

Gospel Focused in a Screen-Time World

Session 2

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Psalm 101:1-4; Ephesians 5:5-16

Session Outline

1. Walking in Darkness (Ephesians 5:5-6)
2. Out of Darkness (Ephesians 5:7-8a)
3. Into the Light (Ephesians 5:8b-16)

Theological Theme

Followers of Jesus walk in the light and follow the will of God. This means making the most of the time God has given us to honor Him instead of conforming to the patterns of the world.



Leader Guide

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Introduction

- ❓ Have you ever witnessed or heard a firsthand account of someone conducting CPR on a person to revive them?
- ❓ What were the circumstances of the situation? What was the result of their efforts?

Any situation that requires the administration of CPR is critical and traumatic. If such drastic measures are being taken, then it is a matter of life and death. Imagine a situation in which a man nearly drowns in the ocean. He gets pulled out by a riptide and is unable to swim back to safety. His strength gives out, his head is submerged, and his lungs fill with water. As he sinks down, suddenly, a hand reaches out and pulls him to the surface. He is laid out on a boat and life-saving measures are deployed. The man who pulled him out of the water is a skilled paramedic and is able to clear the man's lungs of water, restart his heart, and bring the man back from certain death.

Now, imagine the next day that the nearly-drowned man is celebrating with his family and someone asks him to tell the story of what happened. The man tells it like this: "Well, I got in over my head and was all but dead. Then, I suddenly took a breath and now I'm alive!" How strange! Everything the man said was true, but he left out the most important and wonderful part. As bizarre as this man's retelling of his rescue is, it is very much like the way many people talk about their salvation.

If you are following Jesus, you were dead and now you are alive because of God's mercy and kindness toward you. He has done everything to save you and keep you saved. When we truly comprehend this reality and rejoice and rest in it, we live in a different way. Those who have been rescued from the penalty of their sin and transferred to God's household are new creatures with new affections that result in a new way of seeing the world and living each day. If you want to know what a person values, examine how they use their time. The way we use our time reveals what we have given our hearts to.

Session Summary

In Psalm 101:1-4, we find a man—David—who desired to know and walk with God. These verses help us see that those who love God give Him not only lip-service but also their time and energy. David said he would sing to the Lord, “pay attention to the way of integrity,” and “live with a heart of integrity in [his] house.”

It is a great error to believe that worship and devotion to God can be simply a small part of a person’s life. The glory and majesty of God demands full devotion. The Scriptures exhort those who love and fear God to do so in every area of life. “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

As humans we all long for community and worth. We often try to satisfy those longings with things of this world like technology, but nothing can satisfy us like a relationship with Jesus. Do you ever find yourself letting technology consume your time, resources, or thoughts? In Psalms 101, David described his heart for nothing to guide him but God. In Ephesians, Paul advised the church to make the most of their time. With the wisdom of Scripture, we can learn how to live a life of gospel hope by spending our time on what really matters.

1. Walking in Darkness (Ephesians 5:5-6)




What descriptors did Paul use of the people referenced in these verses? What is your response to his words?

Ephesians 5:5-16 has three main sections that we will consider. We see the flow of Paul’s argument going from a description of those who walk in darkness, to a reminder to believers that they have been rescued from that domain, and finally an explanation of how believers are to live in the light. In verses 5-6, Paul described those who dwell in darkness. We should note the way he described them. He didn’t describe them as unbelievers. Instead, he said those who are “sexually immoral or impure or greedy” or “an idolator.”

While Paul used strong descriptions and language in these verses, He wasn’t seeking to insult anyone. He wasn’t being mean-spirited. He was simply telling the truth. These are the sorts of things that characterize life outside of Jesus. In essence, Paul was saying the way we live gives evidence of Who or what we follow. It is impossible to see visibly whether a person has been a relationship with Jesus. However, just as a tree grows fruit based on it’s makeup, our lives also grow fruit according to our inner realities.


Paul was saying that those who willfully and unrepentantly practice such sins will not inherit the kingdom of God but should expect only God's wrath.

