

Ephesians Sermon Illustrations 5

EPHESIANS SERMON ILLUSTRATIONS

OUR DAILY BREAD, et. al.

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Copy The Master

Ephesians 5:1

November 10, 2003

The Louvre in Paris is perhaps the most famous art museum in the world. It displays originals by such masters as Delacroix, Michelangelo, Rubens, da Vinci, Ingres, Vermeer, and many others.

Since 1793, the Louvre has encouraged aspiring artists to come and copy the masters. Some of our most famous modern artists have done that and have become better painters by copying the best the world has ever known.

An article in Smithsonian magazine tells about Amal Dagher, a 63-year-old man who has been duplicating art at the Louvre for 30 years. Dagher remains in awe of the masters and continues to learn from them. He said, "If you're too satisfied with yourself, you can't improve."

Paul instructed us to be "imitators of God" (Ephesians 5:1). In his first letter to the Thessalonians, he commended the believers because they were becoming like the Lord and setting an example for others (1Th 1:6, 7, 8, 9, 10-note).

Like the Louvre copyists, we'll never reach perfection before we get to heaven. Even so, we must resist the temptation to be satisfied with our present imitation of Jesus. We need to keep looking to Him, learning from Him, and asking for His help. Let's

copy the Master. —David C. Egner

More like the Master I would live and grow,
More of His love to others I would show;
More self-denial, like His in Galilee,
More like the Master I long to ever be. —Gabriel

To become like Christ, we must learn from the Master

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Ephesians 5:1

F B Meyer

Be ye therefore imitators of God, as beloved children. (r.v.)

Children mostly resemble their father. There is often an unmistakable family likeness, which compels the most casual observer to exclaim, "The very image of his father." Oh that in each of us there might be that which would make men think of God!

Put away your former manner of life (Ephesians 4:22-note). — The old man stands for the collection of habits, sayings, and doings which characterised our unregenerate days. The apostle says that they are to be put away suddenly, instantly. Evidently this is possible, or such a command would not be issued. Men speak of a gradual reformation, and advise the piecemeal discontinuance of evil. God, on the contrary, bids us treat the evil past as a company of soldiers would bandits and outlaws. There is the greater reason for this, as the old man waxeth corrupt. Even Martha could not bear the opening of her brothers vault.

Be renewed in the spirit of your mind (Ephesians 4:23-note). — We are reminded of Romans 12:2-note. The mind needs to be brought into daily, hourly contact with God's thoughts, as contained in Scripture, that it may be renewed; else our constant association with the men and women of the world, their maxims and practices, will inevitably and sorrowfully deteriorate it. The only source of daily renewal is fellowship with God.

Put on the new man. — Of this the apostle affirms that it is according to God, and has been created. Our Lord created this beautiful dress when He rose from the dead. The day of resurrection was one of creation. All the habits and dispositions of a holy, godlike life have been prepared for us in Him, and await our appropriation; and as they are according to God, so soon as we put them on we shall become imitators of God as dear children. (Meyer, F. B. Our Daily Homily)

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Living Up To The Name

Ephesians 5:1

August 3, 1999

Our 9-pound Yorkie was barking frantically and digging furiously to get at a chipmunk that had scurried under a shed. She looked at me with an expression that seemed to say, "Can't you do something to help me catch it?" I didn't help her, but neither did I scold her. While I wish she could distinguish between rats and chipmunks, it's natural for her to go after any rodent. She is, after all, from a family of small terriers that were bred in Yorkshire, England, to kill rats. So she's living up to her family name.

God expects His "dear children" (Eph. 5:1-note), who have been delivered from spiritual darkness and made to be "light in the Lord" (Eph 5:8-note), to do what we were redeemed to do. He wants us to "walk in love, as Christ also has loved us" (Eph 5:2-note), and not to speak or live as unbelievers who have no share in God's eternal kingdom (Eph 5:5,6-note).

Obviously, living as God's children is not a matter of instinct. We are challenged to remind ourselves daily of who we are by God's grace. Only as we do this consistently and become "imitators of God as dear children" can we have the joy of knowing that we please the Lord.

When we do what God saved us to do, we'll be living up to the family name. --H V Lugt

Dear Jesus, take my heart and hand,
And grant me this, I pray:
That I through Your sweet love may grow
More like You day by day. --Garrison

How we behave reveals what we believe.

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Just Like My Dad!

Ephesians 5:1

June 18, 1995

Like so many kids her age, my daughter Julie loves to play basketball. Of course she's had more than a little encouragement, since that is my sport of choice.

Much of what Julie knows about the game has come from our driveway sessions. Occasionally, as I have watched her playing ball with friends, I've heard her remark after making a long shot, "Just like my dad!"

That's a good feeling, but the other day she said something that made me feel even better. We were talking about how she imitates me on the court, and she said, "Dad, Christians should be imitators too. We should imitate Jesus. Then we could say, 'Just like Jesus.'"

Julie is right. We need to know how Jesus responded to trouble--and react as He did. We need to know how He answered critics--and answer as He did. We need to know how Jesus cared for others--and treat them as He did.

That's a lofty aim, but it should be the goal of every Christian. We can only begin to do this by regularly studying God's Word and daily seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance in all that we do.

Imagine the joy it would give our Lord if we would always try to handle life just like Jesus. --J D Branon

O blessed Jesus, help us
To ever be like Thee;
Till at the throne of glory
Thy loving face we see. --Haan

God's children should bear a likeness
to their Father.

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Disappearing Act

Read: Ephesians 5:1-13

August 7, 1998

What if suddenly one day all followers of Christ disappeared? What if we all just vanished?

I'm not talking about Christians being removed from planet Earth. I'm talking about something that we can control.

