

So, to start things off today I wanted to clarify one quick thing from last week. I ended the message talking about a situation our family is walking through right now. And Hannah and I talked after the service and she said, "Make sure everyone knows that we're ok! It sounded like you and I were having a rough time." And to just clarify a little more, Hannah and I are doing great! I love her more every day and couldn't imagine trying to walk through this without her. But it's a parenting situation that we're working through. And just a little foreshadowing to where we're going in this series, the first thing we started doing immediately is reaching out to our church family, the pastors, friends that are parenting the same way Biblically that we are and either at the same place or further ahead of us in parenting and we started asking for wisdom.

We knew that emotions tend to cloud your judgment when you're right in the middle of a situation so we reached out to specific people and invited them into our lives to help us gain perspective. Naturally, we have very strong emotions tied to our children and how we lead them and we needed objective outside counsel to provide us with insight and tools to walk through this wisely.

SLIDE

*Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the **multitude of counselors** there is safety.*

Proverbs 11:14

One day, once there's a little distance and time from this and we have been able to navigate this all the way through, because we're still right in the middle of it, I'd love to share more details. But, one thing I can share with you is how amazing it is to have a church family to share life with. To break down in tears in the middle of an all staff meeting and to have everything stop and everyone gather around to lift up your family in prayer. To cry out to God for wisdom, peace, strength, healing, and restoration and to see the God of Angel Armies do what only He can do is humbling, awe inspiring, amazing beyond words. And we've decided at some point we're going to look back on this and thank Him for how he brought us through. So, we're not going to wait. We're going to praise and thank Him right now as if it's already done. He deserves the glory, He deserves the thanks, He deserves the credit, He deserves our deepest worship.

So, please come this evening and worship with us. We're going to take some extra time to worship Him with music and then in the middle we're going to take time to pray. I know we're not the only family facing things that are bigger than us. I know we're not the only ones who are at the end of our understanding and need insight straight from God Himself.

I also know that worship changes our perspective when we're right in the middle of a storm from seeing huge waves and strong winds and thinking our life and our family is about to go under. This storm is going to be the one that ends us and God seems so small and far away. But once we begin to worship our perspective shifts from a God far away to a God greater than any circumstance, the master of the wind and the waves, and closer than our next breath. Who fights for us, and with one word can calm the strongest storm. And I know that we need each other to pray for one another, to lift each other up when we don't have strength of our own. We're going to do that tonight, don't miss it.

So, we're in week 2 of our walking wisely series and I know last week I said I was going to teach you the best question ever in 2 weeks, but I couldn't hold onto it any longer. So we're changing it up to this week. Our passage for today is the key passage for our whole series. And I talked through it a little last week, but we're going to spend some more time unpacking it today. And then using it to teach us the best question ever.

Ephesians is a letter that was written to the church at Ephesus by the Apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If you want to hear the story of how the church in Ephesus was started go read Acts 19. It's an amazing story! Ephesus was a huge city and the epicenter for worship for most of the Greek and Roman gods. Including the temple to the goddess Artemis or Diana that we talked a little about last week, the temple was actually one of the Seven Wonders of the World. If you remember, she was the goddess of transgressing boundaries, all moral and sexual boundaries were meant to be crossed and one of the key characteristics of her priests and priestesses was altering their gender, making the men feminine and the women masculine. So, we can very much identify with what the church at Ephesus was facing culturally.

As Paul was there for 2 years in a very pagan society; the book of Acts tells us that he did extraordinary miracles. Not just your average ordinary miracles of healing diseases and casting out evil spirits.

SLIDE

11 God did **extraordinary miracles** through Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

Acts 19:11-12

People were so moved by the things being done in Jesus' name that those who'd been practicing sorcery brought all their scrolls of spells and incantations to do all sorts of evil things and burned them publicly declaring their allegiance to Jesus. And the value of the materials was worth millions of dollars today, estimated anywhere from \$6 to \$16 million dollars worth of occult or satanic materials.

Years later, Paul is writing back to the church in Ephesus from a Roman prison. And in chapters 1-3 He reminds them of the beauty of the gospel story **SLIDE (Ephesians 3:14-21)** and in chapter 4 he says, "Therefore" in light of what God has done for us through Jesus. Because we have the same Holy Spirit who raised Christ from the dead living in us. Because we're no longer dead in our sins. Because we have unity in Christ: **One body, one Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father who is over all, in all, and living through all.**

Therefore live a life worthy of the calling that you have received from God. Live differently than the culture around you. And in chapters 4-6 he teaches us very practically what that looks like. So, we come to our passage and he says:

SLIDE

*15 Be very **careful**, then, how you **live***
Ephesians 5:15-17

The Greek word he starts the sentence off with is, "**Blepo.**" And it's meant to grab your attention. "Hey! Listen up! Eyes on me. I need you to understand this! This is life and death that you pay attention and get this! This is the highest priority." It's a visual term that means look up, look around, and pay attention to your surroundings. **Be very careful how you live** and the Greek word "**Peripateo**" translated "live" literally means, "to walk," so some Bible translations will use the word "walk" here instead of "live." What he's painting a picture of is; imagine you're walking through an area where you have to be careful where you step because there are things you don't want to step on or in. Imagine walking through a minefield or a path through the marshes where you have to avoid quicksand on every side. So, you're having to look back and see where you came from. You have to look around to be sure where to take your next step. You're looking ahead, trying to make sure that you're headed in the right direction.

He's calling us to realize that we cannot afford to just kind of figure it out as we go, drift with the culture, walk aimlessly and casually. We can't walk without purpose and without strong consideration. We have to be constantly looking around, constantly paying attention to how we walk and how we live.

SLIDE

*15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as **unwise** but as **wise***
Ephesians 5:15-17

So, he says there's only two ways that you can live, either wisely as we were designed to live (that we talked about last week) or unwisely. We tend to think that there's multiple ways to go about it and we just need to find what works for us. You do you, boo boo and I'll do me. **But he equates living wisely with being careful and living unwise as careless.**

So, living unwise means I can do whatever, whenever, with whomever I please as long as it's consensual and there's no law against it. Or if there is a law against it, as long as I just kind of bend the law not break it or if I just don't get caught then it's ok. And consequences don't matter, that's "future Michael's" problem or, "Yeah, I've heard that's where this leads, that won't happen to me. I can be unwise in my relationships, my dating life, my marriage, my schooling, my finances, my job, with my friends, what I do, where I go, and what I allow into my life, and I'll be fine."

Or you can be careful, you can live wisely. You can be looking back, looking around, looking ahead, stepping carefully and a lot of times counter-culturally.

SLIDE

*15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every **opportunity**, because the days are **evil**.*
Ephesians 5:15-17

This word for opportunity is, "**Kairos**," a word for time, but actually a very specific time where everything changes. Those key moments where you're making a decision. Where you're having to decide if you're going to be wise or unwise. And the phrase "**making the most of every opportunity**" literally means to redeem the time. Because time is our most precious asset. It's the one thing we can't make more of and each of us is dealing with a limited amount. No one can buy more at the end of their life to make up for the time that was wasted. He says to make the most of your days, each opportunity, and especially those "**Kairos**" moments, those moments of decision that could potentially decide the path you get to take in life.

“...because the days are evil.” And we mentioned this last week so no need to rehash it, but all you need to do is open your eyes to what’s happening in culture around us to realize that culture is not moving in the direction of God and morality and true Biblical justice or even simple sane rational thought. The current of culture is sweeping as hard and as fast away from God as it possibly can. If you want to look into a little more on the thoughts and ideas that are driving this, I encourage you to go on our website and watch the class I taught on deconstruction. It will help you make sense of where all these ideas in culture came from and where it’s going because it is a pathway that leads to a specific destination: **it’s meant to destroy your faith.** And will help you be prepared to interact with your coworkers and neighbors and family and friends that might be struggling with this.

SLIDE

15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.

Ephesians 5:15-17

“Therefore do not be foolish,” is kind of a dig at us in the church. Because Paul is saying, “Come on. You know better. Don’t be foolish. Don’t lie to yourselves. Don’t try to find loopholes or ways around what God is telling you to do. Don’t go as close as you can to sin and ask when does it “technically” become a sin, because I want to do everything I possibly can except the technical definition of that sin so that I can keep God on my side.” Believe me, after years of leading small groups of middle and high school guys and 20-somethings + guys. Everyone wanted to know, there’s a lot that can happen between holding hands and intercourse. So, how much can I do without technically crossing the line?

Don’t say, ‘Well, there’s not a specific verse against this, so that must mean God must be for it.’ Don’t close your ears to wise counsel and say, ‘Yeah, everyone I know and love and has actually been there before is saying the same thing but they don’t know what they’re talking about.’”

“...but understand what the Lord’s will is.” And the word understand means to face up to, to acknowledge. Because, you know what’s right. You know you shouldn’t go out with them, marry them, go there, spend that, hide this, indulge that... You know, your friends know, your family knows. They might have been trying to tell you all along. So, actually face up to what’s right. If you just take the time to ask; His will, what’s right, what’s wise is pretty obvious in most situations.