Those who have been redeemed by Jesus live differently because they have been made new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17). They have a living faith, and their works prove it (see James 2:14-26). They have new affections and a new way of living because they have been given a new heart and God has put His Spirit within them (Ezekiel 36:26-27). Each of us should examine ourselves in Paul's manner of examination. Paul looked not to baptism, church membership, or profession of faith as proof of a person's salvation; rather, he looked at the fruit of their life. Of course, this is not the only indication of the state of our souls, but if our lives do not give much evidence that we are following God, we should consider what this means.

 What does it mean to have no inheritance in God's kingdom? Why is this an urgent warning for us?

If we have not trusted Jesus to save us from our sins, we have no claim to God's blessing. The hard truth is that the Bible says if we haven't trusted Christ, we are God's enemies. This is because we have sinned against God and if we haven't placed our trust in Him, our hearts remain hard toward Him. We are not saved because we have lived rightly on our own, but because Jesus has done the right thing in every way we haven't. Those who remain separated from God live for their own desires and pleasures instead of God's.

Christ has promised that all who come to Him in faith and repentance will never be cast away (John 6:37). It is crucial to remember that no man or woman can make themselves presentable before God. This is the reason Christ came. It isn't that we are a bit dirty on the outside; we are corrupted to the core. Someone had to save us.



 Application: If someone were to observe your life, would they conclude that you are a part of the kingdom of darkness or of light? What evidence would they have?

2. Out of Darkness (Ephesians 5:7-8a)


If we have trusted Jesus, we have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. We have not experienced this change through our own strength; it is by the power of the Holy Spirit and the gift of God. Here's how Paul explained it to the Christians in Colossae: "And when you were dead in trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive with him and forgave us all our trespasses.

He erased the certificate of debt, with its obligations, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-14). He said something similar to the Ephesians earlier in the letter we are reading today: “God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!” (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Indeed, if you are in Christ today, you are blessed beyond comprehension no matter what temporal trials you may be facing. You were caught in the pit, enslaved to sin, destined for eternal darkness. You were going to die without any hope of escape. But God, in His infinite mercy and grace, sent his Son Jesus Christ to lower the rope to you and pull you out. Don’t ever let the point of your testimony be the unremarkable fact that you grasped the rope. Give all glory and honor and credit to Jesus, for that is where it belongs.


-  What exhortation did Paul give in verses 7-8a?
-  How should this change the way we live daily? How might this apply to an area like screen time?

Paul told the Ephesians not to become “their partners.” In other words, they were not to join in the evil deeds of the world. They were not to become entangled in their affairs. They ought not be collaborators in their manner of living. He was not saying they should avoid any interaction with anyone who was not a Christian, but that they needed to pay careful attention that they didn’t get caught up in how the world lived. Paul knew, as we have all experienced, that “Bad company corrupts good morals” (1 Corinthians 15:33). If we have put our faith in Jesus, we have been made new and given a new way to live. Therefore, we should no longer follow the patterns of the world but instead seek to influence others to follow the way of Jesus.

-  Application: Do you see any areas of your life where you are “partnering” with darkness? Is there any area of life that you know flies in the face of what God wills for you? What needs to change?

3. Into the Light (Ephesians 5:8b-16)

In Jesus, we are not only in a different kingdom, but we also live a different sort of life. We have left behind an old place of living as well as an old way of living. We should now live a life seeking to please God.

-  How did Paul describe the lives of those who live in the light? What makes it possible for a person to walk in the light? Why is this not possible apart from Jesus?

Paul said we walk in the light by discerning what is pleasing to the Lord, taking no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, exposing those evil works, paying careful attention to their own walk, and making the best use of the time.

Followers of Jesus are enabled to do the things Paul described in this passage for three reasons. First, we have been freed from the power of sin and are now able to hear the commands of God and obey them. We have a new King and have been set free by the Son (John 8:36). Second, we now desire to do good work in obedience to and for the glory of God. When we dwelt in darkness, our hearts were only inclined toward what was evil and all that we did (even what appeared good) was corrupted and as filthy rags before God (Isaiah 64:6). But when we were made a new creation and given a heart of flesh in place of our heart of stone, we were awakened to the glory and majesty of God in Christ. Our hearts are now inclined toward Him, and our desires changed. While it is true that even the good works of Christians are still mixed with sin to a certain degree, this sin has been atoned for by the blood of Christ. Third, we are given power to obey. Before we were powerless, now we are empowered by the Holy Spirit and Christ Himself. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me” (John 15:5).