What if suddenly all the Christians vanished from places of entertainment where we, as children of the heavenly Father, didn't belong?

For instance, what if Christians refused to watch TV programs in which immorality masquerades as entertainment? What if we all vanished from the Nielsen ratings? And what if we no longer watched movies that are ungodly or whose characters use God's name in vain and take God's standards so lightly?

Would our absence make a difference? Would the people in Hollywood notice that we were gone?

I think so, but that's not really the point. Our duty in life is to live each moment in fellowship with God. That means we don't let anything in our lives interrupt that fellowship. Our close relationship with God is at stake.

Let's vanish from the hordes who are being influenced by ungodly entertainment. And even if nobody notices but God, that's really all that matters. --J D Branon

More purity give me, more strength to o'ercome,
More freedom from earth-stains, more longings for home;
More fit for the kingdom, more used would I be,

More blessed and holy, more, Savior, like Thee. --Bliss

If you walk with God, you won't run with the world.

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“Garbage Mary”

Ephesians 5:1-13

February 10, 2006

She dressed in rags, lived in a tenement house amid mounds of garbage, and spent much of her time rummaging through trash cans. The local newspaper picked up her story after the woman who was known in her neighborhood as “Garbage Mary” had been admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Astonishingly, in her filthy apartment police found stock certificates and bankbooks indicating she was worth at least a million dollars.

This woman’s condition was heartbreaking. But from God’s point of view there are even more tragic examples of “wealthy” people who subsist on “garbage.” If Christians are controlled by lust, hate, envy, pride, impatience, or bitterness, they’re actually choosing to live off the refuse of the world.

This might be understandable if they had no resources to draw from. You’d expect that kind of behavior from people without faith in Christ. But that’s not the case for believers. We have the Word of truth and the help of the Holy Spirit. We have no excuse for groveling in the dirt of sin when the power of God is at our disposal.

Father, forgive us for eating “garbage” when You’ve prepared a banquet for us. Help us to “lay aside all filthiness” (James 1:21-note) and to feast on Your goodness. —Mart De Haan

Choose not the lowly paths of sin
When lofty heights before you rise;
God freely gives the power to win
The victor’s crown, the heavenly prize. —D. De Haan

One taste of God’s grace can make us lose our hunger for the world.

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Love Letters

Ephesians 5:2

January 18, 2001

To “walk in love” means that we continually do the little acts of kindness that can make life bearable and better for another person.

One practical way to express our love costs only the price of a postage stamp—plus paper, ink, and a little thought.

All of us have felt the nudge to write a letter—an unexpected note that could brighten another person's day. Perhaps it is a note of appreciation, an expression of concern, or a compliment for a task well done. Too often the letter goes unwritten and the impulse is unexpressed. We convince ourselves that we don't have time, or that our letter won't matter.

A young minister cherished a note he received from a busy architect in his congregation. The letter said simply, “Your sermon met me where I was on Sunday—at the crossroads of confusion and hurt. Thanks for preaching it!” Those words met the pastor where he lived—at the intersection of discouragement and pain—and encouraged him to keep on in the ministry. The note took less than 5 minutes to write.

Can you think of someone who needs encouragement, thanks, or a reminder that you are praying for him or her? “Walk in love” to the mailbox today. —H W Robinson

It was only a brief little note,
Or a word that was prayerfully spoken,
Yet not in vain, for it soothed the pain
Of a heart that was nearly broken. —Anon.

One little act of kindness can have multiple results.

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Why Love Begets Hate

August 18, 2005

Ephesians 5:2

If there is one thing believers in Jesus should be known for, it is love. The word love appears in Scripture more than 500 times. The essence of the gospel is love, as we see in John 3:16. "For God so loved the world ... " The epistle of 1John 3:16 elaborates: "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us."

Christians are to serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13), love their neighbors as themselves (Galatians 5:14), live a life of love (Ephesians 5:2-note), and love with actions and in truth (1John 3:18).

So, if Jesus and His followers are all about love, why do some people love to hate us? Why are there, according to one estimate, 200 million persecuted believers in the world today?

Jesus told us why. He said to His disciples, "Everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed" (John 3:20). Jesus is the Light. When He walked this earth, people hated Him because He exposed the darkness of their sin. We are now His light in this world (Matthew 5:14-note); therefore, the world will also hate us (John 15:19).

Our task is to be channels of God's love and light, even if we are hated in return. —Dave Branon

Some will hate you, some will love you;
Some will flatter, some will slight;
Cease from man, and look above you,
Trust in God and do the right. —Macleod

Love in return for love is natural, but love in return for hate is supernatural.

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Enslaved

Ephesians 5:3

The story is told that a friend of Augustine named Alypius was often urged by his neighbors to watch the gladiators in combat. He refused to do so because he abhorred the brutality of those barbaric contests. One day, however, he was forced into the amphitheater against his will. Determined not to witness the gory spectacle, Alypius kept his eyes tightly closed. But a piercing cry aroused his curiosity so much that he peeked just as one of the fighters received a fatal wound.

J. N. Norton says of the incident, "No sooner had Alypius discovered the bloody stream issuing from the victim's side, than his finer sensibilities were blunted, and he joined in the shouts and exclamations of the noisy mob about him. From that moment he was a changed man—changed for the worse; not only attending such sports himself, but urging others to do likewise." Even though Alypius had entered the arena against his will, his exposure to evil and eventual addiction suggests what can happen to the best of people when they get one small taste of lustful pleasures. Their appetite is whetted. They develop a liking for what they once abhorred. And without realizing it they become enslaved. (Original source unknown from [10000 Sermon Illustrations. Dallas: Biblical Studies Press](#))

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Wholesome Humor

Ephesians 5:3-4

August 5, 2005

Abraham Lincoln faced enormous pressures as president during the US Civil War. Without humor, it's doubtful he would have been able to bear the strain. When emotions ran high in cabinet meetings, he often told a funny story to break the tension. Laughing at himself kept him from becoming defensive. And a good story with a strong point sometimes won over an opponent.

