

“The Blessing Of New Life”

Ephesians- Blessed Beyond Belief- Part 7

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Introduction:

Ephesians 5:15-20

¹⁵ So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. ¹⁶ Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. ¹⁷ Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. ¹⁸ Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit, ¹⁹ singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. ²⁰ And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

4 Keys To A Vibrant Christianity:

1. Use Time Wisely

¹⁵ So be careful how you live. Don't live like fools, but like those who are wise. ¹⁶ Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. ¹⁷ Don't act thoughtlessly...

...So be careful how you live... Don't live like fools...Don't act thoughtlessly...

It is easy to walk through life with out a plan. It is easy to get up in the morning, go through our routine to start the day, try and survive at work, help with the kids and get through the evening only to start the same deal over again the next week. We are kind of conditioned to establish an auto-pilot setting in our minds to take us through the week.

But, Paul, here, is trying to shake his readers out of routine. He is trying to stimulate their alertness. He is trying to wake them up and cause them to think freshly about how they use their time. *Be careful in how you live. Don't just act without thinking... plan well... use your time wisely. Live as those who are alert, careful, thoughtful, and make the most of every opportunity...because these days are evil...others will not have the same priorities as you... you cannot let culture dictate how you live... you must act with wisdom!*

I just finished an excellent book this week. One of the principles the author was talking about was that to use time wisely- we need to focus our energies in “our top 5 percent” of priorities. What he taught was this: 85% of the things that we spend most of our time on- anyone can do. They may be things that need done...but they aren’t things that we are uniquely called to do. Another 10% of the things we spend most of our time on are things that someone else could do with a little training. Maybe not anyone could do them...but they aren’t things that you necessarily have to do either—you could train someone else.

However, 5% of what we do are things that God has called only use to do. These are things that we are uniquely qualified to do...uniquely called to do...or perhaps uniquely responsible to fulfill.

For instance:

- Only I can push myself forward to grow in my spiritual journey. No one else can do that for me. I am responsible for that.
- Only I can be a father to my children and a husband to my wife.
- At this point in time God has called me to pastor ClearView- there are some things I must focus on in that role.
- Only I can care for my body.

You get the point. The problem is this: life crowds out the top 5%. The other 95% of things that anyone could do or anyone could do with some training many times get in the way of focusing energy on what is most important—on what you are uniquely qualified to do.

¹⁵ So be careful how you live. Don’t live like fools, but like those who are wise. ¹⁶ Make the most of every opportunity in these evil days. ¹⁷ Don’t act thoughtlessly...

Here’s the point-- *What is your “top 5 percent”?* If you discover this, you’re going to be on target to live wisely. You’re going to make the most of every opportunity because you will know what is important and you won’t miss key opportunities because you’re living lackadaisically.

Application: From Wayne Cordeiro (*Leading On Empty*, pp. 76-82):

- *What is your “top 5 percent”?*
- *Use these as anchors for your soul. This is what you focus on in good and hard times. When hard times, your center is not toppled. You know where to focus to get back on track. You can still focus on and be successful in what is most important- even if your circumstances are not ideal.*

2. Find God's Will

17b...but understand what the Lord wants you to do.

Ephesians 5:10:

¹⁰ Carefully determine what pleases the Lord.

I want to ask you a simple question. It is simple...but it has profound implications. **How do you start your day?** Do you roll out of bed and let the day come at you and see what happens? Or, perhaps you are intentional with what you will do and how you will do it. If that's you- my question for you is- **who determines your agenda?**

What if the first thing we did when we woke up was to sit up, swing our feet out over the bed, pause for a moment and simply pray, "Lord, what do you want me to do today...what would please you?" We ought to be asking that question every morning. At some point, early in the day, before the kids wake up...before work...before a workout...before eating...yes...even before coffee...alright... you can do this with coffee ☺... **"Lord, what do you want me to do today...what would please you?"**

If we were to do this...and listen to God's response...it would change our lives and we would live with intention.

We need to learn to live with intention. Life is not best lived by reacting to whatever comes our way or making decisions mostly by what we think will please other people or by allowing our selfish inclinations to be our guide—we must intentionally take the time to ask God what He wants and then live that way.

From Wayne Cordeiro (*Leading On Empty*, pp.159-161):

There are four basic courses by which we can live. These may not be planned, but they will be followed... Every life follows a set of rules, a default of ideals...I had to look at each one individually and intentionally choose my route. So will you. This one choice will alter your future once and for all, and opting out will default you to one of the first three.

1. *A Life of Reaction. With this paradigm, we plod forward until something forces us to change direction. The loss of one job compels us to find another.*
2. *A Life of Conformity. This is the person that makes decisions based on what culture says is right or based on what he/she perceives those around them to think is best. They are living to please people.*
3. *A Life of Independence. This is the person that makes decisions based on what they think will set them apart from the crowd...but usually they end up just hanging out with others that also want to be separate. This is the kid with purple hair at school that end up hanging out with the kid with pink hair.*
4. *A Life of Intentionality. This is the person that starts the day with the simple prayer: "Lord, what do you want me to do today...what would please you?"*

They spend some time with God in Scripture and prayer and they come away with a picture of what God wants from them for the day.

Romans 12:1-2

¹ And so, dear brothers and sisters,^[a] I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.^[b] ² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Try it. Ask this question tomorrow morning: **“Lord, what do you want me to do today...what would please you?”** Ask it when you encounter a problem. Ask it when you're in a difficult conversation and a relationship is in jeopardy. Ask it when you get your paycheck and you are making choices about how to spend it. Ask it when your kid disobeys. Ask it when deciding what to watch on TV.

