



# ***The Westminster Pulpit***

Sermons Preached at Westminster Presbyterian Church  
3900 West End Avenue Nashville, Tennessee 37205-1899

## ***“Be Careful How You Live”*** **Sermon on Ephesians 5:15-20**

Donovan A. Drake

August 18, 2024

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Stephanie just read the story about God asking King Solomon, “What do you need?” And the need that bubbled up for King Solomon was wisdom. Suddenly, Solomon was a wise man. God said, “No one has been as wise as you. No one will ever be as wise as you.” Solomon is and will be the pinnacle of wisdom.

Who have been some wise people in your life? And what made them wise? And if you can't think of anyone, congratulations, you're probably the wisest one in the room. None has ever been as wise as you. But, I bet, even as wise as you are, there are places in your life where you might ask God for some extra wisdom to navigate the crazy days of your life.

### *Ephesians 5:15-20*

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

What do you think of this Paul of the Ephesians telling you to, “Be careful how you live”? Are you going to mind his words? It's tough. It's tough having people telling you how to live.

I took the photo on the cover of your bulletin. It should have had a title on it, that is, “Be Careful How You Live.” In that photo is Howard Mann and Dennis Williams, who were climbing a roof to repair damage from the Nashville tornado. We were up on this roof, to do good and to help, but we were also up on the roof because none of our loved ones were there to stop us.

I'm sure everyone who was on a roof that day came home to their loved one who asked, "What did you end up doing?" And everyone replied, "Not much." Because no one was fool enough to say, "I was up three stories high hanging upside down while the pastor hung on to my boots." Not... Everyone replied, "Not much," because, as they say, "The truth will get you killed."

The point is that Dennis, Howard, and I will now have some explaining to do on the way home from church. But the other point is that people telling you "be careful how you live" isn't always embraced with open arms.

For example, "Honey, you're driving too fast!"

Now that may be truth, but I seldom respond, "You're correct, honey, I am driving too fast. Before I knew you, I had no idea I was so terrible at operating a motor vehicle, but you have touched my life with wisdom, and I am grateful."

I think in any relationship you want to be careful how you live!

And so it is, this Paul of Ephesians thinks we might be living a little recklessly. He seems to be worried about the Body of Christ not looking like the Body of Christ. No one appreciates a fraud. Anyone who says they're one thing but lives a different way – that's a fraud.

I remember having a discussion with someone in seminary who could not call God "Father" because of what her father did to her. Be careful how you live.

I remember having a conversation with someone who grew up in the church but didn't come to church. She had attended a summer church camp and heard a preacher preach a word of meanness. If that's the church, she didn't want any part of it. Be careful how you live.

The Church sings, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." But therein lies a 6th verse that points a damning finger; what does that say? That's a fraud...

"Be careful how you live," says Paul. "Lead a life worthy of the calling. Put away what is false! Speak the truth. Be angry, but do not sin. Let what comes out of your mouth be useful to those who hear." Paul doesn't want his church to be tossed to and fro from every wind of doctrine.

"Be careful how you live, for the days are evil!" The days are evil.

I don't like to think that way. I like to think, "This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!" It's positive. The days are evil! That just makes you want to pour vodka on your Raisin Bran and call it a day! Such a downer.

It reminds me of when I was on my first day on the job as a television reporter intern. We were covering what was going on at the Woodbury County Board of Supervisors in Sioux City, IA. I was just standing there in the courthouse, and an older gentleman came up to me and said, "Do you know what television is?" "No, sir, I replied. He said, "It's the Devil's eye." First day on the job and I realize I'm working for the other team. Who knew that reporting on sand and road salt was working for the dark side? But it was.

“Be careful how you live, for the days are evil!” I just don’t see it!

But that may be because I’m too careful about how I live. Life goes pretty swimmingly on the West side of town.

But, if you get out of town a little bit, you can see how some people live so close to the edge of the cliff. We heard that in the Sunday School classroom the other week. We heard that there are over 4,500 homeless children, right here in Nashville! We heard about a woman with children who missed a rent payment, and was living in a car with her children. She couldn’t go to social services because she was afraid they would take her children away. It’s pretty dangerous out there. It’s pretty dark out there when rent is too high, when food costs too much. When the world is on the Internet, and you can’t afford a phone. When there’s a method of getting ahead, and you know it and I know it, but some people don’t know the rules of the game. When you’ve grown up with a parent who uses words that you cannot trust. “Yes” sometimes means “yes.” And “No, never means “No.” When you have been abused, when you have been called an idiot by the one who is supposed to love you.... Then, the darkness covers this earth, and that’s an evil day.

Be careful how you live, for the days are evil. If you can’t see the evil, it may be because we’re too careful in how we live as the Body of Christ. Because it’s pretty dark out there. And light shines in the darkness. To be loved in a world full of hate.

Jesus was the angriest that I have ever known him to be when he turned the light on in a very dark temple. Next thing you know, he toppled over the tables of the money changers. Fashioned whip and cord. Driving out the animals. “You have turned my father’s house into a den of robbers.” A den of robbers is a place where those who did evil can go to feel safe.

Jesus wasn’t upset they were selling Girl Scout cookies in the parlor; he was upset because the temple became a place to hide from their evil deeds. Six days a week, they took the coins of the widows, allowed the orphans to walk the streets, and let the poor starve, and then came inside the temple with washed hands and pious faces. It made Jesus ill.

The Paul of Ephesians makes the point that our we are equipping ourselves not to “eat, drink, and be merry!” But be careful how you live. We are equipping ourselves for the work of ministry. For building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

“Be careful how you live!” means NOT being afraid to die for a good thing. Someone did that once. Don’t be afraid of that. Be careful how you live.

Someone was upside down on a roof, nailing a tarp. They held onto his boots while he was holding on for dear life, and covering the hole on a roof that belonged to someone they had never met. Some people did that. Be careful how you live.

I know someone who reads to children in public schools hoping to make a difference. Be careful how you live. Someone does that. Be careful how you live.

I know someone on a fixed income who gives a small portion of her income to help someone who has little income... Someone does that. Be careful how you live.

I know someone who has gone through operation after operation, tumors twisting in his body, strangling the life right out of him. The pain he feels is beyond belief, and yet when the doctors come in or the nurses ask, he responds with such kindness. I don't know how he does that except I know how he does that. Be careful how you live.

I know his mother and father are going through hell, the darkest valley. And yet after each email update, there is gratefulness for this church. In the midst of her pain, she sends gratitude to the church. Someone did that. Be careful how you live.

I know a woman who helps people fill out a form, understand the form, and navigate the bureaucracy...so that a person can have some food to eat or a house to stay in. "It's not hard. If you know how to do it." She knows how to do it. Be careful how you live.

I know someone who could not let the bitterness eat her soul anymore, and she knocked on the door and gave the other person mercy and forgiveness. Had to let it all go. Someone did that. Be careful how you live.

I know a man going into surgery for a brain tumor tomorrow, and he's more worried about his friend. "Pray for my friend who is going through a struggle..." He has a brain tumor, but it's not about him. He's thinking about the others. Wow! Someone did that. Be careful how you live.

What is that thing that you can do that is careful and full of care that will bring to light the Kingdom of God? Amen.

Copyright©Donovan A. Drake 2024