Walking Wisely

Believers are to walk wisely, depending on the Holy Spirit for direction.

EPHESIANS 5:15-21

MEMORY VERSE: Ephesians 5:18

READ Ephesians 5:15-21, First Thoughts (p. 114), and Understand the Context (p. 114). As you read, reflect on how much (or how little) you think about the Holy Spirit, compared to the attention you give the other two Persons of the Trinity.

STUDY Ephesians 4:17-32, using Explore the Text on pages 115–119. Spend time reviewing the Key Doctrine (Holy Spirit) on page 103 of the PSG. Look up the other verses related to the Holy Spirit in the Bible Skill section (PSG, p. 105). For more study helps, consult the Explore the Bible Adult Commentary, found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com.

PLAN the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 120–121). Tailor the plans for your group using More Ideas (p. 122) and Weekly Adult Extras under the Resources tab at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Consider how to implement the Suggested Music Idea (p. 122).

GAIN insights from the weekly podcast on Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/ExploreTheBible).

GATHER the following items: □ Personal Study Guides. Prepare to display the following Pack Item: □ PACK ITEM 4 (Poster: Ephesians 2: Old and New). Make copies of: □ PACK ITEM 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark); and □ PACK ITEM 13 (Handout: The Trinity in Ephesians).
FIRST THOUGHTS

If you were traveling in an unknown remote area and could select only one form of navigational help, which would you choose? Would you prefer a map, a GPS device, or an experienced guide who had frequently traveled that area and was thoroughly acquainted with it? The wise choice would be a personal guide who possessed complete understanding to reveal the best path for you.

(In PSG, p 100) Who or what do you consult when planning a trip? How do you know this is a trustworthy source?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 5:15-21

Paul made a contrast in this passage between those who are drunk on alcohol and those who are filled with the Holy Spirit. This is not the only time in the Bible this comparison is made. On the day of Pentecost, some thought that Peter and the other followers of Jesus were drunk even though it was morning (Acts 2:13-15). In the Old Testament, when Hannah went to the house of God to pray for a child, Eli the priest thought that she was drunk because he saw her mouth moving but he heard no words (1 Sam. 1:13).

The Bible warns against drunkenness. Some of the physical symptoms mentioned in Scripture are: staggering (Ps. 107:27), vomiting (Isa. 19:14), and hallucinations (Prov. 23:33). A much more serious side effect of drunkenness was that it deadened a person’s sensitivity to God (Isa. 5:11-12). Caution against the use of alcohol was given because of the effects of drunkenness.

Some of those mentioned as drunk in the Bible include Noah (Gen. 9:21), Lot (Gen. 19:33), Nabal (1 Sam. 25:36), Uriah the Hittite (2 Sam. 11:13), King Elah of Israel (1 Kings 16:9) and Ben-hadad (1 Kings 20:16). In each of these cases misfortune fell upon them either in their drunken state or shortly after they recuperated. Therefore, the Bible clearly prohibits drunkenness throughout its pages (Lev. 10:9; Deut. 21:20; Prov. 23:29-35; 1 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18). Being filled with wine brought negative consequences, but being filled with the Spirit brought the opposite.

The Holy Spirit came upon the early church believers in Acts 2:1-4. This was the initial outpouring of God’s Spirit upon believers. Peter and the other believers were later described as being filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). When God initially poured out His Spirit upon the Gentiles, they were filled with the Spirit in a similar fashion as the believers on the day of Pentecost (Acts 10:47). The church had entered a new covenant with God through Jesus’ blood, and they had a new relationship with God through the indwelling Spirit.

KEY DOCTRINE

Holy Spirit

At the moment of regeneration the Holy Spirit baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ (Gal. 4:6).

BIBLE SKILL

Read passages to create a summary statement.