What does it mean to make the most of the time in our world today? What did Paul mean by this?

Make the Most of the Time

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.

Followers of Jesus see the world in a new way. What we value becomes increasingly aligned with the things God values. What we value, of course, is reflected in how we spend our time. When Paul told the Christians in Ephesus to make the most of the time, he meant that they ought to view their time as currency and they ought to spend that currency on the things that would bring the most return.

Similarly, today we must consider how to get the most value in terms of how we spend our minutes, hours, and days. Many of us have been sucked into endless social media feeds. At every idle moment our hands reach for our phones to see if any notifications await us. We scroll past post after post as though we don't have eternal matters to deal with. Prayer, Bible reading, family worship, spiritual conversations with family members, and a host of other more meaningful activities often get neglected for screen time.

Just as we ought to examine themselves to make our calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10), so also we should continually examine our lives—especially how we spend their time—to make sure we are wisely spending the time we have been given in obedience to God’s Word.

- ❓ Application: Are you making the best use of your time? What is the greatest “time suck” that you allow to steal time from you?

Conclusion

Christians have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. This is possible not because we have moved ourselves, but because of the mercy of God in Christ. Through Jesus’s shed blood on the cross, sinners are made children of God. Therefore, we ought not to partner with those who live according to the designs of the world. In Jesus, we are now citizens of heaven and should walk as children of the light, discerning what is pleasing to the Lord and making the best use of the time that has been given to us.

- ❓ How does a person go from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light?
- ❓ What are some practical ways a Christian can walk in the light regarding how they spend their time?
- ❓ How can you be more careful to use your time wisely? What things do you need to cut out of your life to give time to things of eternal substance? How does this specifically apply to your screen time?

Prayer of Response

Ask the Lord to help you to pay careful attention to your own life so that you don’t partner with workers of darkness. Ask Him to help you walk in the light, especially when it comes to how you spend your time.

Additional Resources

- *The Tech-Wise Family* by Andy Crouch
- *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* by Tony Reinke
- *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* by John Mark Comer

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Call to Action:

This week list out your schedule and look at where you are spending most of your time. Talk with your immediate family about how as a family you are using your time and ways to focus on the gospel together. The biggest difference maker in transforming a life for Christ is spending time with God daily in his Word. How can you and/or your family spend more time reading the Bible?

Group Emphasis or Project:

Does your group time each week model the importance of being in God's word and talking with God? As a group evaluate where most of your time and energy is spent during group time and consider any changes which may help you to be more gospel focused.

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Light of the Gospel in the Dark Abyss of Addiction

Main Passages

- 1 Peter 5:6-9; James 1:12-15

Session Outline

1. The Reality of Sin (1 John 1:8)
2. Our Two Enemies (1 Peter 5:6-9)
3. Hope for Cleansing (James 1:12-15)

Memorize

Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—¹⁶ making the most of the time,, because the days are evil.

- Ephesians 5:15-16

Historical Context of Ephesians

Purpose

The book hints at several purposes. The apostle taught that Jewish and Gentile believers are one in Christ. This oneness was to be demonstrated by their love for one another. Paul used the noun or verb form of love (agapē) nineteen times (about one-sixth of the total uses in all the Pauline letters). Ephesians begins with love (1:4–6) and ends with love (6:23–24).

Paul implicitly addressed matters raised by the mystery religions in the Lycus Valley. The letter has much to say about redemption (1:7) and the divine intention for the human race (1:3–14). Additional themes include grace (1:2), predestination (1:4–5), reconciliation, and union with Christ (2:1–21).

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 (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 (1:3–2:10) and put into practice the new standards (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 (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 (writing under someone else's name) probably was not practiced by early Christians. We can conclude, in line with the indisputable acceptance of Pauline authorship in the early church, that there is no reason to dispute the Pauline authorship of Ephesians.

