

Living a Life You REALLY Want: 4.The Maturity Question
Ephesians 5:15-17
June 20, 2021
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One of the challenges in parenting is knowing where to draw the line. Children do not enter this world with an owner's manual, and every parent wants their children to be safe, healthy, and happy. We want our children to be able to grow up and become everything that they can be, and parents want to do all they can to make that possible. And so, we give our children a line in all sorts of areas and tell them not to cross the line. The line is a guardrail to keep them from disaster and irresponsibility. And our children do what we all did at one time, we get as close to the line as possible and sometimes we even cross to line to see if there really is a consequence when crossing the line. Whenever our daughters were invited to a sleep over, Amanda would call the parents where they would be spending the night, and she asked four questions: Will a parent be in the home the entire night? Will there be boys at this sleepover? Will alcohol be where they could get into it? Are there guns in the home and are they locked up? Our daughters often pleaded with us not to make the call. They said it was too embarrassing, that other parents didn't make these calls, and that we didn't trust them. It wasn't a matter of trusting. Our job was to ensure the safest, healthiest environment possible. And often when a parent heard the questions, the parent was impressed that we cared enough to call. The purpose of the line was not to keep them from crossing the line, but to keep them from falling into whatever was on the other side of the line.

Throughout our lives, we need to know where to draw the line – in our finances: how much can we spend or how much debt is too much debt? In our diet: where is the line and will eating fast food all the time put us over the line? In our driving: if its not the speed limit, then how fast is too fast? There is a line between legal and illegal, moral and immoral, responsible and irresponsible, ethical and unethical. A line between I'm still in control and I need help.

So, where do you draw the line – to live the life you really want. This is week four in which we are looking at the relationship between good questions and good decisions. Good questions make for better decisions. Here's our verse for this series: **The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.** Life is better when we pause and ask five questions. Three weeks ago, we looked at the Integrity question: Am I being honest with myself? Because the easiest person to deceive is the person in the mirror. Then we looked at the Legacy question: What story do I want to tell? You decide the story of your life one decision at a time. Last week, we looked at the Conscience question: Is there a tension that deserves my attention? When something doesn't feel right, pause and pay attention. Today, I want us to look at the Maturity question. It's called the maturity question because asking this question is a sign of maturity. What is the wise thing to do? Whenever facing an important decision, pause and ask, what is the wise thing to do? It may not be wrong or immoral, but is it wise? Mature people know a decision can be not wrong and unwise at the same time. Think about your greatest regret. Wasn't it preceded by a series of unwise decisions? What is the wise thing to do?

Today's scripture comes from Ephesians 5. Paul is talking to the Christians of Ephesus, a culture that was more amoral than anything we see today. Superstition was elevated to a religion. Prostitution and extramarital affairs were part of a religious experience. And in the first part of chapter five, Paul goes through a list of things Christians should not do. Christian living is set apart from what the culture defined as acceptable – because in Ephesus almost anything was acceptable. Then Paul describes Christian living, and at the end of the chapter he appears

to be responding to a question about how to live this way in a culture where nobody values what Paul is teaching. How do we live this way? And what Paul describes is how to keep from going over the cliff – how to stay in the path. Verse 15 – **Be careful to live your life wisely, not foolishly.** The Greek word for live means *walk*, which is what some translations use. Be careful how you walk. Here's what comes to mind. Each morning, I let our dog run in the backyard while I make a cup of coffee. While I'm doing that, he is doing his business. And if I don't get it picked up and you come into our yard, it is best that you be careful where you walk. Paul says, pay attention to where you are. Why? Verse 16 – **Take advantage of every opportunity** – being very intentional with how you use your time. **because these are evil times.** You, Ephesians, are living in dangerous time. If you are not careful, you may drive off a cliff or end up some place where you may never recover. Do I need to convince you that there are dangers today – to your health – if you are not vaccinated, you are taking a risk for yourself and others; financially – it is so easy to get into debt and so hard to get out of debt, so we can't live as we want; or morally or in friendships, marriage, facing temptations, parenting. Because we live in dangerous times, be careful how you walk. Verse 17 – **Because of this, don't be ignorant, but understand the Lord's will.** Paul is saying: I want you to face up to what you know in your heart is God's will. Embrace what God's plan is in every area of your life. Be honest. You know what's on the other side of the line financially, morally – you know what can happen to your physical health, you know what can happen to your relationship. You don't need more information. Stop and face up to what you know God's will is for your life.