The spontaneity of humor reflects the way God created man. It is both physically and emotionally beneficial. Laughter can keep a tense situation from ending in bitter words or hard feelings.

Although Jesus was a "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is 53:3), I believe He laughed often. Sometimes Jesus used

humor to make a point. Imagine a camel trying to squeeze through the eye of a needle! (Matthew 19:24).

But there's also a dark side to humor. Paul called it "coarse jesting" and said that it should have no place in the believer's life (Ephesians 5:4-note). It demeans, degrades, and defiles those who use it and those who hear it.

So what do we laugh at? What kinds of stories do we tell each other? Would Jesus laugh with us? I believe He would—if it were wholesome humor. —Dennis J. De Haan

Give us a sense of humor, Lord,
Give us the grace to laugh and smile;
But check our lips from needless jest
That what we speak may be worthwhile. —Anon.

To laugh is to be fully human.

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WALKING IN THE LIGHT

Ephesians 5:8

F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk

ST. PAUL makes use of this passage in Genesis, when He says, that "God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." He seems to go back in his experience to that remarkable vision on the road to Damascus, when the light shone, and he saw the face of the Lord Jesus. It was as though he had passed through the experience of chaos, while kicking against the goad of conviction, and at that moment, which he could never forget, God said: "Let there be light." Looking up, he saw the light of the glory of God reflected in that dear Face that looked down on him with ineffable love. It was life out of death; light replaced darkness, and peace chased away the last vestige of storm.

This is ever the result and climax of the work in our hearts wrought by the Holy Spirit. He leads us out of darkness; He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. His one aim is to glorify our Saviour, and to make Him the Alpha and Omega of our faith, as we walk in the light.

When I was in Tasmania, I was shown a great mountain range on which was a vast lake, fifty-two miles in circumference. The overflow yielded a perennial waterfall of a thousand feet, the force of which was translated into electricity which made light and power cheap for great factories and for domestic needs. It seemed to me, as I thought about it, that the great sheet of water resembled the Love of God, in its longing to help mankind; that the descending waterfall might be taken to illustrate the Incarnation of our Saviour, who was the Sent-One of the Eternal Trinity; and that the electric current, invisible but mighty, was typical of the Holy Spirit, who brings to our hearts the Light and Power of the Divine Nature. The lesson is obvious, that as the manufacturer or the scientist invents machinery to meet the conditions on which alone the electric current can do its work, so must we learn to adapt ourselves to receive and transmit the power and light of God, which comes to us through our union with Jesus.

PRAYER - May the Holy Spirit keep us ever walking in the light of Thy countenance. May He fill our hearts with the sense of Thy nearness and loving fellowship. Order our steps in Thy way, and then walk with us, for in Thee is no darkness at all. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

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Only on Sunday?

Ephesians 5:8-21

February 2, 1994

One controversy in professional sports today is the matter of prayer on the field. Sometimes after a big play or a victory, a player will drop to his knees and thank God. Some people object to this practice.

One newspaper writer suggested that the playing fields should be off-limits to such religious practices. He said that anything having to do with God should be confined to church. To him, it's "absolutely ridiculous" for people to talk to God anywhere else.

As Christians, we would disagree with this kind of thinking. But we sometimes give the impression by our behavior that we believe

it. We set Sundays aside to worship and serve God but act as if the rest of the week is ours to do with as we please.

For the believer, however, living for God is a 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week proposition. Notice Paul's teaching in Ephesians 5. When he talked about walking "as children of light" (Eph 5:8-note), he wasn't referring only to the way we behave in church on Sundays. When we are filled with the Spirit, we will exemplify compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, thankfulness, and love all the time.

The Christian life is not for Sunday only. It's a day-to-day, all-the-time way of life--even on the playing field. --J D Branon

Do others know from how we act
At home, at work, at play,
That we have Jesus in our heart
And live for Him each day? --D J De Haan

Being all-out for Christ means living for Him at all times and in all places.

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An Attitude Change

Ephesians 5:8-14

August 4, 1999

Pastor and author A. W. Tozer wrote, "Human nature is not fixed, and for this we should thank God day and night! We are still capable of change. We can become something other than what we are."

The priority of our lives should be to let God change us. But what should be our attitude toward believers who have shown little or no change over the years? Too often we develop a critical spirit, which only reinforces their problems and may hinder God's work in changing them. Here are three such accusing attitudes:

1. "They never do anything right." (No one does everything wrong!)
2. "They've always been the way they are." (Maybe, but God is powerful and able to change them.)
3. "They'll never change." (We can't know that. We can only trust God, who knows their hearts.)

Sometimes we even have these attitudes about ourselves: "I can't do anything right. I've always been this way. I'll never change."

We may not be able to change the attitudes and actions of others, but with God's help we can take charge of our own--if we're willing. We can choose to "walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8-note). --J E Yoder

It is our Father's will,
And precious in His sight,
That Christians learn to walk
In wisdom, love, and light. --Hess

A changed heart will result in a changed life.

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Light Up Your World

Ephesians 5:8-14

Matthew 5:14

May 9, 2003

My daughter Julie and her friend Jenni were driving one evening from their college to a nearby town. Along the way, they passed through a community that had an eerie darkness to it because of a power outage. It was strange—almost frightening—to drive through that blacked-out community.

