

Title: Living Wisely
Text: Ephesians 5:15-20
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‘Awake my soul and sing’

‘Awake my soul and sing. You were made to meet your maker.’

In his letter to the Ephesians, with a sense of urgency, Paul issues this challenge:

Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.
(Ephesians 5:14)

Wake up, O sleeper. Awake my soul and sing.

For a few months now we have been diving into this Paul’s wonderfully inspiring, practical and eloquent letter to the church around the ancient city of Ephesus. This is where we are up to. He has urged them to wake up. In the course of human history, they live in the ‘last days’. It is the last scene of the movie, the final stanza of the poem, the concluding act of the play. They cannot fall to sleep now. Let’s read together the next six verses:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
(Ephesians 5:15-20)

Paul begins this part of his argument with the phrase, ‘be careful, then, how you live.’ Another way of translating Paul’s challenge is ‘watch carefully how you walk.’ Paul is saying that if life is a journey, on either side of the path we walk are potential dangers - hidden drops. So choose where you place your feet – watch carefully, precisely, with close attention.

For Paul, a careful person is a wise person. An unwise person will rush unthinking into the future, while a wise person will move into the future with all their senses attuned for the dangers and possibilities it holds.

Paul gives us four markers of a wise person. First:

A wise person makes the most of their time

Paul says, ‘make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.’

A wise person lives by the Latin dictum – Carpe Diem – Seize the Day. A wise person sucks the marrow out of life, believing that every moment of every day is pregnant with possibilities to serve and glorify God.

The phrase, ‘make the most of every opportunity’, is translated from the Greek words, exagorazo kairos.

Exagorazo means to redeem or buy back.

Kairos means time, specifically a moment or season in time.

Paul is saying, buy up and buy back every available moment of God-given time. Don’t waste a day, and hour or a second. Time is the most precious of commodities – treat it as a gift of God to be stewarded.

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Buy up every opportunity to learn, to serve, to grow, to love, to glorify God.

Jonathon Edwards was the person through whom God brought a Great Awakening to 18th century America. Before he had turned 21, Edwards had written out 70 resolutions which he committed to live by for the rest of his life. One of them reads this:

Resolved: Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.

How much time do I waste on trivial, inconsequential things? How many opportunities do I lose to improve, or buy back time for the purposes and glory of God?

In the scheme of eternity, the time we spend on the fragile planet is infinitesimally small. The years we enjoy these bodies is a blink of an eye. But God has given, numbered these days as a gift to be treasured. What we do with the time we are given has eternal consequences for us and others. Amy Carmichael, who was an Irish missionary to India, said this:

We will have eternity to celebrate the victories, but only a few hours before sunset to win them.
(Amy Carmichael)

A wise person makes the most of every opportunity. A wise community also makes the most of every God-given opportunity.

Time to Build

Earlier this year we embarked on the long-term goal we have had to expand our facilities here at Robina. The plans for those extensions are out in the foyer. In June we announced an 'only God' result as 280 individuals and families in our church gave and pledged \$3.7 million to our Time to Build Vision.

I am so excited to update you on where we are up to.

First, in the next week or so we are planning to submit detailed plans for our building extension for approval with the Gold Coast City Council. We have already had some preliminary meetings with council officers which have gone exceedingly well. The reason we can submit these plans is because of the dedicated work of our building committee lead by Doug Mayes and which includes our Project Officer, Con Graves our Architect, Leon Reynicke and Melissa Lipsett.

Second, we will be putting out to tender our plans to building companies in January next year. We plan to choose a preferred builder by no later than March.

Third, in March next year we will be presenting all of our final plans and financial modeling to the Synod Finance and Property Board for their approval. Without their approval we will not be able to start building.

This leads to the fourth and most critical date. We plan to start building works in April 2012, as soon as possible after our Easter services. If we are able start building in April we believe it will be possible for us to move into our newly completed facilities before Christmas next year. Praise God!

Alongside all of this activity has been Time to Build Capital campaign.

As I said before, in June we celebrated an 'only God' result when we received a total of \$3.7 million in gifts and pledges over three years. Can I say again that I am humbled by your incredible faith and generosity?

I am thrilled to let you know that we are ahead of budget in terms of gifts received so far. Let me explain.

For the financial year of 2011/2012 the total amount of pledges is \$986,432. As at the end of October we have already received approximately \$352,000. Fantastic!