So, that's the command that Paul is giving us but today I want to teach you a question that's not explicitly stated in the text but will help us to follow this command. And it's the best question ever: And it's not "What's everyone else doing? Or What can I get away with? Is it right? Is it legal?" It's better than that, it's the best question ever. Are you ready for it? It's going to blow your mind...

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What is the wise thing to do?

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This is what Paul is calling us to do, "**Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise.**"

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So, we simply ask what is the **wise** thing to do? Everybody got it? Alright, let's pray...

It's so simple but we're going to add some extra things to it in just a second that will help make it crystal clear. And it will probably start feeling uncomfortable, and if you feel that, then I'm doing my job. But we've got to start asking, "**What is the wise thing to do?**" So, here's the first part we're going to add.

SLIDE

1. In light of my past experiences, what is the wise thing to do?

Now, here's a tricky concept, my past is my past and your past is your past. And what I've experienced or gone through isn't what you might have gone through. So, what may be ok for you to do may not be ok for me because of my past experiences. So, it's not in light of anyone else's past but yours, what is the wise thing to do?

In light of what happened last time they called...

In light of what happened last time we were working late alone together...

In light of what happened the last time I went there...

In light of what happened the last time I was feeling sad and alone...

In light of what happened the last time I made that purchase to keep up with the Joneses...

In light of what happened the last time I was on social media just chatting with some "old friends" from school...

In light of what happened the last time I found the stock that would make me rich or the Nigerian prince who just needed a loan...

In light of what happened the last Amazon Prime Day... (I had to sneak a couple lighthearted ones in)

Foolish people think, “I can keep doing the same thing and just have different results. This won’t be like the last time.” The reason you keep making the same foolish relational or financial decisions is because you’re not looking back and asking yourself, **“In light of my past experiences, what is the wise thing to do?”**

SLIDE

*As a dog returns to its vomit,
so fools repeat their folly.*

Proverbs 26:11

And you think when you’ve seen your dog do it, “Gross! What are you doing?! Why would you go back to that?!” And everyone keep your elbows to yourself, no nudging anyone. But do you realize that’s what your friends and family have been thinking about the guys you’ve been dating? They just didn’t want to say it. But it’s not because there’s just not any good ones out there. It’s because you keep going back to the same place to pick up the same kind of icky ones that you did before. It’s not because there’s no good jobs out there, it’s because you’re bringing the same chip on your shoulder with you into every new job.

And we all think that we can manage outcomes. “I know what happened before but this time it’ll be different. I can handle it. It won’t trip me up this time.” And the Apostle Paul is saying, “Stop lying to yourself. In light of your past experiences, your past hangups, your predisposition to certain temptations, ***what is the wise thing to do?***”

That’s the beauty of this question; it makes what could be kind of ambiguous, and I’m not sure, and I don’t know why this keeps happening, crystal and sometimes painfully clear. Do you know the common denominator in every past relationship you’ve been in? It’s you! And if you’re getting the same results every time, it’s time to start asking: **In light of my past experiences, what is the wise thing to do?**

SLIDE

2. In light of my current circumstances, what is the wise thing to do?

You just got married. And when the fellas used to call, you could go anywhere and do anything at the drop of a hat. You used to go and take your two weeks to spend with them, it’s tradition. But you just got married and now it’s not just you in the mix when you make decisions. So, in light of your current circumstances, what’s the wise thing to do?

You just went through your first divorce. It was ugly, it was hard, you've been lonely for awhile and you're ready for something and somebody new. And you just met him, you just met her. Actually the divorce wasn't technically finalized when you met, there was a little bit of an overlap but let's not split hairs. In light of your current circumstances, in light of your current vulnerabilities, in light of your emotional and spiritual wellbeing, what's the wise thing to do?

You just started a new job.

You just moved to a new city.

You just had your first baby, second baby, third, or in our case in 3 months 4th baby.

This isn't a forever situation, but based on your current circumstances, what is the wise thing to do?

This is one that parents especially, we need to learn to be really good at. Because we talked through the 4 stages of parenting in our Family in Focus series, and the first 2 stages The Discipline Years and The Training Years actually require lots of discipline and training for us, the parents. Because these are the years we're teaching our children the concept of delayed gratification, but we need to be walking the talk with them as well.

Here's where another key phrase can come into play, "**No for now, but not forever.**" The first two stages are time consuming. Love right now for our kids 6 and under is spelled, T-I-M-E. So, Hannah and I have realized that because of the weight of these stages and how investing heavily timewise in our children now will hopefully pay off in the later stages, there are certain things that are "**No for now, but not forever.**"

When we first got married I used to travel and lead worship and speak all over the place and especially in the summers with students. I loved getting to travel and be in new places. I loved getting to lead worship with new groups and getting to preach and pour into students and their leaders. The year before we got married I spent 10 weeks traveling all over the south from Tennessee to Texas. The first year we were married I spent 6 weeks away. But the year that Mia was born I only traveled 2 weeks and I brought them with me. And for now, I don't travel to lead worship or speak unless it's either very short, or I can bring them with me. Because our current circumstances dictate that our children need that time. And some day, I may be able to do it again, but in this area it's, "**No for now, but not forever.**"

Yes, I know you played golf 3x a week for the last 5 years.

