faces and cry out, "woe is me." In other words, they are terrified. Again, this is more than a healthy respect.

Sun illustration:

God is like the sun.... the sun is an incredible source of life, light, and heat. Without the sun we would all die. According to one astronomer, the sun is the most important source of life and energy in our solar system.

But the sun is also incredibly hot. The core of the sun is 27 million degrees. The surface of the sun is 10 million degrees. If you approach the sun in the wrong way, you will be incinerated.

God is an incredible source of life and light, but if you approach God in the wrong way, you too will be incinerated!

Dog illustration:

John Piper tells the story of visiting a friend with his young son. When they walked in the door, the friend's massive dog ran up to the son. The son was terrified. The friend said, "The dog is safe as long as you don't turn your back on him..."

Aslan the Lion:

"In the classic *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis... Christ is represented by Aslan, the great lion. When the beaver, the guide, briefs the children about Narnia, he mentions the Lion. The children ask, 'Is he safe?' the beaver answers, 'Of course not, he is a lion, but he's good.'" (Waltke, 101)

The key to unlocking wisdom is the fear of God.

Proverbs 9:10–11 (ESV) — **10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight. **11** For by me your days will be multiplied, and years will be added to your life.

Proverbs 10:27 (ESV) — **27** The fear of the LORD prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.

Proverbs 14:26–27 (ESV) — **26** In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge. **27** The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.

Proverbs 19:23 (ESV) — **23** The fear of the LORD leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.

Proverbs 22:4 (ESV) — **4** The reward for humility and fear of the LORD is riches and honor and life.

How do we walk in wisdom? We grow in the fear of God!!! The more we fear God, the more we want to please him, which inevitably leads to more skill in Godly living.

Ephesians 5:15 (ESV) — **15** Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,

Application:

Now, more than ever, we need wisdom to navigate the complexities of living in the 21st century (examples).

Where does this wisdom come from? Not network news, Tik Tok, Facebook, or Instagram.

Wisdom comes from the fear of God.

Furthermore, wisdom comes to those who ask for it.

James 1:5 (ESV) — 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

In addition, wisdom comes to those who meditate on the Bible.

Psalms 19:7 (ESV) — 7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

Can you give an example of walking wisely? Yes, this brings us to the second point....

First, *walking wisely involves pursuing biblical wisdom.*

Second, walking wisely involves redeeming the time

This brings us to verse 16. Verse 16 gives a small snapshot of wisdom in a particular area of life. Redeeming the time.

In verse 16, we see a command to redeem the time!

Ephesians 5:16 (ESV) — 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

The phrase “making the best use of the time” literally means “redeeming the time.” The verb is a commercial metaphor used for purchasing a commodity, and it implies a period of vigorous trading while there is profit to be made.

The word for “time” is important. It is the word *kairos*. It refers to a specific moment in time rather than an extended period of time, which is the word “*chronos*.”

In other words, we must redeem every single moment of time.

Commenting on these verses, one scholar writes,

“Here the intention is that we will use our time wisely, making every opportunity count. As I write this I am 73 years old and have come to recognize how short life really is. We have only a few chances to make our lives matter, and we want to avoid squandering our limited opportunities and resources.” (Osborne)

But why should we redeem the time? Let’s keep reading...

In verse 16, we see a command to redeem the time!

In verse 16, we also see a motive to redeem the time!

Ephesians 5:16 (ESV) — 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

We must redeem the time because the days are evil. This phrase is a reference to what Paul refers to elsewhere as “the present evil age.”

The present evil age is controlled by Satan.

Ephesians 6:12 (ESV) — 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

See also Gal. 1:4; Eph. 2:2

The last thing Satan wants, is for you to redeem the time. He wants you to squander your life away by doing worthless things—spending hours and hours a day playing video games, binge watching Netflix, shopping online, or reading mindless fiction.

We must redeem the time, because the days are evil!

Illustration:

Somebody once advertised as follows,

“LOST, yesterday, somewhere between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward offered, for they are gone forever.” (Stott)

Application:

How do we redeem the time? The same way a mouse eats an elephant. How does a mouse eat an elephant? One bite a time. Or in little chunks.

Those who want to get a lot done often overlook the importance of plodding, that is doing a little bit of something every day.

Many people think, “If I could just take three months off, I could write my dissertation, or I could write the great American novel, or I could—fill in the blank.”

You are probably not going to get three months off.

This is where Doug Wilson’s concept of productivity comes in. Like him or not, he is an incredibly industrious person. He started the classical school movement, started a university, started a church, started a seminary, started a publishing house, has written 30-40 books, has raised three very godly children, and he is a college professor. How does he do all of this?

He argues that most really productive people get things done by doing something for 15-20 minutes a day.

He calls it the power of plodding.

How has he written 30-40 books? By writing 100 words a day, which takes him about 15-20 minutes. This enables him to write 1-2 books a year. You can get a lot done by redeeming that spare 15 minutes a day.

Chip away at things...

He also reads hundreds of books a year the same way.

Doctoral reading...

You can redeem the time by memorizing the Bible 15 minutes a day, do pushups 15 minutes a day, praying 15 minutes a day, read a good Christian book 15 minutes a day, or practice bass 15 minutes a day.

Before you know it, you will have gotten a lot done.

What plodding requires is predictability and routine. So set a schedule and stick to it. Get up at the same time, go to bed at the same time, etc... people who redeem the time often live very routine lives.

You all have scores of 15-minute periods lying around every day.

While folding the laundry listen to an audiobook, the Bible, or a podcast.

While brushing your teeth, flossing, and washing your face, listen to an audiobook.