Read Luke 1:15,41,67; Acts 2:4; 4:8,31; 9:17; and 13:9,52, looking for what each passage teaches about the filling of the Holy Spirit. Are these one-time experiences or something that is repeated over time? Are these experiences that are earned or given freely by God? What are the results of the Holy Spirit’s filling in these verses? Write a summary statement based on what you discover.
EXPLORE THE TEXT

BE WISE (EPH. 5:15-17)

VERSE 15
After contrasting light and darkness (Eph. 5:6-14), Paul shifted to a contrast of wisdom and folly. He provided a solemn encouragement to believers to *pay careful attention* to how they lived. The word translated *pay attention* is the Greek word for *see*. Paul combined this word with a word that meant “careful,” “accurately,” or “carefully.” This was the same word used to describe the care that a judge would take in making an investigation. Paul was encouraging deep introspection of one’s life to make sure it reflected the changes God had made in the salvation experience. We are to reflect on the way we live.

Paul encouraged his readers to walk *not as unwise people but as wise*. Walking in wisdom was a central theme of Proverbs (Prov. 1:7). The foolish person lived recklessly, flaunting his foolishness and associating with those who were living foolishly. He despised the wisdom of the Lord. However, the wise person made wisdom his diligent pursuit (Prov. 2:1-5).

How could a person obtain such wisdom? Proverbs stated that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7). Certainly wisdom for living begins with a proper relationship with the Lord through faith in Christ. James wrote that whoever lacked wisdom should ask the Lord for it (Jas. 1:5). In other words, wisdom is a gift of God given to those in relationship with the Lord and willing to ask for it. Furthermore, Paul taught that all the treasures of wisdom are found in the Lord Jesus Christ (Col. 2:3). A believer does not have to live the foolish life but can live a life based on the wisdom of the Lord. As Paul stated in Colossians, Christians should “act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time” (Col. 4:5).

**Why would wisdom only be found in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ?**

VERSE 16
Wise living is really *making the most of the time*. The older translation, *redeeming the time*, is a proper translation of the Greek used in the verse. Paul used the word that meant “to purchase,” “to buy,” or “to redeem.” Though the idea of purchasing time is not a common theme in Scripture, it does occur in Daniel 2:8, where Nebuchadnezzar accused his advisors of trying to buy time to figure out his dream since they did not know its interpretation. Though not associated with time, Paul used the verb also in Galatians, where he described redemption from the law. He said Christ “redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13). Rather than gaining time as in Daniel, the emphasis here was to set someone free from what
held him or her back. This is probably the emphasis of Paul when it comes
to *making the most of the time*. Instead of allowing time to be wasted or used
for evil, we are to use time for good purposes.

The reason for the need to redeem the time is that *the days are evil.*
Typical Jews in Paul’s day divided time into the present evil age and the
age to come. They saw the current days as tainted by the fall of man. For
that reason, they were living in an evil age. Two Greek words were available
to Paul as he spoke of time. He could have used one that referred to
chronological time or one that referred to an opportune time. He used the
latter one in this passage. He was looking for the time when the Messiah
would come and ultimately begin a new era of time where everything was
redeemed by His hand. Until that time believers were to make the most of
every opportunity they had rather than getting swept into the darkness
that surrounded them (Eph. 5:6-8).

**What are practical ways you can redeem the time?**

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**VERSE 17**

17 So don’t be foolish,
but understand what
the Lord’s will is.

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**VERSE 17**

One of the ways we can make the most of every opportunity is to
understand how God would want us to live in a world that is fallen and
dominated by evil. Paul again encouraged the Ephesians not to be *foolish.*
This is a different word than the one used for the unwise in verse 15. It
appears seventy-four times in Proverbs to contrast the fool with the one
who walks in the ways of the Lord. Proverbs describes the foolish person as
lazy (24:30), loose-tongued (18:6-7); quick-tempered (14:29), and reckless
(14:16), among other things.

By focusing on the small, everyday decisions about how
to live, Christians will place themselves in positions to
discern His will about the big, major decisions of life.

