

Food and Drink for the Race

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[0 : 01] Good evening, brothers and sisters. I am so excited. A hot day followed by a rainstorm. I feel like I'm in Australia again. In fact, in honor of that, I'm going to preach the whole sermon in an Australian accent.

Night. Oh, night. Oh, night. Sorry. There's actually more to the Australian accent than just groaning, although.

Can I please draw your attention to a notice? I have a notice. It's in the bulletin. If you have a space that a VYLC-er can stay in, that would be great. We've got a number of people coming from other parts of Canada.

I think there's nine that we know of, so it would be good if any of you can billet or house one of them. It's Monday to Thursday. That'd be great. Let me or Julie know.

I'm going to pray for us. Father, help us to concentrate on this muggy, warm night. Help me to speak truthfully as we look at your word. We pray that this would bless us as we try to live as wise people in this dark world.

[1 : 16] We pray this in your son's name. Amen. My guess is that in our collective experience, we have all shared in this one.

It's when you are watching maybe television or a movie with your mother, and like one of those commercials comes on. I don't know if that's ever happened to you. A little bit awkward. Or if you're watching a movie that you saw with some friends, and you had your kind of crudity filter just switched off, and all of a sudden, I didn't realize there was that much swearing as your 83-year-old mother's watching the movie with a certain look on her face.

Maybe some of your 83-year-old mothers might enjoy that sort of thing. Mine was a little bit confused. Years ago, Julie saw this great film. Julie's my wife.

She saw this great film on a plane. It was called 50 First Dates. It was playing at the local drive-in. We thought we'd take our youth group, and I said, Julie, you've seen this film.

It's clean, right? We're going to have like 12-year-old girls coming along. She says, I've seen it. It was fantastic. I don't know if you've seen the movie 50 First Dates, but we were watching the edited airplane version, or certainly Julie was.

[2 : 31] We weren't watching that at the drive-in. We had a similar experience just last week on our summer camp. We were going to watch an outdoor film. I went to the local video store.

I thought, Happy Feet. It's a movie about singing penguins. It's a musical. Looks pretty good. There will probably be some good moral lesson about accepting those who are different.

As I got the film, this grade 9 young man said to me, You know this movie's full of sexually suggestive stuff? And I, Yeah!

It's a movie about singing penguins. You know? The one who can't fit in because he's got the happy feet. And the other one's a thing. I don't know if you've seen Happy Feet, but it is basically a raunch fest of penguins looking to find the opposite-sex penguins so they can produce more penguins.

It was a slightly queasy experience for a youth minister with 40 young people watching this saucy hip-hop video complete with Barry White soundtrack.

[3 : 49] Hey, baby. I'm like, whew! Have we seen Happy Feet? Have I piqued your interest? Now, you see, when you look at a movie, like I had Charlotte's Web in one hand, I had Happy Feet in the other, and I had Cars in the other hand.

And I'm looking at these three, and I'm thinking, Cars, I'm not really into the kind of Pixar stuff.

Charlotte's Web, the spider dies. I mean, I am still crushed from that when I was seven years old.

Feel my pain. And so I'm holding happy feet, and I think, okay, it's PG, but it's an animated film about singing penguins. What's the damage?

Now, you see, this is the image of tonight's Bible passage, believe it or not. No, not about penguins. But it's about this. Be careful.

Be careful. Get your facts straight, and choose wisely. That kind of sums up the Christian life, in a sense. Be careful. Get your facts straight.

[5 : 03] Choose wisely. You see, what God says to us in His Word tonight is that if you want to succeed as a Christian, you've got to watch out.

And you've got to be alert, because the days are dark, and the days are evil, and the world that we live in works against us. My guess is you know that. And my guess is you've heard countless sermons on that.

The reason you've heard countless sermons on that is because the Bible tells us that all the time. Be careful. If you want to succeed as a Christian, you watch out.

Now, if you have been with us, we have been looking through this magnificent book of Ephesians, and Paul has been talking about how God has made us alive. Paul has been talking about how we've been saved by this great act of God, and now we have to live a certain way.

First three chapters, here's what God has done. Here's all this great stuff. The last three. Here's what we have to do as a response. Now, immediately before this section we're going to look at tonight, Paul says a whole bunch of things that may make you feel a little uncomfortable.

[6 : 16] You may feel a little bit edgy with what Paul says. But he says, listen, the world around us is full of people who don't know God. They are completely shut off in their thinking. In fact, their thinking is completely dark and futile, and it leads them to sin.