When you are waiting at the DMV, instead of pulling out your phone and checking the news or social media, listen to a redeeming audiobook or read a digital book.

While you commute, mow the grass, or go for a walk listen to a book.

Everyone gets 24 hours a day, some people are way more productive. How??? They eliminate time wasters and look for ways to redeem the time in little blocks.

With all of this said, don't be a curmudgeon or an ascetic, schedule time for recreation and rest. Rest on Sundays, watch a football game, read fiction, read to your kids, play with your kids, relax with your spouse.

But how do I know that redeeming the time is the will of God for my life? This brings us to the final point.

First, walking wisely involves pursuing wisdom.

Second, walking wisely involves redeeming the time.

Third, walking wisely involves understanding God's will

Ephesians 5:17 (ESV) — 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

What is the will of God? Unfortunately, many Christians are confused on this topic.

Illustration:

“Man, 91, dies waiting for the will of God... Tupelo, Miss.- Walter Houston, described by family members as a devoted Christian, died Monday after waiting seventy years for God to give him clear direction about what to do with his life. ‘He hung around the house and prayed a lot, but just never got that confirmation,’ his wife Ruby says. ‘Sometimes he thought he heard God’s voice, but then he wouldn’t be sure, and he’d start the process all over again.’ Houston, she says, never really figured out what his life was about, but felt content to pray continuously about what he might do for the Lord. Whenever he was about to take action, he would pull back, ‘because he didn’t want to disappoint God or go against him in any way,’ Ruby says. ‘He was very sensitive to always remaining in God’s will.’” (Deyoung, 76)

This is fake news from a spoof website (larknews.com). Sadly, it could be real!!! Many of us think about the will of God like Walter Houston. We think it is something that has been lost and needs to be found. But is the will of God lost? No...

To correct this harmful tendency, we must understand the different aspects of God's will. Let's look at each one...

God's will of decree

Often called the secret will of God.

Ephesians 1:11 (ESV) — 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,

See also Acts 4:27-28, Ps. 139:16, Isa. 46:9-10

In eternity past, before God created all things, he planned every single detail of history and now he is carrying out that plan. God does not reveal many of these details to us.

In eternity past, God decreed our every decision.

He decreed who we will marry, where we will live, when we will die, where we will work, where we go to school, all the cars we will buy, the pants you chose to wear today, and the specific food you would eat for lunch today. But these things are often hidden from us. Yet many of us spend time trying to figure out God's will of decree, stop!!!

There is God's will of decree...

There is also God's will of precept

Often called God's will of desire. These are the things that God clearly tells us to do in the Bible. He tells us not to murder, steal, get divorced, lie, etc... We don't have to determine whether it is God's will or not for us to murder. Murder is clearly wrong. God's will of desire is crystal clear in Scripture. It has not been lost, we don't need to find it.

We must distinguish between God's will of decree and God's will of precept.

Application:

God's will of decree is usually what trips us up.

When most people talk about finding the will of God, they are talking about finding God's will of decree. Here is the problem. God, generally speaking, is not going to reveal his will of decree to us. In fact, this is not even a biblical concept.

Illustration:

One of the world's premier OT scholars is Bruce Waltke. He wrote a book titled *Finding the will of God: A pagan notion?*

Israel's Pagan neighbors used to kill an animal, and spread its guts out across a table, then a priest would look at the guts and try to determine the will of the God's from the way the guts were arranged. This is pagan, not Christian...

Waltke argues that Christians have their own version of doing this...

I think of the single college aged kid who likes Sarah... he starts praying, asking God if it is God's will for him to date Sarah. The next day he is driving down the road and the Hall n Oats song "Sarah Smile" is on the radio. Then at lunch he reaches for the butter and he notices that the butter brand is Sarah Lee. Then his aunt Sarah emails him two days later. He has finally found the will of God. Now he has peace to move forward with Sarah.

This is not biblical wisdom!!!

Commenting on this unbiblical mentality, Kevin Deyoung writes,

"God is not a magic 8-ball we shake up and peer into whenever we have a decision to make. He is a good God who gives us brains, shows us the way of obedience, and invites us to take risks for him. We know God has a plan for our lives. That's wonderful. The problem is we think he's going to tell us the wonderful plan before it unfolds." (Deyoung, 26)

This quote comes from Kevin Deyoung's excellent book on decision making and the will of God. The title is "*Just do something: a liberating approach to finding God's will or How to make a decision without dreams, visions, fleeces, impressions, open doors, random Bible verses, casting lots, liver shivers, writing in the sky, etc...*"

Application:

Focusing on determining God's will of decree often leaves us looking for something we are never going to find. God is probably not going to tell you in the clouds, a dream, or spell out in your bowl of cherries who to marry, where to work, or what type of car to buy. He is not!!! He has given you a brain, friends, the Bible, and sanctified common sense to make these decisions.

We don't need to find the lost will of God, we need to read our Bibles, pray for wisdom, talk to others, and obey his will of precept.

With that said, God sometimes does, supernaturally, reveal his secret will to us, and when it happens it is awesome. But this is not the way that God ordinarily works.

Conclusion:

Let me conclude by reading our passage again-

Ephesians 5:15-17 (ESV) — 15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, **16** making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. **17** Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

None of us walk as wisely as we should. Right???

Maybe you are thinking, "I have been a fool. I have made foolish choices over the years in regard to time, money, relationships, jobs, sex, family, etc... is there any hope for me?"

Yes. Jesus was the wisest man to ever live.

Colossians 2:3 (ESV) — 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

He displayed his wisdom in redeeming sinners (1 Cor. 1:23-24)

Look to him for forgiveness and look to him for wisdom.

Let's pray....