Yes, I know that your company always had you travel out of town at least one week a month.

Yes, I know you've always just been able to cram the night before and Ace the test but this is your GRE exam.

Yes, I know that you've always wanted that dream car and you've worked really hard for it, but it only seats 2 and there's no way a baby carrier is gonna fit in there.

Yes, I know you love to hunt, and fish, and it takes lots of hours to bring home the deer and crappie y'all love to eat.

Yes, I know you've been working so hard for this promotion and the expectation is you've got to put in the extra 60-80 hrs a week to prove that you can handle the added responsibilities. It's the only way to climb the corporate ladder.

Yes, I know that when you're feeling down a little retail therapy always perks you right up.

None of those things are bad, in and of themselves. But, in light of your current circumstances, what is the wise thing to do? Not forever, but for now with a new spouse, new kids on the way, new job, new sobriety, new family dynamics, a recent diagnosis, a parent needing more care... What is the wise thing to do?

These questions are meant to take what's kind of foggy and unsure, and bring shocking and maybe even unsettling clarity of what to do. So, what's happening currently in your life that needs to be a part of your considerations as you ask: What is the wise thing to do?

SLIDE

3. In light of my future hopes and dreams, what is the wise thing to do?

For a lot of us here, especially if you're over 30, we can look back on unwise decisions we have made and realize that it cost us a future hope or a dream. We've had friends who in the moment made a decision that cost them their future one way or another. How awful it is to trade your tomorrow for something today that you won't have tomorrow. How tragic is it to trade your future relationship for a relationship today you know is not going to last.

But this question maybe more than any of the others helps us to understand exactly what we should do. In light of our future hopes and dreams, what is the wise thing to do? And we've had friends who've said, "It'll all work out. I'm living in the moment. Hakuna Matata." And the furthest they've thought is 2 weeks ahead to the next paycheck.

In light of YOUR future hopes and dreams, what is the wise thing to do?

In light of the future relationship you want to have with your kids...

In light of not wanting just to make it to the end of your life together, hating and resenting your spouse but white knuckled committed to your marriage. But actually loving and enjoying each other for the rest of your lives...

In light of having a future that doesn't include bankruptcy, and a lifetime of debt but financial freedom...

In light of hoping someday not just to have a big bank account, surrounded by the bodies of everyone you trampled to get there and no one to enjoy it with...

In light of the story you hope to tell your future spouse when you talk about your dating past...

In light of the story you hope to tell your KIDS when you talk about your dating past...

In light of what you hope to accomplish with your limited time...

In light of the unique dreams that God has placed in your heart...

In light of His glorious calling on your life...

In light of what you have been gifted, trained, and sent out to do for the Kingdom of God...

In light of YOUR future hopes and dreams, what is the wise thing to do?

In all of these scenarios, I'm trying to give as many examples that I can to try and make it as clear as possible. Because that's what God wants for us! That's what Paul is commanding us to do. "***Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise.***"

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In light of my past experiences, my current circumstances, and my future hopes and dreams; what is the wise thing to do?

Nobody goes into their first marriage thinking about their 2nd or 3rd, they just don't plan not to. Nobody plans to go into bankruptcy, we just don't plan not to. Nobody plans to have an addiction, we just don't plan not to. And God has something so much better for us than that!

So, your homework for this week is to start asking yourself in every invitation, opportunity, or point of decision you come to, "***In light of my past experiences, my current circumstances, and my future hopes and dreams; what is the wise thing to do?***" And you don't have to act on it yet. Just start asking yourself the question. If you want extra credit, by all means when you find the answer, do it. But, let's just start asking yourself the question; "***What is the wise thing to do?***" And students, don't be shocked when it sounds eerily similar to what your parents have been saying. Husbands, wives, don't be shocked when it sounds very much like a conversation you had with your spouse.

And if you feel yourself start to push back against it, you've learned something too. If you feel the excuses start coming up, "But I can handle it... But they just don't understand... Sure, that happened to them but it won't happen to me..." If you feel that happening know that's an indicator that ***you don't have your best interest at heart.*** That's an indicator that you are starting to try and lie to yourself and choose foolishly. And next week we'll talk about what happens when you start to make that a habit.

Let's pray.