

# GIVE THANKS

27th December 2020

Readings: Ephesians 5:12-20

With Christmas over our attention naturally shifts to the New Year and for many that includes resolutions. Resolutions that want to make the most of the New Year's fresh start and new opportunities. Here's the top ten resolutions from a year or so back.

- Lose weight
- Get organised
- Spend less, save more
- Enjoy life to the fullest
- Stay fit and healthy
- Learn something new and exciting
- Quit smoking
- Help someone else achieve their dreams
- Fall in love
- Spend more time with family



On the whole a worthy list. Now, this morning as we journey through Ephesians, we come to a section that gives us a framework for making resolutions – for making effective changes - that not only honour God but last the distance.

*So, let's pray.*

This morning we come to a passage towards the middle of chapter 5. In the first three chapters, Paul lays the groundwork - the theory, the theology - for living a life worthy of the calling we've received. In the second three chapters, including chapter 5, it's all about the "how too" of living a life worthy. Let's dive into 5:15-16

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Ephesians 5:15-16

Here we have three practical steps to make the best of life. Firstly, we are to look carefully into how we walk. This is nothing to do with good posture, not tripping up or getting lost. "How we walk" is a way of saying "how we live". "Look carefully then on how you live". Consider, review and ask ourselves questions. You see if we're comfortable we often drift. Even when things are uncomfortable, we often work hard to retain the status quo - even if haven't thought through if status quo is worth keeping. This is why God's Word instructs us to consider our lives carefully. To ask

ourselves, “What’s working well? What isn’t? What bad habits need breaking? What good habits need forming? What’s God honouring in my life and what’s not?”

The next thing we see from verses 15-16 is we need to be wise - and as we’ll see in the next verse - not to be foolish. This means after considering carefully our lives, a wise person makes a plan. Don’t let the “looking carefully” end in mere good intentions. We consider and then make good decisions that honour God and improve our lives. We are to be wise. Why? So that, thirdly, we make the best use of our time. We don’t need to be told how much time we spend putting off, procrastinating and wasting our time. We need to follow through. So, we consider carefully, be wise with a plan and follow through.

Now, how do we do all this? How are we to carefully consider, be wise and make the most of our time? Verse 17

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.  
Ephesians 5:17

“Understand the will of God”. Now, how do we do this? How do we understand the will of God? Well, this is a big topic and so we’ll break it down into two steps – finding the general will of God and finding the specific will of God for us. Let me explain. God’s Word, the Bible, reveals the general will of God Bible. Biblical principles help us understand God’s general and sometimes, but not always, also give us specific application. So, the Bible says do not murder. This is the general will of God, with a specific application. Don’t murder. Then there’s “love your neighbour as yourself”. This is the general will of God, however the Bible does not spell out how to do this. Now you might have a solo parent next door with a couple of younger children. The general principal is love our neighbour. But what’s the specific will of God for you? Well as you pray for our neighbour it comes to mind, “I’ll offer to baby sit at no cost now and again.” The general “love your neighbour” becomes specific, concrete, doable and God pleasing.

So, we learn the general will of God from the Bible and his specific will by asking God in prayer how to apply his general will. There is also occasions where we seek the input of other Christians - we seek wise counsel.

Now, Paul gives us an opportunity to apply this in the very next verse. What is God’s will for Christians over alcohol? Let’s find out, verse 18

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but... Ephesians 5:18

So, what’s God’s will here? Very clearly Christians are not to get drunk. This is the general will of God. Now, as there’s no clear prohibition in this verse and because we know that Jesus drunk wine at the last supper as did New Testament Christians

as they celebrated the Lord's supper, we know it is permissible for Christians to drink alcohol - as long it's not in excess.

This is the general will but what's God's specific for you concerning alcohol? Well, after taking this verse to God in prayer some may decide not to drink at all - they don't like the taste or that have family members whose lives were destroyed by alcohol or they hate the incredible social and physical carnage alcohol consumption makes in New Zealand. Other's may decide that in some social circumstances they'll have a drink or two but others they won't. It may be because a friend or family member is recovering alcoholic or has given up after major alcohol problems so drinking in front of them is not a good example of "loving our neighbour". Others many set their limits in a different direction. But God's Word is clear. With alcohol we need limits. Now because we are full of mixed motives and experts at denial and justification sometimes we need the help of others to find God's will. We need wise counsel. For, someone who's had major alcohol problems in the past may need a Christian friend to be firm about them to abstaining when tempted to misuse verse 18 as an excuse to go back drinking

So, here in Ephesians we are instructed to understand what the will of God is. We do this by taking principles from God's Word and applying them to our situation in prayer - and at times with the input of other Christians. This is the best pattern to follow as we come to making new plans for 2021.