As they left the town behind, they noticed a light up ahead. It shone like a beacon. And when they reached it, they were pleasantly surprised to find that the only light in the darkness was a church. A house of worship was lighting up their world.

This is exactly how people should see us as Christians—a bright and inviting light in this world darkened by sin. Jesus brought us

out of the darkness, and He said that we as His followers are "the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). And now we are to "walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8-note).

It's a huge challenge that should make us think seriously about how we live. Ask yourself, "Am I a light in anyone's life? Are my life and words guiding people out of the darkness and into the light of Jesus?"

It's dark in the world—and we have the light. Are we lighting the way? —Dave Branon

Lord, let me be a shining light
In all I say and do,
May Your great love be seen in me
And lead someone to You. —Sper

Your life will either shed light or cast a shadow.

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Remote Control
Ephesians 5:8,10
October 24, 2003

Flick. "That's tonight at 8 on ABC." Flick. "A high pressure system is moving in." Flick. "He kicked the ball wide of the goal!" Flick. "I'll take 'World History' for \$600, Alex." Flick. "In the news today ... " Flick!

What's happening? It's a TV viewer giving the thumb a good workout with the remote control, looking for something to watch, filtering through the maze of choices.

Each time we stop on a channel, we've made a choice. We've made a decision to allow that program to influence us in some way. But have we been discerning? Are we using our time wisely and beneficially? Will what we watch build us up or tear us down? These are vital questions for the Christian, for we have been told to do all things for God's glory (1Corinthians 10:31).

One set of guidelines is outlined in Ephesians 5. We are to steer clear of immorality, filthiness, foolish talking, coarse jesting (1Cor 10:3, 4). And we are to have no "fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" nor "speak of those things which are done by them in secret" (1Cor 10:11,12).

We need to keep learning what is "acceptable to the Lord" (Eph 5:10-note). And sometimes that means taking the remote and clicking the TV off. —Dave Branon

Take heed to what you see and hear,
For it affects your soul;
Be sure it's pleasing to the Lord
And that He's in control. —Fitzhugh

The best TV guide is the Bible.

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Will It Please Him?
Ephesians 5:10
October 2, 2002

Two friends were talking about a movie that one of them had seen recently. As he began to describe the film, he characterized it like this: "You wouldn't want to take your pastor to watch it with you."

It's a curious standard we sometimes set for ourselves, isn't it? We allow ourselves to view, hear, or participate in things that we know are not proper for us as followers of Christ. But if an activity is not appropriate for those whom we expect to be godly (church leaders), how can it be okay for us? Or if it has elements that would be harmful for young people to take part in, then why should we?

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he didn't limit God's moral standards to certain people or age groups. He didn't create a rating system that would allow exposure to evil for those who were at certain spiritual levels. Instead, he pointed to the Lord Jesus as the standard.

If we are committed to living as God has called us to live, we will strive to find out what is "acceptable to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:10-note). We will "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph 5:11-note).

The issue is not what a pastor or any other person would do. The question is: Will it please the Lord? —Dave Branon —Dave Branon

Lord, as I follow You by faith,
Help me each day to learn
That pleasing You in all I do
Must be my main concern. —Fitzhugh

You can do what you please if what you do pleases God.

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Kind Disapproval

Ephesians 5:11

April 30, 1994

How should we as Christians relate to people who are living contrary to biblical standards?

I faced this question recently in a shopping mall when I met two people who had left their mates and children and were living together without getting married. They were friendly, and I greeted them politely. I did not berate them, but neither did I imply that I approved of what they had done and were doing.

On another occasion a father told me that his son had declared himself to be a practicing homosexual. "I know you are a preacher," said the father, "but I hope you are enlightened enough to understand." I told him that I didn't despise his son or feel any ill-will, but that God says such conduct is sinful.

John the Baptist told King Herod that he had no right to have Herodias as his wife, because she had divorced her husband to marry him (Mark 6:17, 18). Although the Bible doesn't tell us John's manner, I think he was respectful but firm. If his rebuke had unduly antagonized Herod, the king would not have continued to respect and listen to John.

Let's be kind toward those who live in sin, but let's always make it clear that God hates sin, and that there are serious consequences for those who don't repent. --H V Lugt

The sad world with all its repining,
Its bitterness, care, and tears,
Needs the wealth of your lovingkindness
To sweeten the sin-soiled years. --Hall

True kindness warns and rescues.

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BEAUTIFUL GARMENTS

Ephesians 5:12

F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk

"Awake, awake; put on thy strength; put on thy beautiful garments."-- Is 52:1.

"It is high time to awake out of sleep: let us cast off the works of darkness; let us put on the armour of light."-- Ro 13:11, 12note.

PUT ON strength. We have not to purchase it, or generate it by prayers and resolutions, but simply to put it on. As we awake in the early morning hour, and have to pass out into the arena of life, which has so often witnessed failure and defeat, let us put on the strength and might of the living Christ. He waits to strengthen us with all power, according to the riches of His glory (Eph 3:16-note). Do not simply pray to be kept and helped, but put on the whole armour of God. "The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?" (Ps 27:1-note)

Put on beautiful garments. The emblem of the life of the Christian soul is that of the bridegroom or the bride (Rev 19:7-note) decked with jewels; or a garden filled with beautiful flowers (Is 61:10, 11). We are not only to do right things, but we must do them

beautifully; not only to speak the truth, but to speak it in love (Eph 4:15-note); not only to give to those who need our help, but to do it graciously and joyously. We must cultivate the bloom of the soul, which is made up of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, generosity (Col 3:12-note). The beauty of the Lord our God must be upon us.