That's the world that we live in. And Paul says, you guys, you can't be like that. We here at St. John's, those of you who are guests or visitors, and either from another church or thinking through the whole Jesus-God thing.

Paul says, listen, you can't live like that. You can't live like that. Don't live any longer like they do. You now have to imitate God.

You've got to be like God in your thinking and your speaking and your actions, and as we start next week, in your relationships with each other. And Paul says, don't have anything to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness.

It's a great phrase. Don't have anything to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness. You, however, you need to wake up. You need to wake up. And you need to be alive.

[7 : 31] Now that's where we're at right now. And Paul says to us, in light of all this, be careful how you live. Be really careful.

You see, be careful how you walk in your life. You don't want to be unwise, but you want to be wise, and you want to be really sharp, because the world that we live in is evil, and the time is short.

And so don't be foolish, but find out what God wants from you, and do it. And that's tonight's passage, in a sense, summed up. Now, if you've got this beautiful sand-covered document, I want you to make sure you're looking at the passage.

Mine got a bit munched. And I want you to follow with me in verse 15. And let's play a little game. The game is, find the action words.

Find the action stuff. Find the words that Paul says to us that say, this is what you do. We're not in the land of concept.

[8 : 37] We're not in the land of theory. We're not in the land of kind of highfalutin doctrine that will cause us to think and mull over. No, no, no. We are in the land.

We are on the playing field. Look carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise, but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.

Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Look at these action words. Look carefully. Keep your eyes open. You want to be wise.

You don't want to be a fool. You want to use the time well. There's not that much of it. And the time is evil. The time wants to kill you. You don't want to be foolish.

And you want to understand God's will. It's a good memory verse, that one. Or three. In a sense, as from my perspective, we're starting to start the year.

[9 : 41] I know not everybody's doing that. But as we start to think about the year that's going to come, starting kind of September 1 or September 2, this is a good theme for this year in ministry.

It's a good theme for me in my life. Now, if you know the book of Ephesians, Paul is very careful how you walk. And that word walk, which also means live, is a key theme in the book.

Paul says, Listen, I urge you to live or to walk according to the calling you have received. God has called you to be a Christian. Respond. Paul says in 417, Don't walk like the non-Christians. That's 417. Don't walk any longer like the non-Christians. Verse 2, chapter 5. Walk in love just as Christ loved you. Verse 8, chapter 5. Walk as children of light.

Paul is very, very concerned that the Ephesians and you and I live like Christians. We just don't believe good doctrine.

[10:48] We just don't have the right answers. We just don't know what's wrong with the cults or with the sects. But we live in a way that is smart and pleases God.

Now follow me again, even closer. Here's what Paul says. He says, Don't grow complacent in your Christian faith. You keep your eyes open and every day when you wake up, you want to wake up and you want to be thinking, How am I going to live today?

Where are the pitfalls that are going to trap me? Yesterday I completely goofed. I did this or I said that. How can I avoid that? How can I avoid that situation?

Because I want to have my eyes open and I want to live and walk as wise. As I've said to us all in the past and to the youth many times, it appears like we lose this as we get older.

And I've got to struggle that I've been a Christian for 27 years. And every day I've got to think, dude, you want to be as sharp now as you were back in August of 1980.

[11:58] You've got to keep focused. You've got to keep your eyes open. You've got to keep thinking and watching. In 10 years when I'm a Christian, for 37 years, I want to be sharp.

In fact, I want to be sharper. But historically, we tend to lose this. The next thing that Paul says is, use your time well.

Don't think about later. Don't think about putting things off. Use your time well. These days that you live in are evil and the days just go. Just like that.

They just go very quickly. Paul will say in another part, Galatians 6, as we have opportunity, do good to all people. You use this time to serve the King, to help your Christian brothers and sisters, to show Jesus to those who live around you.

Because it's going. The clock's ticking. And the time works against you. Finally, God says to us here, Paul says to us, don't be foolish.

[13:07] Don't be foolish. Fill your brain with everything that God wants you to do. You see, we don't live in a world anymore where we're waiting for a letter from an apostle.

That's when the Bible was written. They would have to think through the Old Testament, which they had. They would wait for a letter from an apostle. They would talk about it. They would think about it. And God blessed them with lots of miraculous words and actions.

These days, we have God's Word. And so we have to fill our mind with God's Word so that we can stay wise. Now, when you think about us as a group of Christians, there's been a lot of descriptions used about us historically.

Way back in the old days, we were called cannibals, believe it or not, because of the Lord's Supper. We were called incestuous because we greeted each other with a kiss. We were called pagans because we didn't worship the emperor.

more lately, we've been called judgmental, prudish, intolerant, unloving, irrelevant, bigots.