Rather than being *foolish,* Paul encouraged believers to *understand
what the Lord’s will is.* Often, people think of the Lord’s will in terms of
the major decisions of life such as one’s college, career, or lifetime spouse.
This is not what Paul intended in this verse. The will of God included the
things God had already revealed in His Word about how believers were to
live. Since *Lord* consistently refers to Jesus in Ephesians, it is probable that
Paul was encouraging the Ephesians to live according to the teachings of
Christ. Like in Romans, he was encouraging them to pattern their lives
after Jesus in every area, not merely the unknown areas of life (Rom. 8:29).
By focusing on the small, everyday decisions about how to live, Christians
will place themselves in positions to discern His will about the big, major
decisions of life.
BE FILLED (EPH. 5:18)

VERSE 18
When talking about living wisely, Paul encouraged Christians not to get drunk with wine. Though drunkenness was commonly a part of Roman culture and pagan worship, it was never accepted in Scripture. Believers need to be under the control of the Holy Spirit, not under the influence of alcohol. The influence of alcohol led to reckless living. This term had the basic idea of “wastefulness.” This negative characteristic stood in contrast to those who were making the most of the time (Eph. 5:16). It was the term used of the prodigal son when he took his early inheritance and squandered it on reckless excess (Luke 15:13). Drunkenness wastes time and opportunity. It leads to other sins because it causes a person to lose control.

Instead of being drunk with wine, Paul commanded believers to be filled by the Spirit. This is not for only a select few who want to go deeper with God or those who have achieved some higher degree of spirituality. This is a command for every believer. On the day of Pentecost, when believers were filled with the Spirit, others thought they were drunk with wine (Acts 2:13-15). Just as alcohol influences the behavior of the drunk person, the Holy Spirit influences the behavior of those who are filled by Him.

The infinitive is a present, passive infinitive, meaning that it is something continual (“keep on being filled”) and something God does, not something we achieve or merit. As a believer cooperates and surrenders to God, He fills him with His Spirit.

Verse 18 makes the contrast started in verse 15, where Paul compared the wise person with the unwise person. An unwise person yields himself to alcohol, and it consumes his behavior, causing him to lose restraint and live recklessly. A wise person yields himself to God, and He fills him with the Holy Spirit, producing wise behavior and strong character.

(In PSG, p. 105) How does being controlled by the Holy Spirit compare to and contrast to being controlled by alcohol?

BE GENUINE (EPH. 5:19-21)

VERSE 19
A result of the filling of the Holy Spirit is praise and thanksgiving directed to the Lord. The phrase speaking to one another implies the idea of communicating and expressing love for the Lord. Believers filled with the Spirit of God address one another with praise to God. Paul mentioned three types of songs. The first is psalms. Psalms referred to the songs collected in the Old Testament Book of Psalms. These were meant to be sung together in public worship. Other expressions of worship in song were called hymns. This traditionally was a festive lyric ascribed to the praise of
a hero or god, but in this case the hymn would have been directed toward God and Jesus. Those filled with the Spirit also worshiped with spiritual songs. These could have been spontaneous expressions of praise from the heart (1 Cor. 14:15). Spirit-filled believers do not battle over the types of songs, for there is plenty of room for diverse types and styles. The point of the singing songs of praise is not the musical style but the One who is the object of our worship.

The Spirit-filled believer is to be singing and making music in his or her heart to the Lord. The worship of Spirit-filled believers has both a horizontal and vertical dimension. Some songs were sung to one another to edify and build each other up in the faith. Other songs were sung to the Lord as a prayer or direct expression of praise. Those who include only one of these foci in worship miss out on one of the important dimensions of worship.

What practical value are songs that are sung to each other about the Lord? What is the value of singing songs directly in praise to the Lord?

A grumbling spirit is not in concert with the Holy Spirit’s filling.