We cannot weave these beautiful robes, or fashion them out of our own nature, but they are all prepared for us in Christ, who is "made unto us Wisdom, and Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption." (1Cor 1:30) Let us wake up out of sleep (Eph 5:12-note), put off the works of darkness (Ro 13:13-note), and put on the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the armour of Light. (Ro 13:14-note)

PRAYER - Lord of Power and Love! I come, trusting in Thine almighty strength, and Thine infinite goodness, to beg from Thee what is wanting in myself; even that grace which shall help me such to be, and such to do, as Thou wouldst have me. I will trust Thee, in Whom is everlasting strength. Be Thou my Helper, to carry me on beyond my own strength, and to make all that I think, and speak, and do, acceptable in Thy sight, through Jesus Christ. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

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Word Watch

June 25, 2005

Ephesians 5:12

Good grammar matters to me. As a writer and former English teacher, I'm bothered when I hear the wrong word used by people I think should know better. For instance, using "I" instead of "me" or "who" instead of "whom." There's a proper way to use the language, and it makes me cringe when the standard is violated.

There's another kind of incorrect word usage that is far worse. It happens when Christians utter words that fall short of the standard God expects. Whenever we use words that are considered crude, profane, or obscene, we violate God's clear standards.

Anytime we speak any form of God's name irreverently or in a way that doesn't honor Him, we displease Him (Exodus 20:7). If we joke about sinful practices, we are speaking in a way we shouldn't (Ephesians 5:12-note). Or if we participate in coarse talk (5:4), we bring dishonor to the name of Christ.

James said, "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing... These things ought not to be so" (James 3:10). Such speech is hypocritical.

Controlling our tongue is difficult because it is an "unruly evil" (Jas 3:8). For the glory of God, and with respect for His standards, let's watch our words. —Dave Branon

A wise old owl sat on an oak;
The more he saw, the less he spoke;
The less he spoke, the more he heard—
Why aren't we like that wise old bird? —Richards

Every time you speak, your mind is on parade.

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Dead While Alive

Ephesians 5:14

February 19, 1998

Gary Dockery, like a 20th-century Rip Van Winkle, slept in a coma for 7-1/2 years. He was a police officer who had been shot in the head while on duty. Unconscious and unable to communicate, he was dead to the world.

Then a medical miracle occurred. He awoke! He immediately recognized his family and told his two sons he loved them. For 18 hours he talked, recalling the past and learning what had happened during his long sleep. After emergency surgery to drain fluid from his lungs, however, Dockery never regained the same level of consciousness. He died a year later.

Many people who are physically alive are existing in a spiritual coma. They are unaware of divine realities, totally out of communication with God, and dead to the supernatural world. But just as Jesus raised Lazarus physically from the grave, the Holy Spirit can give new spiritual life to those who respond to the urgent entreaty, "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Eph. 5:14-note).

How thankful you can be, if you are alive in Christ, that you were aroused from your spiritual slumber! But if you have been unresponsive to God in the past, today is the time to wake up! He will give you eternal life. --V C Grounds

For years my slumbering spirit lay
Apart from God, in sin's dark night;
But Jesus wakened me one day
And filled my soul with wondrous light. --Hess

No disease is more deadly than sin--the cross is its only cure.

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Sleeping Sickness

Ephesians 5:14

April 26, 1997

In the tropics of Central Africa many people are afflicted by a disease known as sleeping sickness. In one epidemic between 1901 and 1904, more than 100,000 died in a single province.

The disease is caused by a parasite carried by the tiny tsetse fly. When the fly bites a human, it transfers the parasite to the person, where slowly but surely it multiplies in the victim's blood. It's a painless disease that causes drowsiness and sleep and eventually death. Before those facts were known, people saw no connection between the bite of the flies and certain death, so they didn't even bother to brush them away.

After discovering the cause, the government began cleaning up the area around the homes. They cut down the jungle brush and sprayed the insects' breeding places. Thus they created an environment where the fly could not thrive.

Sin is like the tsetse fly, spreading disease that creates spiritual sleep (Eph 5:14-note). What is the remedy? Create an environment of cleanliness for your soul by prayer, Bible study, fellowship with other believers, and by daily relying on the Lord's help. The flies of temptation and sin will not plague you if you keep your life clean. --M. R. De Haan, M.D.

My soul, be on your guard,
Ten thousand foes arise;
The hosts of sin are pressing hard
To draw you from the skies. --Heath

To defeat sin, get rid of its breeding ground.

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Check Your Work

Ephesians 5:15

February 27, 2001

I'm getting pretty good at math. That's because every day my son Steve and I have a little math session. He does his 30 junior high math problems, and I help him check them over. Sometimes we even get them all right.

As I go over Steve's math, I notice that he understands how to do his problems. In fact, in some areas he's better at it than I am. But occasionally, despite knowing how to do the problem, he gets the wrong answer. He either gets a little sloppy in using the right formula or he just doesn't check his answers carefully.

Aren't we all a little like that in our Christian life? We know what we should do. We have a good understanding of how to live the Christian life, but we get careless or lazy. We know better, but we fail.

For instance, we know we aren't supposed to gossip. But before we know it, we're roasting a fellow Christian. Or this: We know God wants us to keep our mind and heart pure, but we let down our guard and watch a TV program or movie we know is not edifying.

It's true, isn't it? We all get a little sloppy in how we live for God. Let's be more careful and pay closer attention to our Christian walk (Ephesians 5:15-note). Let's make sure we're doing quality work for our heavenly Father. —J D Branon

Lord, help me to apply Your Word
And move it from my head
To actions that won't shame your Name
But honor You instead. —Sper

Give your all for Jesus, He gave His all for you.

