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Title: Live Like You're Living

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Scripture: [Proverbs 9:1-6](#)

Text: [Ephesians 5:15-20](#)

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I annoy my wife when I read to her from product labels. It is more frustrating for her when we are in close, confined spaces and she can't get up and move away from me. Many of the labels have to be written by corporate attorneys to protect the company from our lack of common sense. Recently, we were on an

airplane. During the beverage service, we were handed a packet of peanuts. I curiously looked at the label and there it was – INGREDIENTS: peanuts and salt. I get that, you have to list ingredients but then there is this – “produced in a facility that processes peanuts.”

There are others that I've seen or read about like the caution label on a portable stroller that says in large font, capital letters, “remove child before folding for storage.” Or how about the caution on the chainsaw that says, "do not attempt to stop the blade with hand" or the instruction in the TV manual about not putting the remote in the dishwasher. Or my personal favorite – it is rumored that someplace on the Boeing 757 airplane there is a label that says, “fragile, do not drop.”¹

Let's face it, life can be dangerous. Sometimes it can feel like a never-ending obstacle course. You never know from one moment to the next what the next challenge is going to be. It could be why the TV show Survivor was so popular. It seems like everything we encounter needs a warning label telling us of the inherent danger in the product or activity. Most of us remember when McDonald's had to start putting the warning on their coffee cups that the contents of the cup are HOT because a woman sued the company after pouring hot coffee into her lap.

Much of Ephesians reads like a common sense label that warns us about the dangers that lurk for a Christian growing in the faith. Paul wrote letters to the emerging churches to give them counsel in the situations in which they found themselves. This letter is addressed to the church in Ephesus, a port

city on the Mediterranean coast of what today is the west coast of Turkey. It is one of the seven churches of Asia that is cited in the book of Revelation. Even though written to the church there, it is presumed to have been circulated to many churches. Ephesus could be equated on some levels to starting a church in Las Vegas. Not that there aren't good Christian folks in Las Vegas as there were in Ephesus but there were also a lot of negative distractions in Ephesus just like there are in Las Vegas.

Paul had once lived in Ephesus so he knew of that which he spoke. Paul knows the distractions of drunkenness, loose living and the general transient nature of a port city because he had witnessed it first hand and likely was hearing about the issues in letters coming to him from those in the church. When you read the letters of Paul, you have to keep in mind that it is like listening to one side of a telephone conversation. Members of the church there would have been writing to him giving him status updates on this new church start and there would have been multiple letters back and forth with the various churches. We have only one letter from Paul to the church at Ephesus.

We believe that the Ephesians letter saved in scripture was written by Paul from prison. He is giving instructions, many of which should be obvious, to these new Christians that may have been tempted by the city around them. If we were to back up to the beginning of the fifth chapter, you would see that Paul lays out at least three stark choices in this chapter – early in the chapter there is the choice of love over lust, then the choice of light over darkness and then, in our text for today, the choice of wisdom over foolishness.

He begins this section with another package label for the young Christian seeking to grow in the faith. "Be careful how you live," he says, "not as unwise people but as wise." There are three of these "not like this, but like this" sayings in this little section alone – "not as unwise but as wise;" "not as foolish but understanding the will of God;" and "not drunk but filled with the Spirit." All three can be covered in the first one – "not as unwise but as wise" - if we understand wisdom correctly.

If you want a way to track the essence of today's message, know that I want to give you three "W's." The first is WISE. To rightly understand what it means to be wise, we first have to understand that being wise does NOT equate to being smart. Wisdom does not equal knowledge. In fact, most of us can identify people that we know who rank high on the Intelligence Quotient – the IQ scale - but low on the Wisdom Quotient – the WQ scale. We wonder where along the line they missed the slightest bit of common sense.

Being wise is rooted in ancient "wisdom literature." The wisdom literature that we have in the Bible include the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. They are typically grouped together because of the abundant use of Hebrew poetry but they also are known as wisdom literature because of their emphasis on understanding and attaining wisdom for all areas of life, including our relationship with God and one another.

It's why I included the wisdom saying that the worship leader read from Proverbs this morning. "Lay aside immaturity and walk in the way of insight."

In these books – in wisdom literature – being wise means not being mired down in this world. Those who are wise look beyond the end of their nose, beyond the end of their own influence, beyond the extension of those who hold the power – way beyond those things – to something and someone greater.

Wisdom means that you're not plugged into the things that the world tells you will give you power. That is why, to the world, wisdom can sometimes look foolish over knowledge. It means living according to God's dreams and not the world's schemes. Wisdom is acknowledging complete dependence on God's redemptive purposes where death is cheated and life and love emerge triumphant.

When early anthropologists were looking for a name to identify the uniqueness of the human species, they came up with the name "homo sapiens." Any Latin students want to tell me what that means? "Wise person" technically "person wise" but we would say "wise person." It is what separates human beings – homo sapiens – from our fellow creatures. Wisdom takes us beyond the idea of what gets me ahead or what is easiest or that others do not matter to a place where others do matter. ²

Wisdom doesn't listen to reason, it listens to the Spirit. The wise among us care for the sick, the aged, and the less fortunate. The wise among us know how to listen better than talk. The wise among us show (as I bow to the great Aretha Franklin) some R-E-S-P-E-C-T for others. So the first "W" for our passage is WISE.