See, if we follow Romans 12:1-2... if we dedicate our whole body to the Lord...if we move away from the world and allow God to change our thinking/our worldview by spending time in the Bible and prayer and worship and with godly people...this question: **“Lord, what do you want me to do today...what would please you?”**—We'll hear answers. You will know what God wants...you'll be able to carefully determine what pleases the Lord.

3. Listen To The Holy Spirit

¹⁸ Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit,

This is one of the most important instructions in the Bible. I feel that strongly about it. I think, right here, in this verse is one of the greatest keys to living a successful Christian life.

It is interesting that Paul makes an analogy between being drunk and being filled with the Holy Spirit. However, this is actually helpful because the analogy gives us a clue into what Paul was talking about with the instruction “be filled” with the Holy Spirit.

We commonly think of this as “filling” like you would fill up your cup of ice with Pepsi Max or your favorite summer drink. But, Paul can't mean this because the Bible says elsewhere that we are “indwelt” by the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:13b:

And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own^[a] by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.

When we believed in Christ and God gave us the Holy Spirit... *He didn't give us just part of the Holy Spirit.* He gave all of the Holy Spirit to us. You can't be partially indwelt... in one sense—you are “full” of the all of the Holy Spirit because you accepted Jesus as the Forgiver and Leader of your life.

So, we come back to the analogy between drunkenness and being filled with the Holy Spirit. The issue here is not the “amount of filling” but the “amount of control” we give the Holy Spirit in our lives. When someone is drunk, their ability to control their functions is diminished. They loose control. In one sense the alcohol is controlling them. A drunk has given control of his life to a substance.

Instead, God's plan is that we be “filled” or better—“controlled” by the Holy Spirit. Paul is teaching us to constantly (the verb here is one of continual action) allow our senses and our words and our thoughts and our actions- every conscious part of our being- to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. My selfish nature... my old sinful patters are to no longer be my guide. I am to be under the influence of God's Spirit.

This portrait of spiritual discipline is fully painted in **Galatians 5:16-24**:

16 So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. *17 The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. **These two forces are constantly fighting each other**, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.* *18 But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.*

19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

22 But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. *25 Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives.* *26 Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another.*

Paul is teaching his Galatian readers that there is a battle waging in their hearts. Any time there is a decision to make, a comment to respond to, an issue in a relationship, how you spend your money, what you look at on your computer when no one is around, how you treat your spouse... there is a battle raging inside of you between your sinful nature and the Holy Spirit. Your sinful nature wants to lead you down a path of selfishness. Your sinful nature wants you to use the world as your guide. Your sinful nature wants you to do what feels good.

But, the Holy Spirit is leading you down a path of selflessness. A path of submitting to God's ways. A path of obedience to Jesus. A path of righteousness, kindness, graciousness, love, forgiveness, etc.

There is a battle waging inside of you. ***To whom/what are you going to give control?*** When the tension is rising in a conversation with my wife- I have a choice- follow my sinful nature or follow the Holy Spirit. When I am angry with my kids- I have a choice- follow my sinful nature and sin in how I discipline them... or follow the Holy Spirit... There are other... more subtle times we are led by the Holy Spirit...but our flesh gets in the way....

Illustration about talking with Debbie and praying with her at the bus garage.

To whom/what are you going to give control?

4. Exude Thanksgiving

¹⁹ singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts. ²⁰ And give thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Think about this...put this all together. Picture a person that is using their time wisely. They have found God's will for their lives and living intentionally- alive with purpose. They are walking in tune with the Holy Spirit and thriving with the joy of living righteously- in tune with God's desires for their lives. Add to this the picture of a person that lives with a thankful heart. They exude thanksgiving. You can see joy on their face- even in challenging circumstances- because they know deep in their hearts that they are blessed.

We have so much to be thankful for. We are so blessed that many times we become immune to thanksgiving. What I mean is that we are so blessed- many times we don't even realize it. We become callous to how blessed we are and forget to be thankful.

Check out this video: [Thankful](#)

I love this video because it reminds us of how much we have to be thankful for physically. It is easy to forget how blessed we are.

But, even more importantly- **We have so much to be thankful for spiritually!** We read this passage during our first message in this series. But, with this context— thinking of our **spiritual blessings**- listen to **Ephesians 1:3-8:**

³ **All praise** to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who has blessed** us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ. ⁴ Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. ⁶ **So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us** who belong to his dear Son. ⁷ He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. ⁸ He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.

All praise... So we praise God for the glorious grace He has poured out on us...
We have been blessed with every spiritual blessing. We must be thankful!

Now notice this. You are blessed—even if you are having a tough time right now. Many of us are saying- “Well, how can I be thankful when I have this... my nagging health concern, or someone I love is hurting, or my marriage is in a tough place right now... or I want something that I can’t have... Or I’ve got these bills I can’t pay...

So much of life is skewed by our perspective. The thing about these blessings is that they are **true despite our circumstances**. Even if you are facing trials right now...even if life is not ideal... all of these physical and spiritual blessings are still in place. We have much to be thankful for!

Add to this the truth-- **We can even be thankful for trials... for what God is doing to us and through us:**

James 1:2-4

² Dear brothers and sisters,^[a] when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. ³ For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. ⁴ So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

So- are you living with thanksgiving? What do people see when they see you? What do people hear when they hear you speak? Are they blessed by your positivity? Are they encouraged by the fact that you can be thankful- you can celebrate your blessings- even when life is not perfect? Do they hear you praising God and counting your blessings...even when you are hurting?

Thankful people are the type of people that others are drawn to. Joyful people- people that understand how blessed they are even in desperate circumstances- are the type of people I want to be friends with. No one wants to be around Sally Sulking or Donny Downer. But, when we exude thanksgiving—when we become known as people that can be joyful and thankful for God’s blessings even if God is allowing trials in our lives—**these are the people that have a real shot at introducing others to Jesus—because people will want what you have!**