



Finding Our Way With Technology (Our Time)

Summary and Goal

Technology is not going away. If anything, it is only intensifying in its use. Though the Christian cannot control how society functions technologically, he or she can control what and how much time they spend using it. By looking at Paul's challenge in Ephesians 5, believers can be intentional and strategic with their time by applying the biblical teaching.

Main Passages

Ephesians 5:15-20

Session Outline

1. Live Wisely (Ephesians 5:15-16)
2. Led by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:17-18)
3. The Joy of Biblical Community (Ephesians 5:19-20)

Theological Theme

The leading of the Holy Spirit helps believers live with gospel urgency in light of Christ's imminent return.

Christ Connection

The resolute focus that Jesus demonstrated as the moment of His crucifixion approached is a model for the urgent focus believers must have in the world.

Missional Application

The gospel urgency that believers sense as they engage the world around them compels them to wisely use the time available for eternal purposes. This urgency helps keep the distractions from following Christ in proper perspective.

Historical Context of Ephesians

Purpose

Central to the message of Ephesians is the re-creation of the human family according to God's original intention for it. The new creation destroys the misguided view that God accepts the Jew and rejects the Gentile. Paul says the distinction was abolished at Christ's sacrificial death. Thus no more hindrance remains to reuniting all humanity as the people of God, with Christ as the head (Eph 1:22-23). The new body, the church, has been endowed by the power of the Holy Spirit to enable them to live out their new lives (Eph 1:3-2:10) and put into practice the new standards (Eph 4:1-6:9). In sum, we can say that the overall emphasis of Ephesians is on the unity of the church in Christ, through the power of the Spirit.

Author

Paul referred to himself by name as the author of the book of Ephesians in two places (Eph 1:1; 3:1). Many regard this book as the crown of all of Paul's writings. Today some scholars think the book contains a writing style, vocabulary, and even some teachings that are not typical of the apostle. If that is the case, then it would mean a disciple of Paul had surpassed him in theological insight and spiritual perception. Of such an erudite disciple the early church has no record. Furthermore, pseudonymity (a writer writing under someone else's name) probably was not practiced by early Christians. We can conclude, in line with the undisputable acceptance of Pauline authorship in the early church, that there is no reason to dispute the Pauline authorship of Ephesians.

Setting

Relatively little is known about the recipients of the letter called Ephesians. Some important and early manuscripts do not contain the words "at Ephesus" (Eph 1:1). The letter was carried to its destination by Tychicus, who in Ephesians 6:21 and Colossians 4:7 is identified as Paul's emissary. The Ephesian and Colossian letters probably were delivered at the same time since in both letters the apostle noted that Tychicus would inform the churches concerning Paul's situation.

Special Features

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is an anthem to the sovereign grace of God displayed toward sinners in Christ. It contains some of the worst news ("you were dead in your trespasses and sins") and best news ("but God... made us alive with the Messiah") in all of Scripture. In view of this grace, Paul calls believers to "walk worthy of the calling" we have received.

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Session Plan

Finding Our Way With Technology (Our Time)

Introduction

- ❓ What is your greatest source of distraction, technologically speaking?
- ❓ What factors do you consider in deciding if technology is effective or distracting? Which type do you find the most examples of?

In this week's session, Paul warned the Ephesian believers against wasting the time given to them for gospel purposes. Living wisely meant being led by the Holy Spirit so that they were aware of God's will. The prudence required for missional living in light of the imminence of Christ's return meant that distractions could not be tolerated. For the modern believer, discerning the helpful aspects of technology from the distractions it offers is critical for gospel fruitfulness.

1. Live Wisely (Ephesians 5:15-16)

The phrase for "making the best use of the time" included the idea of redeeming the time for maximum effectiveness. It carried a financial connotation in which the time was purchased for a specific purpose, as for an appointment. The same phrase is used in Colossians 4:5 in a similar warning from Paul. The specific purpose had to do with the intentional spreading of the gospel.

- ❓ How have you witnessed inconsistency between confession and daily living impact gospel effectiveness? Give an example.
- ❓ What do you think it would look like practically to "pay careful attention" to how you live? How would your decision making look differently? How might you engage in conversation differently?