The biggest hurdle still we face in convincing the Finance and Property Board to give us final approval to go ahead will be having enough money in the bank to convince them that the pledges we have received are real and will come over the next three years. This leads to two requests I would make of all of you:

- If you have one of the 280 families and individuals who have pledged already, if you are able to meet your some of the pledge you have made for this year now, this would help us enormously. Simply put, the more money we have in the bank sooner, the better story we have to tell the Finance and Property board.
- You may not have pledged to Time to Build. You may be new to our church or not here during our campaign. You may be wondering what the heck we are talking about. You may have been unsure of the building program or your ability to give to it. If you are in any of those categories, can I encourage you to still prayerfully consider making a pledge? I sincerely don't want anyone to miss out on this fantastic opportunity to join in this mirade God is doing in our midst. If you haven't already received one, we have the Time to Build packs available in the foyer and at the Info desk today.

Child Care Centre

The second opportunity our church is making the most of is located the Isle of Capri. One of the original churches that came together to form this congregation was the Isle of Capri Uniting Church. We still have the use of that property which for many years now has been leased out as a large child care centre. That lease income has supported many of the ministry initiatives of our church.

The long term lease on that property runs out in December this year. As has been indicated at congregational meetings, we have been asking ourselves whether we should renew that lease. Recently the Elders decided we would not renew the lease and that we would seek to take over the license to run the child care centre as a ministry of this church. So, subject to various approvals, from January 2012 we will be running a child care centre.

Our vision is to establish a Christian Child care centre that will be another centre of ministry of our church, linking in with various programs of our community, as well as Newlife Care. The centre will also continue to contribute financially to other ministries in and through our church.

The Elders have appointed a fantastic child care centre management committee made up of Newlife members. We have engaged Wesley Mission, who run eight child care centers in Queensland, to assist us. Over the last week we have been meeting with centre staff, including the director and in coming weeks we will be making staff appointments – 18 or so in all.

There is a lot more I could share. You probably have lots of questions. Next Sunday we will have available a letter that gives you more information about Time to Build, the child care centre, as well as other exciting news in the life of our church.

For now, please pray! Thank God for the opportunities that he is opening up for us. As God to continue to guide us and that he would grant us wisdom to take right steps - that we would do his will. Pray that we will make the most of every opportunity he presents us.

A wise person chases after the will of God

Paul says, 'do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.'

When we talk about the will of God we are talking about two things.

The general will of God for all Christians, for all of his sons and daughters, is that day by day they are conformed to the image of his son – that we become more like Jesus. This is the general will of God for all of us.

But then there is the particular will of God that is unique to each individual. God has equipped each of us differently – we have different gifts, personalities and backgrounds which enable us to serve God in particular ways. In the Basis of Union of the uniting Church it says that for each person there is no gift without its corresponding service. If this is true, and I believe it is, then one of

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the most important commitments we will make in this life is to identify our unique and God-given gifts and then use them in the particular service opportunities that God provides us. This is the 'particular will of God' for each of us. John Stott puts it this way:

Nothing is more important in life than to discover and then do the will of God.
(John Stott)

One of my favorite metaphors for the Christian life is that it is an unfolding adventure. It is an adventure in that only as we journey do we see where it is that we are going, what it is that is around the next corner. On that journey we will come to crossroads where we will need to choose which way to turn; whether we will align our life with God's will or our own will. For Paul, a foolish person will go their own way, while the wise person will choose the road less traveled – the way of God. CS Lewis, as always, puts it far better than me:

There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.'
(C.S. Lewis)

A wise person discerns and then walks in the will of God, and:

A wise person is (continually) filled with the Spirit

Paul says, 'Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.'

We know there were problems with drunkenness and worship in the early church. In the church in Corinth some of the rich believers would get to church early, drink all the communion wine until they were completely smashed. Not a good look!

Very popular also in the 1st century Roman Empire were the mystery cults that worshipped the Greek god of the grape harvest, Dionysus. In many of these cults, getting drunk was seen as a way of opening up the mind the mysteries of the gods.

Again, Paul is contrasting the wise and foolish person.

The foolish person will get drunk on wine. They will come under the influence of alcohol.

The wise person will fill their life with God. They will come under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The foolish person will become so addicted to wine they will get drunk again and again and again.

The wise person will so thirst for God; they will seek to be filled again and again and again with God's Holy Spirit.

Under the influence of alcohol, a foolish person will lose control. If you don't believe me, just head into Cavil avenue any Saturday night or during schoolies.

Under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the wiser person will gain control. The Holy Spirit will so illuminate their lives they will be able to discern the will of God and walk in God's ways.

The foolish person will find their senses dulled by alcohol. They will find their appetite for life suppressed.

The wise person, filled with the Holy Spirit, will have their senses stimulated. Their eyes will be opened more and more to the wonder and majesty of God. The first century Jewish philosopher Philo said this:

When grace fills the soul, that soul thereby rejoices and smiles and dances, for it is possessed and inspired.
(Philo)

Some appetites we have to keep in check because left unchecked they lead to unhealthy consequences. For example, I love fruit tingles. What is not to love? The way tall the sugar and artificial colors and flavors explode on your tongue – wow! But as good as they are, I know that too many fruit tingles and I will be a very sick boy, not to mention just a little hyper.