Secondly, Christians are WORSHIPFUL. In the Old Testament, much is written about the worship of a vast array of deities. There was a god for everything. If we are honest, it wasn't just an Old Testament problem. We have similar gods; money, power, prestige, nicer homes, nicer cars, nicer

boats. But the worship of the one God embodied on earth in the life and death of Jesus Christ is true worship – thanksgiving only. In fact, the Eucharist, what we do when we gather around this table to remember the incredible sacrifice of Jesus – the very word “Eucharist” – means “thanksgiving.”

All of worship, the singing of Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, according to Paul, is what we should be about to demonstrate our faithfulness and thankfulness to God. These things should not come just from the lips but from the heart of the worshipper. Intentional thankfulness is the lifeblood of the church community. I hope it is at the heart of why you are here this morning – to be intentional about being thankful to God.

But the worship of God doesn't just happen when we are in this room. We worship God by how we live our lives. If life is a gift, then God is the gift-giver and you have this gift for a purpose. When we worship God through our everyday lives, we live as wise, worshipful persons. We let our lights shine as God gave us the ability to do. Each and every one of us can do that with purpose and with joy.

The final “W” is WAYWARD. I want to suggest that “wayward” doesn’t mean lost but it means being different. Different from what the world expects. It means allowing the Spirit to lead you on a path that may be less traveled, a path that may be uncomfortable. To be “wayward” is to act in a way opposite to what is desired or expected. That is what Jesus calls us to be and do. If we are following Christ, by the world's standards we’ll be living wayward lives.³

It is wayward to befriend people that are different than you. It is wayward to invest money and time in things that do more than bulge the bottom line. It is wayward to take time away from your “real” job – maybe even precious vacation time - to serve others and give time being that hands and feet of Christ in the world.

I spent an hour on Thursday on the phone with Josh Baird, the coordinator for an organization in our denomination called Disciples Volunteering. Josh coordinates people desiring to volunteer time in mission with places that are hurting. I had called Josh because late last month, I received a call from Miguel Morales, the General Pastor of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico. You may remember Miguel when he preached from this pulpit just over a year ago. Miguel was calling me saying that now, one year after two devastating hurricanes, they are ready to welcome people who can come and help in the rebuilding effort. He was asking for our help.

The effort with Disciples Volunteering, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico and our disaster relief arm know as Week of Compassion is just starting to get off the ground and I wanted to ask Josh how we could help Miguel in his request to help in Puerto Rico. I need to learn that I need to be careful when asking such questions. Josh started his response with, "well, I don't know if Geist would be able to pull this off or not, but..." Clearly, by prefacing his request that way, he had thrown down the gauntlet and appealed to the pride I have in my congregation.

He explained that he has a few groups already lined up for early 2019 but he really needs a group of 6-10 people who would go to Puerto Rico for a week to 10 days later this fall to give those on the ground some experience in hosting groups and to start in on the tasks that need to be done. Ideally, the group would be a mix of skilled and unskilled with at least one person who would have some abilities in Spanish. I hung up the phone committing to do my best.

Wayward means trying something new, testing your abilities for the cause of Christ in ways that you may not have thought possible. In my experience, being wayward in your service of Christ begins in the service of others and ends in more joy and happiness received than given.

Rev. Douglas Meyer tells the story of a man who claimed to be the most accurate fortune teller in the world. A man once came to the fortune teller and said he had only one real question about his future and that was, "When will my life end?" The fortune teller gazed into the crystal ball and announced, "your life will end when you die." No wonder he was so accurate. The man nodded and then said, "yes, but will I be happy?"

"Ah," said the fortune teller, "that has nothing to do with the future but what you do in the present." He was right again. ⁴I believe that's what Paul had in mind in the verses 5:15-16 when he told the growing Christians how to be wise. He said, "make the most of time because the days are evil." I believe that days only become evil when we waste them. I've been looking at lots of back to school pictures over the last couple of weeks and there is not a post in which someone hasn't commented on how the time has flown by or how did they get so big so fast.

Those that knew church member Elaine Gorski will recognize the title of the sermon today as her words. Elaine was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in 2009 and passed away at the age of 53 in 2013. Those years between diagnosis and death could have been the most troubling of her life but she would have none of it. She took on the mantra of "Live Like You're Living"

and then set out to do just that. She made bookmarks to remind us to do the same. The days are evil only when we don't cherish each one.

God's will is for us to be fulfilled this day and every day, to believe the Gospel and to cherish the truth that in all things God is with us. That doesn't mean that we will not experience difficulties but it does mean that we will not let our circumstance dictate our faith but rather we will let our faith determine how we navigate our circumstances.

I thought about printing up warning labels for you to slap on your forehead this morning but instead, I'll just use Paul's admonition that seems to be common sense but needs to be affirmed again and again.

Caution – life is short and time flies by – be WISE and not unwise and cherish your days. Be WORSHIPFUL in all you do and let your life glorify God each and every day. Finally, be WAYWARD and serve where you will make a difference.

(And, if you want to go to Puerto Rico this fall, let me know).

¹ Some labels from my experience, some from www.rd.com/funny-stuff/funny-warning-labels/ .

² Word origins at www.dictionary.com

³ Idea of wise, worshipful, wayward from sermon by Leonard Sweet via Christian Globe Resources, Inc., Leonard Sweet Sermons.

⁴ Fortune teller illustration found at It Depends Upon Today, sermon illustrations by King Duncan.