2. Led by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:17-18)

Broaching the subject of the will of the Lord ran the risk of spinning off into a conversation about mining the deeper truths of the mysteries of

God's will. That was not what Paul's intent here. Rather, Paul wrote about that which is clearly the will of God because it is repeatedly expressed. Context provides a great key according to where this verse occurred. Paul had just finished writing about walking in a manner that is worthy of salvation, the importance of holiness, and the need for a lifestyle appropriate for those who walk in light and wisdom. In the immediate context, Paul had been pointedly discussing the intentionality and urgency of spreading the gospel to those lost in darkness.

- ❓ What visible indicators would you anticipate observing in the life of a person that is constantly seeking to "understand what the Lord's will is"? Who do you know that best fits that description now?
- ❓ Why did Paul contrast being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit? How does each example impact living with wisdom?

3. The Joy of Biblical Community (Ephesians 5:19-20)

Even in the midst of the persecution they faced and the oppressive darkness of the cultural context in which they lived, Paul directed the Ephesian believers to be thankful in all things. His repeated use of inclusive qualifiers ("always for everything") in such close proximity underscored the importance of their thankfulness not being hindered by any circumstance.

- ❓ Consider your current relationships with other believers. How do those relationships resonate with what Paul described here? How would you like to see that grow and change?
- ❓ In light of what Paul has shared thus far, how does a spirit conditioned by gratitude help one to live wisely and in such a way that distraction from lesser pursuits are kept at bay?

Conclusion

- ❓ How easily can you state God's purpose for your life? What biblical passages would you rely most heavily on to validate your answer? How does that clarity help you avoid distraction?
- ❓ What dangers do you readily see in the lives of those that do not carefully guard the amount of influence technology has on their thought processes, value systems, and worldview? Do you think it is important to think of technology in such important terms? Explain.

❓ For Further Discussion

What would you say are the primary challenges to experiencing the type of biblical community that Paul referred to? What makes that type of community worth pursuing, even in light of those challenges?



Expanded Session Content

Finding Our Way With Technology (Our Time)

Introduction

One of the staple promises of constantly evolving technological breakthroughs is that such breakthroughs will reward culture with an increase in efficiency. Dove-tailing into that promise is the assumption that the increase in efficiency will result in vastly improved amounts of free time. Having roots in predictions dating back to 1960, the promises of increased free time and relaxation have repeatedly proven to be false. Instead of 20-hour work weeks and retirement ages decreasing to approximately 50 years of age, technology has only increased the frenetic pace of life at an exponential rate.

In a 2018 article (ancient by technology standards), Digital Trends columnist Luke Dormehl explored the empty promise of increased freedom. The increase of wasted time due to productivity apps has become so rampant that Dormehl highlighted the Big Tech leaders that are finally facing the growing hazard of technology addiction:

Recently Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg announced that Facebook is busy making changes intended to actually decrease the amount of time people spend using it. The aim is that, by doing this, people will experience an improvement in the quality of time they spend browsing Facebook.

Apple, meanwhile, has revealed that it is responding to concerns about "smartphone addiction" among young people by providing new tools for monitoring the time users spend staring at their iPhones. These are likely to arrive with iOS 12 later this year.

Making changes so that technologies really do save us time, rather than just giving the illusion of it, is a challenge — but possibly an achievable one. Should concerns like that of smartphone addiction gain momentum it's possible to imagine other companies following the lead of Mark Zuckerberg and Apple's Tim Cook.¹

Certainly, believers are not immune to an increased interest and dependence on technology's offerings. Technology makes methods of

ministry possible that were not imaginable even a decade ago. However, in light of the need for gospel conversations at every turn, how is the believer to navigate the use of technology in a savvy way?

- ❓ What is your greatest source of distraction, technologically speaking?
- ❓ What factors do you consider in deciding if technology is effective or distracting? Which type do you find the most examples of?

Session Summary

In this week's session, Paul warned the Ephesian believers against wasting the time given to them for gospel purposes. Living wisely meant being led by the Holy Spirit so that they were aware of God's will. The prudence required for missional living in light of the imminence of Christ's return meant that distractions could not be tolerated. For the modern believer, discerning the helpful aspects of technology from the distractions it offers is critical for gospel fruitfulness.

1. Live Wisely (Ephesians 5:15-16)

This passage follows a paragraph in which Paul began to lay out the practical implications of the theological teaching he had given in the previous chapters. This was a primary characteristic in Paul's letters. The teaching of truth always brought with it the expectation of living the truth. Paul addressed several topics specifically, including sexual immorality and filthiness of speech. He closed the previous paragraph by drawing the distinction between walking in darkness and walking in light. Paul directed the believers to live up to their calling from Christ by walking in a manner that reflected the character of the One who called them.