The question that many of us want to answer is how close to the line can we walk? Our tendency is to get as close as possible, to take the risk – financially – but the credit card offer said I was already approved; morally – I was just looking. How close to sin can I get without sinning? Where is the line? And Paul is saying, we live in a dangerous time. Don't flirt with disaster. Face up to what you know in your heart that God wants you to be. And then Paul provides an illustration. Verse 18 – **Don't get drunk on wine.** In the interest of full disclosure, I've got to tell you something. I don't drink alcohol – nothing, ever. And the reason is not that I think it is a sin, which I don't. I don't drink for two reasons: First, I was brought up in a home where there was no alcohol. My parents didn't drink. None of our relatives drank. It just didn't exist at all in anything I experienced as a child. And then as I got old enough to decide for myself, my experience with alcohol through other people was 100% negative: a roommate in college who drank so much he was either sick or passed out, friends who began pressuring me to prove that my faith and alcohol were not incompatible and I didn't like being pressured, then I started working in the church and met kids whose lives were messed up by alcohol or whose home life was – marriages that were struggling and alcohol only made things worse. This may not have been your experience, but it was my experience. So when Amanda and I were married we decided that alcohol would not be part of our lives and would not be in our home. I'm telling you this because Paul's illustration is easy for me. I have my own issues, but this is not one of them.

Paul says let's be honest with how we know God wants us to live and let's draw a line. **Don't get drunk on wine, which produces depravity.** Do you know depravity? Have you been there? Anybody know that word? I didn't, so I had to look it up. *Depravity* goes beyond mere bad behavior — it is a loss of control, a disregard for other living things. Last week, someone posted on the neighborhood app that we slowed down as a mother goose and her babies were crossing the road, but a driver coming from the opposite direction saw the same geese and accelerated, killing them all. That's depravity. It's more than bad behavior. Paul is drawing a line or setting a guardrail: getting drunk is foolish. I want you to decide you will never get drunk because getting drunk leads to a place you never want to go - being controlled by alcohol. Paul is not singling out alcohol, earlier in the chapter he mentions greed, lust, gossip, anger – any

indulgence that leads to loss of control – God doesn't want you to go there – because on the other side is disaster. In any area of your life where you might lose control or give control to someone or something other than God, you need a guardrail – and since alcohol by its very nature can lead everyone to loss of control, set a boundary. Is drunkenness a sin? I don't know but it is foolish. It doesn't mean God doesn't love you. It's a guardrail. This is one illustration. Be careful to live your life wisely – because the days are dangerous. Don't get drunk – because it leads to loss of control – and loss of control is a sin, turning control over to anyone or anything other than God is a place you don't want to go. ***Instead, be filled with the Spirit.*** God wants to be the primary influence in your life.

One day I will never forget was the day our daughter, Lauren, stepped on the kindergarten school bus for the first time. She was excited, but I was in tears. Because I knew she was stepping into a dangerous world – and I could not be with her to guard her and direct her, and what I wanted for her was for there to be people around her wherever she was who would treat her with God's kind of love. To this day, every morning – this morning, my prayer was God please send people into her life who will draw her closer to you. And where I find comfort is knowing that if this is my concern for my child, how much more God's love and concern must be.

