

Living It Up: Wisely

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Ephesians 5:15-20

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Will you pray with me?

God of enduring wisdom, give us courage to center ourselves upon the grace of Jesus Christ and Spirits willing to live out his teachings. May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our heart be acceptable in your sight, oh our rock and redeemer.

Wisdom or folly; the world or the church, sunlight or darkness, debauchery or faithfulness: our passage from Ephesians offers us all dualistic themes of Paul in one conversation about wisdom & worship.

We are made in the image of God, made for God's wisdom, but wisdom is not innate. For disciples of Christ, wisdom is the melding of experience and knowledge, synthesized by our communal faith. Many appear wise, the world has its own forms of wisdom, but Paul claims that we must learn it from outside ourselves.

I asked a couple church members for words of wisdom, sayings or poignant directions perhaps passed down to them. I got some great answers like:

“Life isn't just about roses; someone has to clean the toilets.”

“No matter what the problem appears to be, there isn't anything in the world that doesn't come down to sex and money.”

And then one person recalled these words from a former pastor, “The Sunday that you feel like sleeping in, that might actually be the Sunday that someone else really needs you, to be here.”

Well, the book of Ephesians is a letter meant to be instructive and spiritually formative for the church. Paul was concerned with providing guidelines for Christian community that “hemmed them in”, differentiating them from “the world”, helping to prevent spiritual dilution by corrosive forms of power, civic governance, and culture that ultimately can deconstruct the message of The Good News. Paul was concerned that people of faith were mature, were prepared to testify and live in such a way where they walked in the light of their deeds and their deeds manifest the Living Christ.

Spiritual formation for Paul was the creation of boundaries that that gave depth, shape, and definition to what it means to be a person of faith. For him there was “worldly” wisdom which was at odd with “Wisdom in Christ.” Importantly, he was concerned with what this means now, today, not in some distant future. In his own words “the days are evil”, meaning, we are to seize the day not for personal gain but for Christ and the church. Evil is in the world. Systems of oppression require resistance. Our planet is warming. Do you not feel Paul’s urgency in adopting faith-filled wisdom?

This exhortation of wisdom comes with specific instructions: take your singing seriously. Paul doesn’t see hymns and songs of faith as simply decorative, or pleasant, or ancillary embroidery around Christian faith and practice. Singing, whether aloud or in your heart, was in his thinking, an excellent way of practicing and testifying to the faith. Our hymns are words from our mouths, and they are not merely entertainment; they are instruction, consolation, warning and hope.

Paul even quotes in prior verses what was almost certainly one of these early Christian hymns, saying:

“Sleeper, awake!
Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

One theologian muses:

The singing that Paul has in mind is the ultimate antidote to living in the darkness of immorality that pervades the surrounding world. Yet again his emphasis is on the mind, and the need for wisdom. It is vital not to slide along through life in a general foolish haze, hoping things will work out all right but not being prepared to think them through, to figure out where this or that type of behavior will really lead. That is the way of death, and you need to wake up and rise from the dead, relying on the Messiah, already risen, to shine his light on you. Then you'll be able to walk in the light, instead of going down the dark alleys (whether literal or metaphorical) that lead to sin and death. – N.T. Wright

The mark of wisdom is defined by how one uses their time and how it changes and redeems, the world.

In my family there are words of wisdom that have been passed down from one generation to another. They have changed my life and their context is important.

My grandad, a modest farmer in central Illinois, always used to say to my grannie “Jackie, the car belongs in the garage, with the garage door shut”.

This of course perturbed by grannie who was socially connected and had dreams of traveling. But for my Grandad who kept his equipment in a shed, maintained and ready to go, his wisdom was that we should keep our things protected, in great condition, and ready for service. Honor what you have been given.

My great grandmother was famous for saying “The world would be better off without four words: I Want I Need”.

Her wisdom came from her childhood. She literally, grew up on the prairie in Montana in a sod house. During the great winter of 1917 their cattle froze against fence rows and standing up and they lost everything and moved to town. Learn to live fully and be happy with less.

We are people made in the image of God, made for God’s wisdom, but wisdom is not innate. It is a gift of the melding of experience and knowledge synthesized through the omnipotent, omnipresent Grace of God. And for the Christian, wisdom is an extension of our relationship with the Living One who walks in our midst. How can we now help but to sing deeply, from the heart, praising God for the life God has given?

If there is one piece of wisdom I believe God has taught me I hope to pass along, it comes in the form of a question:

What are we grateful for today?

My faith in Jesus Christ teaches me that living a life founded upon gratitude is a life full of joy and depth and unseen possibility. It’s a life that honors the many spiritual and physical blessings we receive from our loving God. It’s a way of living- living with words of gratitude overflowing everyday- helps us center not

upon ourselves- but upon our wondrous Creator. I practice, and encourage my family and friends to practice, into daily acts of. For, isn't worship itself ultimately an act of praise? And praising God is an act to "redeem" our time, to "redeem" the moments of daily life, with all haste, by bringing our core self into the present, oriented towards the Almighty.

Author Maggie Ross recalled a friend she once had. One of the last of the great ladies of the fabled New York 400 club whose legendary parties and mad antics gave Manhattan its mystic. Her friend grew up in a time that valued exquisite, porcelain faces. Yet out of her four sisters she was deemed the ugly duckling. She remained undaunted and became a "beloved doyenne" of New York with her generous public works and commitment to secret charitable causes. Late in life, she married a man that had never grown up. Though he mastered the stock market his nanny tied his shoes, and he remained opposed to learning that task. This was his way of staying a child.

She spent her last few decades crippled by arthritis yet remained indomitable. Only in her last years did she slow down, unable to complete her world cruises, yet still engaged in her robust charities networking and husband's tyrannical childish whims.

At nearly ninety, she confided in Maggie one evening, saying "Don't be fooled dearie. Its only our bodies that grow old, and inside I'm still a young girl who dances until dawn."

Wisdom, wisdom born of love and wisdom suffering is a divine gift that comes from and with the God we seek.

What words of wisdom do you live by?

Who did you learn them from?

How are they lyrics of praise worshipping God- the one source of lasting hope and joy?

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Even when the things of this world; our bodies, rules and principalities, fall short and cannot fulfill their promises they make, it is those who are blessed with grace-filled wisdom whose spirits remain strong, vital, tyrannically childish, and hope-filled.

"Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Live it up! Give praise to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.