Paul marked the two essential choices for how a person goes through life in one succinct verse. A person could either choose to live with wisdom or to live foolishly. Had Paul not spent the previous four chapters spelling out who Christ is, who the believers were in relation to Christ, and the dramatic transformation that their identities would undergo as a result of their relationship with Christ, then this directive would pose a serious problem.

However, Paul had clearly examined what it meant to follow Christ in Ephesians 1-4, so drawing the believers' attention toward walking in wisdom meant choosing to apply the character of Christ to their own lives. This was an incredibly stark contrast to the vast majority of their fellow

citizens. In Paul's use of the dark versus light metaphor in chapter 5, the believers' actions and lifestyle would have been extremely conspicuous, just like a small light in a dark room.

The choice of Christlike wisdom over foolishness was of utmost importance because the reputation of the gospel was at stake. The manner in which the believers chose to live their lives had tremendous bearing on how their fellow citizens perceived Christ and His gospel.

- ❓ How have you witnessed inconsistency between confession and daily living impact gospel effectiveness? Give an example.
- ❓ What do you think it would look like practically to “pay careful attention” to how you live? How would your decision making look differently? How might you engage in conversation differently?

The phrase for “making the best use of the time” included the idea of redeeming the time for maximum effectiveness. It carried a financial connotation in which the time was purchased for a specific purpose, as for an appointment. The same phrase is used in Colossians 4:5 in a similar warning from Paul. The specific purpose had to do with the intentional spreading of the gospel.

The phrase “the days are evil” carried two intertwined meanings. First, it spoke to the increasing difficulty of sharing the gospel as human history spiraled forward. Without doubt, as the span of human history moved toward its completion with the return of Christ, the obstacles for sharing the gospel of Christ would steadily increase. Second, it had to do with the powers and principalities that war against the cause of Christ in the world. This was a fitting observation from Paul considering the presence of the occult's influence in Ephesus. Paul reminded the believers that they were strangers in a foreign land because they did not share the same values as the pagans. The days being evil, then, referred to the oppositional nature of everything in the present world toward the things of God.

2. Led by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:17-18)

Broaching the subject of the will of the Lord ran the risk of spinning off into a conversation about mining the deeper truths of the mysteries of God's will. That was not what Paul's intent here. Rather, Paul wrote about that which is clearly the will of God because it is repeatedly expressed. Context provides a great key according to where this verse occurred. Paul had just finished writing about walking in a manner that is worthy of salvation, the importance of holiness, and the need for a lifestyle

appropriate for those who walk in light and wisdom. In the immediate context, Paul had been pointedly discussing the intentionality and urgency of spreading the gospel to those lost in darkness.

Verse 17, then, in summary of the previous two, was essentially saying that to pay attention to any “wisdom” based on the values and standards of the darkened world was absolute foolishness. Therefore the believer was not to occupy his or her mind, time, or energy chasing after such rubbish. Rather, the appropriate pursuit was to understand the will of God and commit one’s life to it. Remembering the inward and outward components, the believer was to meditate and reflect on the will of the Lord (inward) so that understanding increased through the revealing work of the Holy Spirit. Outwardly, as understanding of the Lord’s will took root in the believer’s life, the actions of the believer became increasingly conformed to the will of the Lord. Instead of focusing on what the world praised, the believer dedicated his or her whole being to accomplishing that to which God gives importance and value.

- ❓ What visible indicators would you anticipate observing in the life of a person that is constantly seeking to “understand what the Lord’s will is”? Who do you know that best fits that description now?
- ❓ Why did Paul contrast being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit? How does each example impact living with wisdom?

Paul’s warning against being drunk with wine was a paraphrase of Proverbs 23:31. It was introduced specifically to be set as a contrast to the effects of being filled with the Holy Spirit. The reckless living that was the antithesis of living wisely referred to a careless embrace of carnal pleasure with no thought given of consequences or long-term results. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, conveyed the idea of being “directed, influenced, and ultimately governed by the Holy Spirit,” says Max Anders.³

3. The Joy of Biblical Community (Ephesians 5:19-20)

Paul gave the evidence of those filled with the Holy Spirit, living with alertness and gospel urgency, within the context of biblical community. In other words, the fruit of living in such a way is born out of the Christlike joy and love extended to others.