There is one appetite that should grow and grow and grow in us – our appetite for God.

Paul says be filled with the spirit – again and again and again and again. Be greedy for one thing only, for one person only – be greedy for God!

A wise person is continually filled with the Holy Spirit, and finally:

A wise person is always thankful

Paul says, ‘Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything.’ He encourages them to do this with singing – with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs – with melody on their lips and in their hearts.

In Romans, Paul suggests that it is a failure of gratitude, a failure to express thanksgiving to God that is one of the root causes of all sin. This is what he says of the sinful or foolish person:

Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

(Romans 1:21)

Think back to the story of Creation and of Adam and Eve. When God saw all that he had made , he declared it to be ‘very good.’ But after Adam and Eve were formed we never read of an occasion before they ate of the forbidden fruit where they expressed gratitude to God. Not once do we hear them say, ‘This paradise, this playground you have given us is very good, God – thanks!’ Now they may well have – we just don’t read it.

Paul specifically encourages the Ephesians and us to express thanksgiving to God through worship in song. He says, ‘Sing and make music in your heart.’

He speaks of a variety of musical forms:

Psalms are praise songs with musical accompaniment. The cognate verb of Psalmos means to ‘pluck a string’!

Hymns are liturgical songs that express and declare truth about God.

Spiritual songs are spontaneous songs from the heart. There are times in worship where the band will play and where space and encouragement will be given for us to sing spiritual songs to God from our heart. Some of us will do that with the gift of speaking in tongues.

Paul’s point is this; sing loud, sing creatively, sing with variety and sing often – sing to God and each other.

When we worship God in song we do three things:

First, we express adoration of and for God. We give God the honor and glory that is due his name. As Christians a key object of our worship is Jesus. We worship Jesus for who he is and what he has done for us.

Second, we edify. We sing to God and each other and as we do we encourage one another. Ralph reminded us at 12two last week that to encourage is to speak courage into another person’s life. When we sing, we wing courage into one another. It is even possible to sing encouragement to ourselves. Have you ever found yourself in the car singing to yourself and finding your spirits lifted?

There is a true story of an 85 year old Catholic Nun who got trapped inside a broken elevator for four nights and three days. She tried pushing the inside elevator door, but the electricity went off. Her mobile phone had no signal. Fortunately, she had with her a bottle of water, some celery sticks, and a few cough drops. Let me read the rest of the story:

At first she said to herself, *'This can't happen!'* But then she decided to turn her elevator into a personal prayer retreat. "It was either panic or pray," she later told an interviewer for CNN. She started viewing the experience as a "gift." "I believe that God's presence was my strength and my joy—really," she said. "I felt God's presence almost immediately. I felt like he provided the opportunity for a closer relationship."

Some of us may be feeling stuck in a broken down elevator of difficult circumstances. We have a choice to make. Will we panic or pray; will we sing or sulk. Paul says to sing thanksgiving to God always. The counter-intuitive thing to do in difficult circumstances is to sing and pray – but what growth and peace there can be on the other side!

In worship we adore God, we edify others, and we declare war.

In worship we declare the goodness and greatness of God and we declare war on the enemies of God. We declare war on evil. When the people of God sing, the devil shakes and evil stumbles.

For a few years now we have been praying for our brothers and sisters in Fiji. Fiji is currently ruled by an unelected military government. This government has cracked down on the Methodist Church, harassed its leaders and limited its work. One of the first signs of the government crackdown on the church was the cancelling of a choir contest. Every year before the Methodist Conference a choir contest is held. Ten thousand singers gather to sing the great Methodist hymns.

But in July 2009, the government shut them down. "No choral contest this year," the government said. The government feared that the big crowd might get out of hand. According to news reports:

"Church officials said the government fears the conference and singing contest will lead to further political instability."

Nothing like singing Methodists to make a government nervous!

Nothing like a singing church to make the devil shiver!

Singing is spiritual warfare. There are weeks here at church when our singing is so spirit-fueled you literally sing spiritual courage into me so that when I preach I am ready to go, I can't wait, I'm bursting to preach Good News and to take on the devil. Our singing should NEVER be a lazy way to open a service – it sets the scene for all that is to come. Our singing helps set the spiritual temperature of the service.

So, for Paul – a wiser person makes the most of every opportunity, chases after the will of God, is continually seeking to be filled with the Holy Spirit and lives a life of gratitude and thanksgiving.

So, how wise are you?