

Warning: a life of faith is filled with pitfalls
United Church of Broomfield
August 15, 2021

Ephesians 5:15-20 (NRSV)

¹⁵ Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, ²⁰ giving thanks to God at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I grew up watching Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Road Runner cartoons. That may date me, but I'm okay with that. I think that era of Saturday morning cartoons was by far, the best cartoons of any - preceding or subsequently.

When you think about many of those Warner Bros. cartoons, they were quite violent and dangerous. There was nothing careful, cautious or mindful about them. The characters and situations were often hazardous and if applied *in the real world*, would certainly lead to death or serious injury in every case. Saying that, let us remember that those WERE cartoons; animated depictions of anthropomorphized animals doing nothing that animals or humans really do.

Strangely enough, I do think that the Road Runner cartoons, with Wile E. Coyote and all of the Acme products that he bought, may be the reason why we have so many warning labels on products today. Warning labels point to dangers in life; that's the *reason (supposedly)* for warning labels. Most warning labels make sense but some of them are just downright ridiculous and make you wonder WHY a company had to put that warning label on their product.

There are websites devoted to nothing but inane warning labels, labels that weren't type-o's, but rather carefully considered precautions for intended consumers. Here are some examples that may be surprising, but also suspect you may have encountered:

On a box of bottle rockets - "Do not put in mouth."

On a remote control for a TV. - "Not dishwasher safe."

In the manual for a Swedish chainsaw - "Do not attempt to stop the blade with your hand."

On a bottle of dog shampoo - "Caution: The contents of this bottle should not be fed to fish."

On a hair dryer - "Do not use in shower."

On a frisbee - "Warning: May contain small parts."

On a can of air freshener. - "For use by trained personnel only."

On a stroller - "Caution: Remove infant before folding for storage."

On a shipment of hammers - "May be harmful if swallowed."

At a swimming pool - "Do not breathe under the water."

At a ski resort - "Caution: Trees don't move."

And one of my favorites on a package of peanuts. - "Warning: May contain nuts."¹

¹ <https://www.atchuup.com/hilarious-warning-signs/>

What I want to know is, what happened to make those manufacturers create such warnings? Is there some general assumption that we are all related to Wile E. Coyote? I know some folks who aren't the sharpest knife in the drawer; I've even been like that about certain things, but are we all dumber than a box of rocks? Apparently, the Warning Label people think so.

Let's face it, life can be dangerous. Sometimes it can be like nothing more than an ongoing obstacle course or a mine field. You never know when something's going to blow up in your face or what the next challenge is going to be.

Our passage today from Ephesians could be interpreted as a warning label for the Christian life. Not a funny warning label, but a serious one.

Ephesians 5:15-20 (NRSV)

[15] Be careful how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, [16] make the most of the time, because the days are evil.

[17] do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

[18] Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit,

[19] sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts,

[20] give thanks to God at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The passage gives us our outline. Paul says we should: Be Prepared, Read the Manual, Stay Connected, Keep Your Focus, and Live Gratefully.

I. Be Prepared

The first thing Paul tells us is to BE PREPARED. In verses 15 & 16 Paul says, "Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil." I understand that to mean BE PREPARED.

I was never a scout, but I know that the Scouting Motto is to, "Be Prepared..." Lord Baden-Powell, a lieutenant-general in the British Army wrote a book in 1908 called *Scouting for Boys*. His book was the inspiration for the founding of the Boy Scouts of America. Lord Baden-Powell said, "you are always in a state of readiness in mind and body to do your duty."

Be Prepared in Mind by having disciplined yourself to be obedient to every order, and also by having thought out beforehand any accident or situation that might occur, so that you *know* the right thing to do at the right moment and are willing to do it.

Be Prepared in Body by making yourself strong and active and *able* to do the right thing at the right moment and do it.²

In our Daily Walk with Christ, we're called to be just as ready. We're called to be prepared because we never know when our faith will be tested or when we'll have the opportunity to share the good news with others. Which of course is "making the most of the time" as Paul says.

II. Read the Manual

² [Lieut. Gen. Baden Powell C.B.](#), [Scouting for Boys](#) (1908), "Camp Fire Yarn.—No. 4. Scout Law." (Part I, p. 48)

Second Paul says: READ THE MANUAL. Actually he says in verse 17, "So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

If, as a Christian, you don't want to be foolish, what better place to start than with the writings that contains the Word of God. The Bible describes the Will of God through the relationships and history of God's people.

Missionary Stuart Sacks was serving in Paraguay when Rafael, a Maka Indian, came to sit on his porch. Stuart stepped outside and asked Rafael what he wanted, to which he replied, "Ham, henek met." This meant "I don't want anything; I have just come near."

The missionary understood the simple meaning: Rafael didn't want anything from the American. He just wanted to sit on the porch because he simply enjoyed being near the missionary.³

In James 4:8 it says, "Draw near to God and God will draw near to you." When we draw near to God each day through the reading and study of Scripture, God draws near to us, and we begin to learn God's will for our lives. It's all in the manual. All we have to do is read the manual.

III. Stay Connected

Next it says, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit." I'm interpreting this as Paul telling us to STAY CONNECTED.