[14:14] A word rarely used to describe you and me is wise. That's rarely a word used. Now, I think there's two reasons for that.

The non-Christian world can't recognize spiritual wisdom. I think that's one reason. But I think a second reason is, by and large, we're not wise. By and large, the Christian community is fairly simple.

You just have to flick on the TV and look at these huge churches. You know, 20,000 people going to some of these churches and hearing just stuff that's not true week after week after week.

And we, as God's people, need to redress that and need to be people who are wise. This generation of Christians needs to actively work at being people who are wise, who walk according to God's path.

One movie I do like, which I won't show to the youth, is a movie called *We Were Soldiers and We're Young*. I liked it so much I read the book. Tragic book. But if you know the movie, Mel Gibson movie, there's a scene, one of the best scenes in the movie, where the soldiers are lying at nighttime and they don't know where the enemy is.

[15 : 37] And so, the one guy, one of the commanders, calls back behind him and he says, you need to send the flares. Does anybody know the scene? Is anybody with me? And they send the flares and the flares light up and these soldiers who are all lying on the ground, what do they see all around them?

They see the enemy everywhere. As these flares go off, they can just see all the enemies who are slowly creeping in trying to kill them.

You see, that's the world that we live in. We are surrounded by foolishness. We are surrounded by idiocy. We are surrounded by blindness. We are surrounded by futile thinking.

And we have to actively work, actively, to fight that. Now, as I read this passage again and again and again this week, one passage that kept coming to my mind was Psalm 1, where the psalmist says, Blessed are those who do not walk with the wicked and in their thinking, who do not stand with sinners, who do not sit with mockers, but they fill their mind with the law of the Lord.

And that is their delight. And that is us. You see, what does Paul tell us here? He says, listen, you don't want to be stupid. You don't want to be foolish. You don't want to act in a way that brings bad results.

[17 : 06] So what is the counter to that? Well, the counter of that is to not be careful. That's not the counter. The counter is to know what God wants from you. So you fill your mind with Scripture and you fill yourself up.

And in the same way the word walk is a theme in the book of Ephesians, the word fill is a theme. And Paul says, what God wants to do is He wants to fill you with a spirit of wisdom and revelation. God wants to fill us and lavish wisdom upon us. Why? So we can live in a way that pleases Him. Those Christians who know the Scriptures, who know what God wants for them, are obviously much more likely to live in a way that pleases Him.

Now let's just think through. What issues do you struggle with? With, you know, how do I live? What are issues that you think, you know, what does God want for me in this issue?

Now here's three of them. They're a little bit kind of sitting duck targets. But you see, if you're struggling with who do I go out with, not that anybody in the first three rows would be struggling with that issue, but if you struggle with the issue, you know, who do I go out with?

[18 : 26] Well, you can think and think and think and you're going to probably not get a lot of spiritually enlightened answers. You go to God's Word, God's Word's full of wisdom about who you go out with.

You've got wisdom in Proverbs, you've got wisdom in Ephesians, you've got wisdom in Corinthians, and you can read God's Word and you can say, well, first of all, if I do marry or go out or marry somebody, they've got to be a believer.

God's Word. So clearly, bang, there's a whole bunch of wisdom. So, if a guy who ticks all the lists or a girl on your little checklist that you've got, but the one box remaining is, must be a believer and you can't tick that box, it's an easy decision.

Real easy decision. God's will is perfectly clear there. And so suddenly, you can live and act in a way that pleases the Lord. Whereas if you go out with a non-believer, I know this is a sensitive topic, but it's a topic that we struggle with.

And if you go out with a non-believer, you are outside of God's revealed will in the Scripture. Now, I know that's a sensitive topic and if you want to talk with me about it after, I can show you parts of the Scripture.

[19 : 44] Here's another issue. How do I spend my money? That's not really, I don't think any of us struggle with that issue. We should. You know, those who are finishing university, what do I do when I get a paycheck?

You know? You can only buy so many wees and then, you know, you can only... Wee, don't worry about it. Actually, is that what you do? I don't even know what you do with a wee. It looks more like a big fat tractor steering wheel.

What do I do with my tractor? You see, what do I do with my money? Well, God's Word is full of what to do. Again, the book of Proverbs talks a lot about it.

Jesus talks so much about finances. It's one of the most common topics that Jesus talks about.

Paul talks about it. So you get revealed will. Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth.

Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Support the poor. The Bible says that very clearly. The Bible says support those who are in gospel ministry.