The Bible teaches that when you put your trust in Christ, the Holy Spirit lives in you and the Holy Spirit will prompt you, guide you and direct you. In my experience, the Holy Spirit never yells. It is usually more of an “umhum”, “that's far enough”. It's like God gives us the elbow, and we know we are close enough. It's why Paul says face up to what you already know God wants you to be. What is the wise thing to do? None of us plan to mess up our lives. No one gets married thinking I can't wait to mess this up. But a lot of people never plan not to. They never establish guardrails. Nobody plans to mess up their bodies, but a lot of people never plan not to. No guardrails. Nobody plans to mess up a friendship or a relationship with a parent or a child, we just don't plan.

Here's your homework for the next week: Before making a decision would you ask the Maturity Question? What is the wise thing to do? And since it's Father's Day: Dads, the best way for the next generation to get this right is for this generation to get this right. Kids are watching, even adult kids are watching. What is the wise thing to do?

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of June 20, 2021

Weekly Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are God, yet you came into this world in human form, bringing us light to replace our darkness. As a human, you knew human emotions, yet you never let go of your obedient connection to God. You made me—and you work with me to remake me into the person you want me to be. I sing your praises with gratitude. Amen.

Monday, June 21

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-20

So be careful to live your life wisely, not foolishly. Take advantage of every opportunity because these are evil times. Because of this, don't be ignorant, but understand the Lord's will. Don't get drunk on wine, which produces depravity. Instead, be filled with the Spirit in the following ways: speak to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; sing and make music to the Lord in your hearts; always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Observation: Paul wants Christians to see every day, every hour, every minute as an opportunity for serving the Lord, for understanding what his will is and getting on and doing it. The foolish not only miss opportunities to make wise use of time, they do not understand what God's purposes are. We need standards or guardrails to keep us from losing control (debauchery).

Application: There is something deeper than right or wrong, and that's where wisdom is needed. What is a guide or standard that you have established to keep you on God's path? How does it guard and direct your life?

Prayer: Merciful God, thank you for your guidance. Help me to be ready to seek your way and to be open to your direction. Let me see the wise thing to do before I make an important decision. Amen.

Tuesday, June 22

Scripture: Psalm 16:11; Psalm 119:105

You teach me the way of life. In your presence is total celebration. Beautiful things are always in your right hand.

Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey.

Observation: Guardrails help to keep us on the road (direct us) and also prevent us from going over the edge and losing control (guard us). The psalmist proclaims that God has made known to him the path of life. This is the path where God is known fully and completely.

Application: What does this path look like for your life? Consider a time when you thought you were taking a shortcut in life, only to discover that it led to a dead end – or regret. How does the Bible illuminate your life path? How does your current use of the Bible make it a "lamp" for your feet?

Prayer: God, I have been shown practices that will strengthen my connection with you. Keep me close, so that the path I follow will be the path of life. Amen.

Wednesday, June 23

Scripture: Matthew 7:13-14; 1 Kings 11:1-11

"Go in through the narrow gate. The gate that leads to destruction is broad and the road wide, so many people enter through it. But the gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it.

In addition to Pharaoh's daughter, King Solomon loved many foreign women, including Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. These came from the nations that the Lord had commanded the Israelites about: "Don't intermarry with them. They will definitely turn your heart toward their gods." Solomon clung to these women in love. He had seven hundred royal wives and three hundred secondary wives. They turned his heart. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods. He wasn't committed to the Lord his God with all his heart as was his father David. Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the detestable god of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was evil in the Lord's eyes and wasn't completely devoted to the Lord like his father David. On the hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a shrine to Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and to Molech

the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. The Lord grew angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from being with the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. The Lord had commanded Solomon about this very thing, that he shouldn't follow other gods. But Solomon didn't do what the Lord commanded. The Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done all this instead of keeping my covenant and my laws that I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom from you and give it to your servant.

Observation: Jesus describes two roads (or paths). The boundaries or guardrails are set in very different places on each of these roads. Much of what Jesus says in chapters 5-7 is instruction about setting certain guardrails in life. Often we want to push the boundaries as close to the edge as possible to create the widest possible way of living. We find an example of this in Solomon who was considered a man of great wisdom but failed in setting a vital guardrail.