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"TIME" AND "ETERNITY"

Ephesians 5:15, 16

Recently, at a conference of magazine publishers in the United States, the representatives were requested to stand and give the name of their publication. Inevitably it seemed that a delegate from the Christian magazine, Eternity, always followed one from the secular periodical, Time. A burst of laughter among the delegates resulted when TIME and ETERNITY were thus linked together. Yet there is food for thought here, for indeed the two are vitally related and closely interlocked. The final rewards and position of the saved will be governed by their faithfulness, after their conversion, in filling the hours here with loving service, holy adoration, and diligent study. The lost too will be beaten with "few" or "many stripes" in relation to their deeds and attitudes while here on earth. Therefore, someone has wisely written: "Use well opportunity, drift not with the tide; killing time is not murder, it's suicide!" Indeed, eternity will magnify that which we have done in time.

May I make a practical suggestion for the new year? Always carry something with you to fill the moments that would otherwise be spent in idleness. For instance, take with you a little New Testament which you can study and mark up as you wait your turn in the doctor's office; or a text — printed on a card — which you can memorize while you ride the bus to work; or a notebook in which you jot down helpful suggestions or prayer requests. These are all good ways to "redeem the time" and make golden investments in eternity.

Too busy to read the Bible, too busy to wait and pray! Too busy to speak out kindly to someone by the way! Too busy to care and struggle, to think of the life to come, Too busy building mansions to plan for the heavenly Home.

Too busy for all that is holy on earth beneath the sky,
Too busy to serve the Master, but—not too busy to die!—Anon.

ETERNITY will be appreciated
only in the measure that we have rightly handled **TIME!**—F. King

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Time For Everything

Ephesians 5:15-16

November 13, 1997

Perhaps the most sought-after but elusive possession of the 90s is "time for everything." The film industry focused on this dilemma in a comedy about a harried man who is cloned so he can fulfill his roles as father, construction foreman, and husband. While pop culture proclaims that people can juggle multiple roles if they just manage them well enough, it takes more than cellular phones and pagers to pull it off in real life.

Ephesians 5:15-16 has been called the Bible's key to time management. But "redeeming the time" goes far beyond being efficient. It's a wonderful phrase that can also be translated "making the most of every opportunity." It suggests an attitude toward living that sees every situation as the perfect occasion to do God's will and influence others for Him. During these evil days, we are to live out the goodness God has placed in us through faith in Christ.

How much time do we have today? Time for prayer? Time to answer a child's question? Time to be interrupted by someone in need? Time to consider others during an inconvenience or delay?

May the Lord give us wisdom to grasp today's opportunities and make time for what's important to Him. --D C McCasland

Lord, help us to redeem the time
You give us every day--
To take each opportunity
To follow and obey. --Sper

There's always enough time to do God's will.

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Our Measured Life **Ephesians 5:15-16**

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. . -- Psalm 90:12 [note](#)

The root meaning of the word translated number in "teach us to number our days" (Ps. 90:12) [note](#) is "to weigh" or "to measure." We are to place each day in the balance and make it tip the scales in a way that will bring glory to God and blessing to the lives of others.

When the great artist Raphael died at the early age of 37, friends and relatives carried his marvelous but unfinished painting The Transfiguration in the funeral procession. His family felt that because of the limited time he was allotted to use his creative genius, the painting was an appropriate symbol of his unfulfilled earthly aspirations.

That half-completed picture has another meaning--a message that should impress itself on all of us: Life is fleeting and death may come unexpectedly. We should treasure each hour as a gift of great value and use it to the best advantage.

If we realize the value of our days, we will try to spend them profitably. To have no regrets at life's end and have much reward in heaven, we must make the most of every opportunity (Eph 5:15, 16-note). In the words of the psalmist let us pray, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12-[note](#)). --H G Bosch

The clock of life is wound but once,
And no man has the power
To tell just when the hands will stop,
At late or early hour. --Anon.

Instead of counting the days, make your days count.

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THE WISE USE OF TIME **Ephesians 5:15-16** **F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk**

GOD DESIRES to give each life its full development. Of course, there are exceptions; for instance, in some cases the lessons and discipline of life are crowded into a very brief space of time, and the soul is summoned to the Presence-chamber of eternity. But, on the whole, each human life is intended to touch all the notes of life's organ. There is an appointed time when it shall be born or die, shall weep or laugh, shall get or lose, shall have halcyon peace or storm cast skies. These times have been fixed for you in God's plan; do not try and anticipate them, or force the pace, but wait thou the Lord's leisure. In due time all will work out for thy good and for His glory. Say to Him" "All my times are in Thy hand."

Times and seasons succeed one another very quickly. Milton, in his glorious sonnet on the Flight of Time, bids her call on the leaden-stepping hours, referring to the swing of the pendulum; and, indeed, as we look back on our past life it will seem as though each experience was only for a moment, and then had vanished, never to return. We are reminded of the cobbler, who, as he sat in his kitchen, thought that the pendulum of his clock, when it swung to the left, said For ever; and to the right, Where? For ever--where? For ever--where? He got up and stopped it, but found that, although he had stopped the questioner, he had not answered the question. Nor could he find rest until, on his knees, he had been able to face the question of the Eternal, and reply to it.

We must be on the alert to meet the demand of every hour. "Mine hour is not yet come," said our Lord. He waited patiently until He heard the hours strike in heaven, and then drawing the strength appropriate to its demand, He went forth to meet it. Each time and season is kept by the Father in His own hand. He opens and none shuts; He shuts and none opens. But in that same hand are the needed supplies of wisdom, grace, and power. As the time, so is the strength. No time of sighing, trial, temptation, or bereavement

is without its special and adapted supplies. Take what is needed from His hand, and go forth to play the part for which the hour calls.