Setting

Paul penned the letter while in prison (3:1; 4:1; 6:20). Disagreement exists concerning whether Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea (Ac 24:22) around AD 57–59 or in Rome (Ac 28:30) in about 60–62 when he wrote this letter. Tradition suggests that Paul wrote the letter from Rome around AD 60–61 which would have transpired while Paul was under house arrest in guarded rental quarters (Ac 28:30). Paul most likely wrote Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians during the same imprisonment.

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 Christ") in all of Scripture. In view of this grace, Paul calls believers to "live worthy of the calling" we have received.

Extended Commentary

5:5–7. Paul warns the Ephesian Christians not to engage in the activities of those who are disobedient. It might be possible to infer that if Christians engaged in these activities (immorality, impurity, covetousness) they would lose their salvation. That is not Paul's point. Paul is saying that we are not to do these things because we are no longer those who are disobedient. Since we are not part of them anymore, we should not be partners with them. It is not a matter of salvation in this instance but a matter of identification. We are not like them anymore; therefore, we ought not to live like them. If we are partners with them, we are forewarned. Such people do not share the kingdom inheritance. Rather, they endure divine wrath. No fine theological arguments can get around that simple truth.

5:8–10. It would be a gross inconsistency for a Christian to participate in the flagrant sins of non-Christians. The Ephesian Christians were once just like those who are disobedient. But no longer! Rather than doing deeds of immorality, impurity, and greed, they should do deeds of goodness, righteousness, and truth. Christians are no longer darkness, but children of light. Therefore, we should do deeds of light, not darkness. Only as you walk in God's light can you please him.

5:11–14. Not only ought we not to do the same sins as those who are disobedient, but we should try to expose them. Paul may be referring to exposing the sins of church members, because the church is responsible to hold its members accountable for their lifestyles. If a Christian lives in flagrant, unrepentant sin, the church is to try to get them to turn from their sin (Matt. 18:15–20; Gal. 6:1).

The context is dealing with the disobedient. This would indicate that the church should attempt to expose the sins of the non-Christian, which would be a full-time job if done very thoroughly. Society's major sins certainly need to be exposed.

Sins are exposed by shining light into sin's darkness. An amazing thing happens. Darkness can no longer hide its nature and acts in secret. All is exposed to light. Light that makes everything visible brings an even more radical element. Literally, this reads, everything that is revealed is (or becomes) light. Light turns darkness into light. This is the church's mission. Whether the people in darkness are church members or society members, the goal is to transform them completely from darkness to light.

The poetic passage in verse 14 may be a quote from an ancient hymn based on Scripture. It is not a direct scriptural quotation. A person who was participating in the deeds of darkness is to wake up and rise from the dead, meaning to turn from those deeds. Christ will shine on you may mean that Christ is pleased with the person who turns from such deeds. He is light and the source of their light. His shining light exposes all their darkness and transforms them into light.

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.¹

References

1. Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 171–172.

Author Bio

Max Anders (Galatians-Colossians)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume Holman Bible Commentary series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Andy Crouch (The Tech-Wise Family)

Andy Crouch—author, speaker, musician, and dad—has shaped the way our generation sees culture, creativity, and the gospel. In addition to his books *Culture Making*, *Playing God*, and *Strong and Weak*, his work has been featured in *Time*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, and Lecrae’s 2014 single “Non-Fiction.” He was executive editor of *Christianity Today* from 2012 to 2016 and is now senior strategist for communication at the John Templeton Foundation. He lives with his family in Pennsylvania.

Tony Reinke (12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You)

Tony Reinke is a journalist and serves as senior teacher and host of the Ask Pastor John podcast for desiringGod.org. He is the author of *Lit!: A Christian Guide to Reading Books; Competing Spectacles; and 12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*.

John Mark Comer (The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry)

John Mark Comer is pastor for teaching and vision at Bridgetown Church in Portland, Oregon. He holds a Master’s degree in Biblical and Theological Studies from Western Seminary and is the author of two previous books: *Loveology* and *Garden City*. Comer is married to Tammy and they have two boys, Jude and Moses and a little girl, Sunday.