Application: As you consider the two roads that Jesus describes, on which do you think you are traveling? Solomon experienced the consequences of his choice. How do you think such a wise man could make such a foolish choice?

Prayer: God, there are time when it is easier for me to give wisdom than receive it, easier to know what to do than to do it. Grant me the humility to pause and listen to the guidance that I am so quick to give. Amen.

Thursday, June 24

Scripture: Proverbs 7:6-27

When from the window of my house, from behind the screen, I gazed down, I looked among the naive young men and noticed among the youth, one who had no sense. He was crossing the street at her corner and walked down the path to her house in the early evening, at the onset of night and darkness. All of a sudden a woman approaches him, dressed like a prostitute and with a cunning mind. She is noisy and defiant; her feet don't stay long in her own house. She has one foot in the street, one foot in the public square. She lies in wait at every corner. She grabs him and kisses him. Her face is brazen as she speaks to him: "I've made a sacrifice of well-being; today I fulfilled my solemn promises. So I've come out to meet you, seeking you, and I have found you. I've spread my bed with luxurious covers, with colored linens from Egypt. I've sprinkled my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come, let's drink deep of love until morning; let's savor our lovemaking. For my husband isn't home; he's gone far away. He took a pouch of money with him; he won't come home till full moon." She seduces him with all her talk. She entices him with her flattery. He goes headlong after her, like an ox to the slaughter, like a deer leaping into a trap, until an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird hurrying to the snare, not aware that it will cost him his life. Now children, listen to me, and pay attention to my speech. Don't turn your heart to her ways; don't wander down her paths. She has caused many corpses to fall; she has killed many people. Her house is a path to the grave, going down to the chambers of death.

Observation: Many people have a propensity for choosing paths that do not lead in the direction they want to go. Solomon describes an encounter that he witnessed from the vantage point of his upstairs window. He could not hear what they were saying, but he provides their conversation as he imagined it. The young man had not set an important guardrail. Unfortunately, the young man's experience is being repeated even today.

Application: In this scripture, what path did the young man take? How might the young man have avoided the chaos that ensued? Claiming a connection with God does not guarantee you will choose the right path. Wisely setting godly standards or guardrails and then observing them, will!

Prayer: God of mercy, you know there have been times when I did not act or speak according to my better judgement. Help me to see the errors of the past and learn from them. I want to live the life you want for me. Amen.

Friday, June 25

Scripture: Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 11:29

The Lord proclaims: Stop at the crossroads and look around; ask for the ancient paths. Where is the good way? Then walk in it and find a resting place for yourselves. But you said, "We won't go!"

Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I'm gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves.

Observation: The prophet Jeremiah describes the chaos facing the nation of Israel, but in the midst of the chaos he points out a path that will guard and direct. It is the tried and true path of their godly ancestors. And yet, then as now, many do not choose that path – not because they want chaos and destruction, but because the guardrails are not clear or do not exist.

Application: It has been said that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. What practices would define the path that the prophet urges the people to seek out? According to Jeremiah and Jesus, what results from choosing these designated paths?

Prayer: God, help me to resist my inclination to rush through this day. Slow me down so that I will pause and set my priorities for this day. I want my path to be your path for me. Amen.

Saturday, June 26

Scripture: Proverbs 27:12

Prudent people see evil and hide; the simpleminded go right to it and get punished.

Observation: This verse describes two kinds of people. Both are headed down the same path. Both see danger, but they react differently. And consequently, they experience two very different outcomes. The prudent act as if then is now, as if the future is the present. The simple respond as if tomorrow will always be tomorrow.

Application: If you could go back in time, what would you tell yourself at seventeen – and what difference might it have made if you had actually taken your own advice?

Prayer: Lord, help me to see trouble coming long before it gets here. Give me the wisdom to know what to do and courage to do it. Amen.