The musical focus of verse 19 may seem odd to western believers in a modern context. For the meetings of the first century believers, however, the joyful gathering was filled with various expressions of musical worship.

The God of Wine

Max Anders notes, “Ephesus was a center of pagan worship and ritual. The Ephesian culture worshiped Baccus, the god of wine and drunken orgies. They believed that to commune with their god and to be led by him, they had to be drunk. In this drunken state, they could determine the will of their god and determine how best to serve and obey him.”²

Speak, Make Music, Give Thanks, and Submit

According to Max Anders, “Four Greek participles – speak, make music (melodying), giving thanks (thanking), and submit (subjecting) – in verses 19–21 modify the verb ‘be filled’ of verse 18.”⁶⁴ The musical nature of these participles indicate the importance of music in being filled with the Spirit.

The celebrative overflow from being filled with the Spirit provided contagious life to the Christians’ gatherings, impacting even the manner in which they addressed one another.

- ❓ Consider your current relationships with other believers. How do those relationships resonate with what Paul described here? How would you like to see that grow and change?
- ❓ In light of what Paul has shared thus far, how does a spirit conditioned by gratitude help one to live wisely and in such a way that distraction from lesser pursuits are kept at bay?

Even in the midst of the persecution they faced and the oppressive darkness of the cultural context in which they lived, Paul directed the Ephesian believers to be thankful in all things. His repeated use of inclusive qualifiers (“always for everything”) in such close proximity underscored the importance of their thankfulness not being hindered by any circumstance. Further, whatever was encountered was to be viewed as something for which the believers were to be thankful. Nothing was excluded. The direction of their gratitude was Godward. He was to continually be celebrated as the Giver of every good gift. Such persistent, unrelenting gratitude would have demanded that the believers’ attention and affection be ever fixed on God and His manifold mercies.

Conclusion

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians challenges the priorities of the modern believer, with its unwavering focus to live with gospel intentionality in several ways.

First, the ability to set boundaries for technology with regard to how the believer’s mind is influenced depends on recognizing God’s purpose for the believer in the world. Distraction of any shape grows unchecked when there is not an understood and clarifying purpose for a person’s time, energy, effort, etc. Without the greater purpose, distractions can be allowed to take on an importance that they are unworthy to hold.

Second, the days are still evil. That will only increase as human history spirals toward its consummation with the return of Jesus Christ. Because that is the case, the believer cannot be naïve enough to believe that influences as powerful as what technology offers will remain morally neutral. Finding one’s way with technology demands a vigilance to guard one’s mind from that which would lure affections away from God. The temptation to be satisfied with something lesser, no matter how attractive or exciting, remains one of the most effective ploys of the enemy.

Third, pursue the Lord's will. Doing so shows the vapid worth of substitutes in light of the surpassing glory of knowing Him and serving Him. Being filled with the Spirit, allowing Him to lead and direct decisions in daily living, affords the believer an awareness of God's will and how the believer is intimately involved in its workings.

Fourth, believers must be connected to biblical community that celebrates the glory of God and encourages one another to do the same. One of the great lies of technology, particularly social media, is that those who use it extensively are connected to community. The reality is that the community is a false, shallow one in which identities are easily faked, photos are more likely altered than authentic, and no one is really genuinely known. This has never been God's desire for humanity. Humanity was created to reflect the community of God within the Trinity as a part of being created in His image. Believers must refuse to be placated with manufactured community.

- ❓ How easily can you state God's purpose for your life? What biblical passages would you rely most heavily on to validate your answer? How does that clarity help you avoid distraction?
- ❓ What would you say are the primary challenges to experiencing the type of biblical community that Paul referred to? What makes that type of community worth pursuing, even in light of those challenges?
- ❓ What dangers do you readily see in the lives of those that do not carefully guard the amount of influence technology has on their thought processes, value systems, and worldview? Do you think it is important to think of technology in such important terms? Explain.

Prayer of Response

Pray and ask God to give you wisdom in your daily use of time. Ask Him to show you where you have given technology too much priority in your life and to guide you to a use of these resources that honors Him.