Now, Paul does not leave the instruction on alcohol by itself. In fact, it's a lead into his next instruction. It's like he's saying "If you must drink then do so in moderation but let me show you a better way. Something that alcohol can never offer". Verse 18...

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:18-20

Now, there's a lot happening here. The initial instruction is key with the following instructions build on and developing on this. The core instruction is not to be drunk but to be filled with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Now the Bible is clear that when someone becomes a Christian, a key consequence is that they receive the Holy Spirit - God's Spirit enters and takes up residence within us. Two verses from Galatians help us see this. First 3:2

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Galatians 3:2 (NIV)

All those who believe receive the Holy Spirit. Galatians 4:6

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father". Galatians 4:6 (NIV)

It is the Holy Spirit within us that allow us to call God our Heavenly Father. So, in summary all Christians have the Holy Spirit in them. You may or may not remember this happening. You may or may not have a dramatic story to tell about the circumstances. However, what is key is if you're a Christian then the Holy Spirit is in you whether it happened in a quiet or dramatic way - whether noticed or noticed by you..

Why then does Paul instruct those who have the Holy Spirit already to be filled with the Holy Spirit? Well... because we can, and do, suppress or quench him we need to be intentional at allowing the Holy Spirit freedom and space. And this is the clue to why Paul is instructing Christians who already to have the Holy Spirit, be filled with the Holy Spirit? In fact, the grammar in the original language indicates the instruction is to "be filled and keep in being filled". Now, part of the reason for Paul's wording is by way of contrast. Instead of being filled and keep on being filled with alcohol - how many people do we know like this! - Christians are instead to be filled and keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. O how easily our hearts take for granted, push aside and even grow callous to the Holy Spirit's life in us. So, here we are instructed to be intentional about the Holy Spirit and keep on asking to be refreshed and refilled.

And because of this there's a natural overflow in at least three areas. We have time too look at just two of the three overflows today, the third we will leave to the next message in Ephesians. Firstly, because we are filled and keep on being filled we verse 19,

... addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. Ephesians 5:19

Being filled with the Spirit causes an overflow from our heart in both God's Word - the Psalms - and music - hymns and spiritual songs. Not just with our voices but also in our hearts. We sing with others in church and small groups, and the like but also privately in our hearts. Praise God for those who he has placed in our church with musical ability to lead, encourage and inspire us nonmusical types to sing God's praises. Praise God for those who record and distribute Christian music for us to listen to and be encouraged by. You see, it's natural for those who are filled, and keep on being filled, by the Holy Spirit to overflow in singing God's praises.

And as we sing God's praises the Holy Spirit also does another important work. He softens our hard hearts, builds up our faith and opens us up to his work within us.

This is why it is good to sing God's praises when we don't feel like it. It opens us up to the Holy Spirit's work and greatly pleases our Heavenly Father.

This then is the first overflow associated with being filled with the Holy Spirit. The second is found in verse 20. Also...

giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:20

Those who are filled and keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit overflow in thankfulness. Yes, like singing praises to God, giving thanks is a natural overflow for those who have the Holy Spirit - aka all Christians. But also, like music there are many times when we don't feel like giving thanks but as we do, out of obedience, the Holy Spirit is free to fill us afresh and do his work in us.

And notice the catch with this instruction. Not only are we to give thanks always - when we feel like and when we don't - but also for everything! Everything - the good and the not so good. We give thanks to God. And it's the "to God" that's crucial. If we have a bad health diagnosis, we thank God that he'll never leave us as we walk through the treatment. If we have a financial reversal, we thank God that he's the same yesterday, today and forever and he will supply the resources we need. If we or loved one have a major relationship breakdown, we thank God that his love for us will never grow cold and that he has a plan. So, fair weather or foul Christians are marked by gratitude and thanksgiving to God. And as give thanks - especially in the tough times - the Holy Spirit is free to refresh, refill and reinvigorate our walk with our Heavenly Father.

Now, let's pull all this together. At this time of year, it's natural to approach the New Year with some resolutions. And we started off looking at ten common resolutions. And as we look at them again - do you see what's missing?... There's nothing about our spiritual life. But today we've seen that God instructs us to look carefully at our lives, be wise and make the most of our time. We do this by understanding the will of God - both in general and in the specifics. We looked at tools for doing this - going to God's Word, asking him to show us specific applications and even seeking wise counsel when needed. Finally, we looked at the instruction to be filled and keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit and the role of music and giving thanks play. A natural overflow of being filled with the Holy Spirit is singing God's praises and thanksgiving.

So, whether you're a New Year's resolution person or not let 2021 be the year we grow in thankfulness. Where we regularly ask God to fill you a fresh, where you intentionally make melody to God with lips and heart, and to grow our ability to give thanks to God in all circumstances. It is my prayer that 2021 will be the year each of us grows in our ability to living lives worthy of the calling we have received. *Amen*