We stay connected through prayer, worship and fellowship. You see, being filled with the Spirit and seeking the ongoing presence and outpouring of the Holy Spirit is essential to the Christian life because there are so many temptations out there, like the wine Paul wrote about. Those temptations pester us and nibble at us and try to distract us from our relationship with God. Many of us struggle with moderation, so an acceptable glass of wine turns into several bottles, and we become disconnected; from ourselves, our God and one another. Temptations try to overload the power grid of our faith. So, what do we do?

A little boy and his father were hiking in the woods. They spotted a hawk circling above them. Suddenly, several black birds flew up, pestering the hawk. "Dad, why doesn't the hawk fight them off?" asked the boy. Motioning his son to be quiet, they watched the bird of prey spread his wings and soar high into the sky, leaving the other birds far behind. The father explained, "When a hawk is being pestered, all it needs to do is catch the currents and rise above the reach of the pests. There is no need to fight."⁴

Isaiah 40:31 says: "But those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings like eagles." In other words, if we STAY CONNECTED through prayer, worship and fellowship we'll be able to soar like eagles and rise above the temptations of life.

IV. Keep Your Focus

Fourth, Paul says KEEP YOUR FOCUS. Paul writes in verse 19: "sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts."

Why? So, you can keep your focus. Sometimes that's hard.

³ <http://www.tln.com/uplink/> August 14, 2003

⁴ <http://www.tln.com/uplink/> August 4, 2003

French Lick, Indiana, is well known to basketball fans as the boyhood home of basketball legend Larry Bird. In fact, many basketball fans come to take pictures of the street that is named in Bird's honor, Larry Bird Boulevard.

According to a sermon I read, one day, a couple of tourists came out to take pictures of themselves in front of the basketball-shaped street sign for Larry Bird Boulevard. They paid no attention to a jogger who passed by, and who was probably caught on the periphery of some of their photos. That jogger was Larry Bird. He was going through his daily work-out in the off-season. But these two tourists were so focused on the Larry Bird sign that they didn't even notice when the real Larry Bird passed by.⁵

Sometimes we get focused on the unimportant stuff of life and miss out on what's real and what's important. Paul tells us to stay focused on our relationship with God by singing Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. We all know that certain song lyrics can get stuck in our brains and hopefully transport us to fond memories and great places. If the words and tunes of music that inspires, motivates and comforts you are running through your head and heart instead of a litany of all the problems of the world or a list of ways you've been wronged or hurt, your life will be more buoyant.

Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things" (4:8).

If you do, then you'll be better able to keep your focus.

V. Live Gratefully

The last thing Paul tells us in this passage is to LIVE GRATEFULLY. He says: "[Give] thanks to God at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Gratitude is one of the greatest gifts and greatest responses to God's gifts in our lives that we can give.

According to an old Guideposts story, for Christmas one year, Phyllis Wohlfarth's husband gave her a gold lapel pin. Phyllis said she only took a second to thank her husband for his gift. A week later, as she put on the lapel pin, she reflected on her husband's thoughtfulness. With more sincerity, she thanked him again. Her husband explained that the pin had belonged to his grandmother, so it was very special to him. Phyllis noted that if she hadn't offered the second "thank you," she might have never learned the significance of the pin. It was only when she took the time to reflect on the gift and offer a more sincere "thank you" that she really learned to appreciate her husband's gesture.⁶

How often do we offer God a quick "Thank You" for our many blessings, and then forget about them? Or how often do we just take the blessings of God and never even say "Thank You."

In 1st Thessalonians 5:18 Paul says: "Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Ten-year-old Ashley Danielle Oubré gave a speech at Washington, D.C.'s Mayoral Prayer Breakfast in 1995. In the speech, she reminded the listeners of Jesus' words in Matthew 18 that they must become like little

⁵ Brad Preston, Bradford, PA.

⁶ "The Second Thank-You" by Phyllis Amy Wohlfarth, Guideposts, Nov. 1966, p. 11.

children in order to enter the kingdom of God. And she encouraged the adults in the audience to learn from their children how to get along together, how to trust one another, and how to trust God.

She ended by saying, "You teach us that when we have a problem, we should talk it out with others and with Jesus. You say that Jesus can solve all our problems, both big and small. But we notice when people get older and have problems, they are embarrassed to talk like that among themselves. We wonder if you really mean it, or is Jesus only for kids? I am still young enough to believe that Jesus knows how to solve my problems, the problems of the city, and of the world."⁷

I think Ashley hit the nail on the head. It may seem naïve, but I think Ashley was right, "Jesus knows how to solve my problems, the problems of the city, and of the world." But with all the bombardment from all the various forms of media, I have to remember and remind myself of that all the time. I have to live carefully as Paul put it because when we look out at the world, those warning labels, even the odd and crazy ones, are needed, because a Christian life is full of pitfalls.

Be Prepared, Read the Manual, Stay Connected, Keep Your Focus, and Live Gratefully. These are all designed to help us live carefully and also to live abundantly and flourish. Put Christ first and use this passage not only as a warning label but as a guide to living.

AMEN

⁷ By Ashley Danielle Oubré, cited by Ravi Zacharias in *Deliver Us from Evil* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1997), pp. 197-198.