Additional Resources

- *[Un]intentional* by Doug Smith
- *Don't Waste Your Life* by John Piper
- *Disruptive Witness* by Alan Noble

For Next Week

Session Title

- Living a Whole Life the Whole Way: Loving God

Main Passages

- Matthew 22:35-40

Session Outline

1. The Important and Impossible Question (Matthew 22:35-36)
2. Loving God (Matthew 22:37-38)
3. Loving God Means Loving Others (Matthew 22:39-40)

Memorize

but be filled by the Spirit: ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

-Ephesians 5:18b-20

Daily Readings

- Monday - John 4:24
- Tuesday - Romans 12:1
- Wednesday - Hebrews 13:15
- Thursday - Psalm 29:2
- Friday - Psalm 95:6
- Saturday - Isaiah 12:5

Extended Commentary

Ephesians 5:15-20

5:15-17. The world in which we live is filled with dangers and deceptions. It is not always easy to live an enlightened life even when we want to.

We can get tripped up or ambushed by events and people without even being aware of the danger. We must be very careful to live our life rooted in wisdom, using our time wisely. Not to do so would be foolish. The will of the Lord is that we live carefully, cautiously, always matching our lifestyle with the teachings of Scripture.

5:18. Ephesus was a center of pagan worship and ritual. The Ephesian culture worshiped Bacchus, the god of wine and drunken orgies. They believed that to commune with their god and to be led by him, they had to be drunk. In this drunken state, they could determine the will of their god and determine how best to serve and obey him.

Paul was talking about how to commune with the God of heaven, how to live for him, how to serve and obey him, how to determine his will. It was natural for him to draw the contrast between how the god of Ephesus is served and how the God of heaven is served. With the God of heaven, you do not get drunk with wine. Rather, you are filled with the Spirit. Being drunk with wine leads to the sexual sins and immorality of darkness described above. By being filled with the Spirit, you can determine God's will and serve him faithfully in moral living.

What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? Some interpreters equate this command with instances of being filled with the Spirit in the Book of Acts in which miraculous things happened: people spoke in tongues; prophecies and visions were given; people were healed. "Be filled" in this verse (*plarao*) is not the same word as the one used in the Book of Acts (*pimplemi*), nor are the consequences the same. Rather than understanding this command in verse 18 to have anything to do with miraculous or extraordinary happenings, it is better to understand it in context. In this ethical context, it means directed, influenced, and ultimately governed by the Holy Spirit.

In Colossians 3:16, the Colossian believers are instructed to let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. The consequences of this are the same as the consequences here in Ephesians 5 of being filled with the Spirit. That suggests that there is a close correlation in meaning between the two.

This filling, then, is best understood, as a command for the believer to yield himself to the illuminating, convicting, and empowering work of the Holy Spirit. As he works in our hearts through his Word, our lives are brought into conformity with the will of God (v. 17).

5:19-21. Four Greek participles— speak, make music (melodying), giving thanks (thanking), and submit (subjecting)—in verses 19-21 modify the verb “be filled” of verse 18, describing the person filled with the Holy Spirit. The first two participles suggest the importance of music and Scripture in being filled with the Spirit. An attitude of gratitude is a third characteristic of being filled with the Spirit. Finally, an attitude of mutual submission among believers is a characteristic of being filled with the Spirit.

Following the fourth participle, being subject (or submitting) to one another, Paul then moves directly into three examples of relationships in which believers are to be subject to one another: husband-wife relationships, parent-child relationships, and master-slave relationships. Paul’s important point is that in each of these sets of relationships the one in authority is to be submissive to the needs of those under him and those in submission are to be subject to the authority of the one over him. For example, the wife is to be subject to the authority of her husband, but her husband is to be subject to the needs of the wife. Children are to be subject to the authority of their parents, but parents are to be subject to the needs of the children. Slaves are to be subject to the authority of their masters, but masters are to be subject to the needs of their slaves. The principle is an attitude of mutual subjection, which is a mark of being filled with the Holy Spirit. It is simply a matter of fulfilling the golden rule: doing to others as we would have others do to us.⁵

References

1. Dormehl, Luke. “Technology Has Given Us More Time Than Ever... To Waste on Technology.” <https://www.digitaltrends.com/cool-tech/does-tech-really-make-our-lives-easier/> . Published 2/24/18. Accessed 6/23/19.
2. Anders, Max. *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians*. Holman New Testament Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1990.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.