PRAYER - Oh, that Thou wouldst bless us indeed and enlarge our coasts of useful service. Let Thine hand be with us, and keep us from all evil that would grieve Thee. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

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Tick, Tick, Tick ...

Ephesians 5:15-16

August 14, 2000

Do you have a clock or watch available with a secondhand on it? Stop and follow that hand as it ticks away 1 minute. Those seconds, of course, are the way we measure time, and time is the very essence of our lives. By the time you reach the age of 75, the clocks and watches of this world will have ticked away a total of nearly 2.5 billion seconds.

Bernard Berenson, an internationally famous art critic, had a zest for life. Even when he was in ill health, he cherished every moment. Shortly before he died at age 94, he said to a friend, "I would willingly stand at street corners, hat in hand, asking passersby to drop their unused minutes into it." Oh, that we would learn to appreciate the value of time!

We certainly don't want to be so time-conscious that we become driven workaholics, neglecting our families, never relaxing with our friends, too busy to smell the roses or admire a sunset. Yet Paul urged us to redeem the time (Ephesians 5:15, 16), and Moses prayed, "Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12-[note](#)).

Let's ask the Lord to help us appreciate the value of time. May we wisely invest our seconds, minutes, hours, and days, realizing that beyond time lies eternity. —Vernon C Grounds

We do not know how long we have
Till time for us is past,
So let us live as if this day
Is going to be our last. --D J De Haan

To spend time wisely, invest it in eternity.

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Stay Within God's Limits

Ephesians 5:15-21

One of life's greatest enjoyments for Suzannah Worl is riding her Harley-Davidson motorcycle. In a devotional article for Covenant Publications, she wrote about cruising the streets of Chicago with her friends late one summer night. They were riding along the shore of Lake Michigan, enjoying the bright moonlight and gentle breeze off the water.

Suddenly the lead motorcyclist took off and several of the group went with him, reaching speeds of 100 miles an hour. Suzannah was tempted to join them—but she didn't. She knew it was not safe and it was against the law. So she held back, continuing at normal speed.

Sometimes the way others live seems far more attractive and exciting than our Christian life. We're tempted to disobey God's commands or compromise principles from His Word. But we are called to live each day with self-discipline and spiritual discernment. The apostle Paul said, "Walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise" (Ephesians 5:15).

We need to ask the Lord for His help so that we'll see situations through His eyes and make wise choices. As we obey Him and stay within His limits, we will find true joy and lasting satisfaction.—David C. Egner

Living for Jesus a life that is true,
Striving to please Him in all that I do;
Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free,
This is the pathway of blessing for me. —Chisholm

The wise know God's limits—fools know no bounds.

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Killing Time

Ephesians 5:15-16

April 3, 2000

A friend of mine was sitting on a park bench with his hands folded, staring into the distance. When I asked what he was doing, he replied, "Oh, just killing time."

What a cruel thing to do to something as valuable as time! Why kill it? Time is given to us to be cultivated, not murdered. Time should never be wasted but used to the best advantage.

Of course, there are times when we must relax and rest. Even Jesus said to His disciples, "Come aside ... and rest a while" (Mark 6:31). But that was not "killing time," it was using time for restoration. After they had rested, they would be able to use their time more fruitfully and profitably.

If a fraction of the time we waste could be used to pray, read the Bible, witness to others, visit a friend in distress, or comfort someone who is grieving, what a difference it would make! Today, when you have leisure time, ask yourself how you can best improve those extra moments. You may think I am being narrow minded, but the Bible is clear—we are to be "wise, redeeming the time" (Eph. 5:16).

Today, see how much good you can do for God and others—not how little you can get by with. It is not true that we can "make up lost time." It is gone forever! —M R De Haan

God's people have so much to do
In serving Christ today
That they should use their precious time
To share, to love, to pray. —J D Branon

Time—use it or lose it!

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MISSED OPPORTUNITY

EPHESIANS 5:16

Dr. Jimmy Allen We missed him. Our chance to change things came and passed and we did not know it was there. A dark-skinned little boy sat through Sunday School classes for three years at a great Baptist Church (First Church, San Antonio) but someone missed him. His name was Sirhan Sirhan, and at age 24 he shot and killed Senator Robert Kennedy. In a welter of words and the shudder of grief throughout our nation, the persistent thought keeps recurring—someone missed him. (Dr. Jimmy Allen, former pastor of First Baptist Church, San Antonio, Texas in Pulpit Helps, May, 1991, from [10000 Sermon Illustrations. Dallas: Biblical Studies Press](#))

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WHEN OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

EPHESIANS 5:16

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days (Hebrews 11:30).

As a sculptor showed a visitor some marble figures displayed in his studio, an unusual sculpture caught the guest's attention. It had two peculiar features. Where the statue's face normally would have been, the sculptor had chiseled a covering of hair, and on both feet were wings.

"What is the name of this one?" asked the visitor.

"Opportunity," the artist answered.

"Why is its face hidden?"

"Because," said the craftsman, "we seldom know opportunity when he comes to us."

"And why does he have wings on his feet?"

"Because he is soon gone, and once gone, he cannot be overtaken."

The apostle Paul spoke of the quickly passing nature of opportunity in Ephesians 5:16. The word time used in this verse can also be translated "opportunity"—suggesting occasions for accomplishing high and noble purposes. But what are these opportunities? They are brief moments of personal contact—the passing incident, the turn of a conversation, or the "chance" meeting of an old acquaintance. Such times present golden opportunities for caring, for witnessing, for eternal good.

Alexander Maclaren, the noted Baptist preacher from England, said, "Every moment of life is granted us for one purpose: becoming like our dear Lord. That ultimate, all-embracing end is reached through a multitude of near and intermediate ones."