[20 : 45] The Bible says that very clearly. The Bible says put aside a sum that you feel is right and give it away. Bang! You start to do that, you can know what God's will is.

And you can make wise decisions. Do I commit myself to something if that means missing my small group for four, six, eight months? Do I play hockey if it means not going to youth group?

You know what God's Word says. You open up the book of Hebrews, God's Word says don't give up meeting together. God's Word says encourage each other daily. I can't commit myself to something over here if it means I'm not going to fulfill God's Word.

Suddenly God's Word is like a floodlight on that issue. Now, my guess is there are some issues that you struggle with that God's Word may be silent on. But in my experience, most of the issues that we are struggling with with wisdom and God's will, you read God's Word prayerfully, bang!

God opens up and He shows you exactly where He wants to walk. And that is what God wants for this generation. He wants us to equip ourselves to know His will, to read His Word, to think about His Word, to write it in our hearts, and then to live it.

[22 : 03] And as we live it, we have a generation of people who are walking wisely. We have a generation of people who are not foolish. We have a generation of people who are using their time well.

what makes you and I different to the average person. They don't know God's will. They're incapable of knowing God's will.

It's not even an issue to them. Whereas you and I have that opportunity. Now Paul moves on kind of interestingly I think in the way I see it.

And he says, listen, be wise. And he goes bang to his first illustration. His first way of being wise. And the practical issue Paul says is don't get drunk.

Don't get drunk. Now in a sense I can't see the connection. Be wise, be wise. Hey, by the way, don't get drunk guys. But clearly that was a problem in the Ephesians church.

[23 : 07] I love the Ephesians church. If you read kind of chapter 4, 5, and 6 you can see that they were thieves or thieves. They lied a lot. They swore.

They were mean. And they were drunkards. What a group of people, huh? I've got a whole bunch of jokes that I want to say right now and I'm not going to say them because I'm going to be good.

Okay? I'm going to be good. You see, it's hard to be wise. Even back then when people knew Jesus, saw Jesus, saw the resurrection, knew Paul, Paul was visiting you, writing letters.

It's hard to be wise. And it takes work. And so Paul says, don't get drunk. One of the marks of being a wise person is that you're full of the Spirit of God.

As you read His Word, as you pray to God, as you live the Christian life, you are going to be full of the Spirit and you're going to turn your back on something that historically has been a problem that has ruined mankind, alcohol.

[24 : 10] It does more damage, you know all this, than every other drug or illicit substance combined. They don't even come close to alcohol. And Paul says, if you want to live wisely, the antithesis of that is to get drunk.

If you get drunk, you're going to be just like the Gentiles, just like the non-Christians, just like those who are futile in their thinking. And I've gotten drunk a few times since I became a Christian and I remember one time in particular, I'm at Zion National Park in Utah with an old non-Christian buddy of mine and he pulled out a bottle of some hideous substance and I drank it and I thought, I am so out of God's will right now.

Especially when I woke up with my boots on and my sleeping bag. But I thought, that's clearly not what God wants.

I couldn't pray. I couldn't read my Bible. I couldn't love my neighbor. Those three fairly important categories were completely cut off.

That's what the Ephesians were struggling with. They were being just like the pagan world when it came to drinking. And the other thing about drinking, Paul says, is that it leads to a lack of self-control.

[25 : 25] It leads to debauchery. which means, you know, that self-control that we're all kind of wrapped with after a few drinks, the top button comes open.

Okay. It's going back up. And Paul says, that's not how we're to live. That's not how we are to live. Now my guess is that many of us struggle with getting drunk. Many of us drink. I drink.

My guess is many of us struggle with, you know, when do we stop? And when we're on a Friday with our work friends, what do we do? You know, we don't want to look like a complete loser or a goose, but we don't want to, you know.

My guess is the youth. No, it's no guess. The youth struggle with drinking. Historically, they do. And Paul says, careful living, wise living, God's will, avoid getting drunk.

[26 : 30] You want to be filled with the Spirit of God. And as that Spirit comes in you, it will reflect itself in joyous singing. And I think the idea in Paul's mind is, in the same way you go to the pub and you sing stupid ditties, you're going to be filled with a true spirit and sing Christian songs.

And that's historically what we have done. Some of the greatest, most spirit-filled Christians have written the greatest, most fantastic songs. Now let's wind up. It's hot.

I think I lost the Australian accent a fair while ago. What's Paul telling us here? He's telling us two things and I think it's pretty obvious.

He's telling us, be sharp. Be sharp. In the same way you are going to wake up tomorrow morning and hopefully have had a good sleep and hopefully attack the day with some degree of vengeance, do that in your Christian life.