VERSE 20

20 giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Paul emphasized that Spirit-filled believers will be submitting to one another. The word submit occurs in Paul’s writing twenty-three times, and it usually denotes subordination to those who are worthy of respect. This could include civil authorities, parents, church leaders, and masters of slaves. This verse may be what leads to Paul’s discussion of the family in the following verses (Eph. 5:22–6:9). Submission is not a natural tendency of the flesh, but it is an important action that keeps order in the church and in society. Though today the English term submit is often mentioned in a pejorative way and is seen as a weakness, it is a valued characteristic in the kingdom of God. It was also valued in both the military and political life of the Roman Empire. Without mutual submission, chaos would reign.

Those who are subject to Jesus Christ do not find it difficult to submit themselves to one another.

This mutual submission of believers to another is done in the fear of Christ. It is not done horizontally, as one believer is forced to submit to another, but it is done vertically. As people made right with God and filled with the Spirit, they place themselves in the proper relationship to one another. Those who are subject to Jesus Christ do not find it difficult to submit themselves to one another. In Ephesians 5:2, Paul had told the Ephesians, “walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.” If Christ had willingly submitted Himself to them for their salvation, how could they not willingly submit themselves to one another as the reverenced Christ?

To live wisely, a person needs to fear Christ. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 1:7). The fear of the Lord is the basis of loving God with the heart, soul, and mind (Deut. 6:2–9). The fear of the Lord provides protection (Prov. 14:26), wisdom (Prov. 15:33), life (Prov. 19:23), wealth and honor (Prov. 22:4). It is the basic building block of church and society. Where the fear of the Lord is absent, disorder and chaos reign, whether it is in society, in the church, or in the family. In Christ, all pride and all feelings of superiority vanish. As the Spirit of Christ fills each believer, their self-assertive spirit should be replaced by a desire to work in harmony with others.

What is the opposite of submission to one another?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: Direct the group to read the scenario (PSG, p. 100). Then, explain that the left side of your meeting room is “Map,” the right side is “Experienced Guide,” and the middle is “GPS.” On your signal, instruct the group to move to whichever place represents their choice for navigation. Give volunteers an opportunity to explain their response.

EXPLAIN: Our desire for an experienced guide increases with the “degree of difficulty” of what we’re attempting. If you’re driving to your sister’s new house for Thanksgiving, you’re probably OK with the GPS. But if you’re scaling Mt. Everest, you want the best guide available.

ASK: How would you rate the “degree of difficulty” in living a wise life?

TRANSITION: Today’s Scripture passage highlights the difficulty of living wisely, but it also assures us that we have constant access to the greatest Guide we could hope for!

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Ephesians 5:15-17. Write the word WISE in large letters on the board or a sheet of paper. Call for descriptors of a wise person.

ASK: What would you include on this list, based solely on what you see in verses 15-17?

EXPLAIN: Remark how we often use the same words to describe what to do with time as we do for what to do with money (examples: spend, save, invest, waste, squander). Why do you think that is? Highlight from the PSG (p. 102): Time is actually more valuable because of its scarcity.

ASK: Describe the difference between spending your time and investing your time. (PSG, p. 103)

MINI-LECTURE: State: As much as we talk about discovering God’s will, there are surprisingly few times in the New Testament in which “God’s will” is explicitly stated. We’re to be sanctified and are to avoid sexual immorality (1 Thess. 4:3). We’re to give thanks in everything (1 Thess. 5:18). We’re to do good so that foolish people will be silenced (1 Pet. 2:15).

ASK: Since the Bible doesn’t give us a detailed list of things that are within God’s will, how do we obey verse 17? Allow for discussion, and remind the group of the opening illustration about the need for a guide.

TRANSITION: We aren’t guided by a written checklist of what is and isn’t the will of God. As we will see next, we’re guided by the Holy Spirit, which is so much better!

READ: Choose a volunteer to read Ephesians 5:18. Point out that this verse is the memory verse for this session. Distribute copies of Pack Item 8 (Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark) to anyone who does not yet have one.

EMPHASIZE: Paul’s intent was not to make a point about the use of alcohol. Rather, his point was to contrast being controlled by a substance—any substance—and being controlled by the Holy Spirit.
DISCUSS: How does being controlled by the Holy Spirit compare to and contrast to being controlled by alcohol? (PSG, p. 105) Distribute copies of Pack Item 13 (Handout: The Trinity in Ephesians) to review how the Holy Spirit helps us through His guidance and control.

EMPHASIZE: Call on a volunteer to read the paragraph in the PSG that begins, “The Scripture speaks clearly about the Spirit’s nature and ministry. … (p. 104). Highlight the information about the present passive imperative tense of the verb “filled,” and suggest that an accurate translation would be “You are being filled!”

ASK: How are you obeying this command to let the Holy Spirit fill you every day? If it’s up to Him to fill us, why are we given the imperative?

TRANSITION: Notice that verse 18 ends with a colon. This tells us that the verses that follow are going to explain what it means to “be filled with the Spirit.” So let’s look at that now.

READ: Guide the group to read Ephesians 5:19-21 and summarize Paul’s point. Invite volunteers to share their summary.

ASK: Someone might read verse 19 and wonder how it applies to them if they aren’t musically inclined. How would you respond to this? If not addressed, point out the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the experience of singing. Note that even those who don’t consider themselves musical can still make music in their hearts to the Lord.

READ: Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 105). You may choose for the group to work in pairs, with each pair looking up one of the verses. Call for volunteers to share insights gained.

ASK: Considering verse 20, how are we to give thanks “always for everything”? What about negative things? Point out that God doesn’t expect us to be happy about tragedy but to recognize God’s grace and comfort in the midst of those circumstances. Emphasize that this unnatural response is evidence of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Highlight the key points under In My Context (PSG, p. 108). Lead the group to reflect on one way they will follow the command to be filled by the Spirit this week.

APPLY: Considering the three broad areas of verses 19-21 (encouraging one another, expressing gratitude to God, submitting to one another), challenge the group to analyze their relationships and attitudes toward other believers in your community.

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to discuss the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 108): What attitudes in your life at the present could be used as “proof of ownership” by the Holy Spirit? What adjustments do you need to make to your attitude?

PRAY: Lead in prayer, asking God to help all of you be controlled by His Holy Spirit this week.
PRACTICE

• Send an email to group members challenging them to invite someone new to the group time this week. Encourage them to use social media as a contact.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the Focus Attention activity, invite the group to share their biggest “Siri® Fail” moments, when their smartphones misheard them or responded in an unexpected way. You can also do an Internet search for “Siri Fails” and print off amusing screen caps.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• To introduce the discussion about the Holy Spirit, lead group members to share different ways the Holy Spirit has been explained to them. Acknowledge that He is often the least understood member of the Trinity.
• To further discuss Ephesians 5:19, lead the group to flip through their Bibles and read aloud verses from Psalms they have highlighted or that have encouraged them at different times.
• To support the discussion of Ephesians 5:19-21 and giving thanks, review Pack Item 4 (Poster: Ephesians 2: Old and New). Lead the group to discuss how reminders of who we were before Christ can help us remain thankful.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Encourage each person in the group to name one area of their lives they need to fully allow the Holy Spirit to control. As the leader, write down what each person says, and when you close in prayer, pray for each person by name and that they would surrender that area of their lives this week.

If others have expressed interest in previous sessions, allow a volunteer to share the story of his or her life before and after Christ. (See Session 9.)

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Play the song “Holy Spirit,” performed by Francesca Battistelli or Kari Jobe. You could play it at the beginning of your session to set the stage for your discussion. For a more traditional alternative, close by singing the hymn “Spirit of the Living God,” by Daniel Iverson.