It takes work. It takes thinking. God is extremely gracious to us, but it is costly grace. He wants our response.

[27 : 46] It's going to take each other and it's going to take a renewed dedication. If you want to fill yourself with spiritual wisdom and alertness, you must surround yourself with people who think the same way.

Commit yourself to this service or your church that you go to if you are a guest. Commit yourself to a small group that studies God's word, that helps us to be wise.

Commit yourself to a small group where you can say, guys, does anybody know some spiritual wisdom on this issue that I'm dealing with or struggling with? If you want to stay alert and wise, you will not commit yourself to something that will block your attendance to this service, your own church, or a small group Bible study.

When you do that, you are unwise and you will probably or possibly not fill your head with spiritual wisdom as you could otherwise.

That's the first thing. The second thing is this. We live in a world that wants to munch us up and spit us out. When I used to partake in the dark side, my whole goal, I was a marijuana evangelist.

[29 : 07] My whole goal was to get non-smokers to smoke dope. And when I got somebody to smoke dope, it was a major success story.

It's crazy, isn't it? Because you see, in my darkened thinking, I wanted more cockroaches in the corner. Hope that illustration works here. There's not a lot of cockroaches in Vancouver.

Works in Australia because it doesn't take away kids, those things. Now, I wanted them to be futile in their thinking in the same way I was.

That's the world that we live in. We're on the beach at our summer camp last week, Point Roberts. There's 40-something of us, and we're reading the Bible.

It seems like a pretty harmless activity. Reading the Bible on the beach in Point Roberts. I blow the whistle. Everybody's walking back to the campsite.

[30 : 10] I'm at the end, and this enormous guy comes out with like a tool belt. Kind of looked like weaponry. And he said, Are you with these guys?

With these kids? And I said, Yeah, I am. He says, I don't go to your place and play basketball, so I want you to stay off my beach. And I thought, Wow, okay.

Quickly, my mind took me to we're in America. You can own the beach in America. It's one of the only countries in the world. I don't have a leg to stand on. He's got a belt with weapons.

And so I said, Well, you know, we're just from the Christian campsite next door, and these kids were just reading their Bibles. Is that okay? And here's his response.

Get ready for it. He says, I do not want a group of kids reading their Bibles in front of my pub. See, he's the publican on the beach, right, you know, right on the beach.

[31 : 12] He says, I don't want kids reading their Bibles in front of my bar. I'm in the sin business. Wow. You see, we get to debate whether running a bar is actually in the sin business.

I think he kind of assists the sin business. But you see, there it is. There it is. There is a picture of this world in that guy right there.

He is futile, darkened, ugly, non-spiritual. He is a complete and utter fool. And when he stands before God, I hope I'm right next to him, when God shows him the videotape of these guys reading this Bible.

You see, I went away from that conversation and I was really angry. I didn't get angry with him. That was a kind of God grace moment on my part. But I was really angry. And I thought, this is rotten that these kids can't read the Bible on his beach.

His beach? How did that happen? And then he said, if you have \$5.5 million, you can buy some. We're going to be taking up a collection.

[32 : 32] I actually thought about saying, can I pay you three bucks a kid to read the Bible? And then I thought, no, that's not right. We'll each buy a beer. No, that doesn't work.

Although a few of the ecclesia who are over 21 said, can we go to his pub with our Bibles and buy a beer? I like that twisted sort of logic. You see, I went away from that conversation and I was really, I was really upset.

I was upset for all sorts of reasons. No more reading the Bible on that beach. We've done it a lot before. I was upset for this kind of unfairness of the whole thing. I was upset about the wake-up call that I live in an evil time and I've got to be wise and I've got to be careful and I saw the sign that said Private Beach don't trespass and I disregarded it.

And I was angry at him. And so we went back in and our speaker Chris Lay was giving his talk and it was the first talk on the Sermon on the Mount and his talk was this.

I love it. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are you when men persecute you. Ah.

[33 : 48] There it is. There it is. I'm faced with this dark world and suddenly God's word comes in and just makes everything clear that that was actually a blessed experience and that people aren't going to understand us.

The average person in Point Roberts is not going to understand a group of kids reading their Bible on the beach. Why would they? They're going to be thinking these kids are on my beach or they're on a private property or they're law breakers. And I went away from that thinking that was a moment that God filled me with his spirit through his word.

Let's have a time of silence where we pray that that happens to us all. Let us pray that God fills us with his spirit that we will be people who are wise that we will be people who are alert.

We're going to have a time of silence and then I'm going to ask who's ever praying for us to please come on up. God I