Like the young shepherd David, when our faith is strong we will have the wisdom and courage to see every obstacle as an opportunity. —P. R. Van Gorder

To believe only possibilities, is not faith, but mere Philosophy.

—Sir Thomas Browne

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Making The Most Of Time

Ephesians 5:16

October 16, 2001

We tend to read Ephesians 5:16 as if Paul is calling believers to action because the days are short, but that's not what he meant. He said we are to make the most of time "because the days are evil."

Evil days are days of opportunity. The more evil our culture becomes, the more opportunities there will be to show and share our faith.

God controls human history—permitting the rise of nations, determining their geographical boundaries, and orchestrating their fall—so that men and women will "seek the Lord" (Acts 17:26, 27). History is "His story" of providing salvation for a lost world and pointing people to the Lord. Even the forces of evil are used in such a way that "all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord, You alone" (Is 37:20).

God may hold back His judgment for a time, allowing evil tyrants to have their day, upsetting people's well-ordered lives, presenting them with dilemmas beyond their understanding. Evil brings pain, but it is the genius of God to bring good out of evil (Romans 8:28).

Evil times, therefore, are not to be feared. They are times of unparalleled opportunity. That's why we must make the most of them. —David H. Roper

Lord, help us to redeem the time

You give us every day,

To take each opportunity

To follow and obey. —Sper

God can turn any difficulty into an opportunity.

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Don't Kill Time!

Ephesians 5:16

April 20, 2001

Author and lecturer John Erskine (1879-1951) declared that he learned the most valuable lesson of his life when he was 14 years old. His piano teacher asked him how much he practiced. He replied that he usually sat at the instrument for an hour or more at a time.

"Don't do that," warned the teacher. "When you grow up, time won't come to you in long stretches like that. Practice in minutes wherever you can find them—5 or 10 before school, a few after lunch. Sandwich them in between chores. Spread the practice throughout the day, and music will become a part of your life."

Erskine stated later that by following this advice he was able to live a fulfilled life as a creative writer, in addition to his regular duties as an instructor. He wrote nearly all of Helen of Troy, his most famous work, on streetcars while commuting between his

home and the university.

How can you make good use of your spare moments? Consider carrying a Bible or a devotional booklet with you. Use the time to read, or to pray, or to write a note of encouragement or admonition to some needy soul.

Beware of wasting the present. Instead of killing time, redeem your spare moments today. —Henry G. Bosch

Redeem the time! God only knows
How soon our little life may close,
With all its pleasures and its woes,
Redeem the time! —Anon.

Wasting the gift of time insults the giver of time.

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What Does God Like?

Ephesians 5:15-21

May 22, 2005

Some churches have become divided over styles of worship. One group may be insisting on a traditional service, while another is agitating for a more contemporary format.

We can all profit from a lesson a man learned on a business trip after attending a church service near his hotel. He talked with the pastor about how he had been blessed by the sermon, even though some of the worship time was not to his liking.

The pastor simply asked, "What was it you think God didn't like?" The man had the grace to reply, "I don't suppose there was anything He didn't like. I was talking about my own reaction. But worship isn't really about me, is it?"

We are entitled to our own preferences, and we must hold firmly to our biblical convictions. But before we voice our fault-finding opinions, let's seriously try to understand God's viewpoint. Consider Ephesians 5 in the light of worship: We are to be filled with the Spirit, speak to each other in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, give thanks to God, and submit to one another (Eph 5:19,21).

Whatever the style of worship, as we express to God our praise for who He is and all He has done, we lift Him up and encourage others. That's what God likes.—Vernon C Grounds

Let us celebrate together,
Lift our voice in one accord,
Singing of God's grace and mercy
And the goodness of the Lord. —Sper

At the heart of worship is worship from the heart.

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Taming The Tongue

October 3, 2001

Ephesians 5:18-21

At amusement parks, the bumper-car ride is always popular. People enjoy driving recklessly for a few minutes, bumping deliberately but harmlessly into other people's cars.

Some people have a bumper-car mentality in their relationships with others. Using blunt words, they deliberately bump into others' feelings, which is anything but harmless.

Solomon wrote, "He who restrains his lips is wise" (Proverbs 10:19). But James said, "No man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). He said that with the tongue we bless our God who created us, but we also curse those whom He has created (v.9). Lest we think that Christians do the blessing and non-Christians do the cursing, we need to remember that James was writing to Christians.

To tame our tongues, we need God's help. In Ro 6:13, Paul said that we need to make a choice—to present the parts of our body "as instruments of righteousness to God," not "as instruments of unrighteousness to sin."

Today and every day, choose to present your body—including your unruly tongue—as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:2) to be

used by Him as an instrument of blessing. —Joanie Yoder

Lord, set a watch upon my lips,
My tongue control today;
Help me evaluate each thought
And guard each word I say. —Hess

**To bridle your tongue,
give God the reins of your heart.**

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THE MESSAGE OF PENTECOST

Ephesians 5:18

F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk

IT IS good to know that there is just as much of the Holy Spirit's presence to-day, wherever two or three are gathered in Christ's Name, as there was in the upper room at Jerusalem. The difference is that we have not the same receptive attitude. We cannot say of God, who is infinite, that there is more of Him in this place than in that, or at one moment more than another. He is always equally everywhere. But where hearts are prepared, as were those of the disciples, can there be other than Pentecost! We may have the counterpart of all these wonderful experiences that came to them. The Spirit of God may inspire us, the fire of Divine love may kindle in our hearts, and we may obtain a new and marvellous power in speaking to men of the wonderful works of God.

They were all filled with the Spirit, and this is the command laid on us also. Let us ask whether this is our abiding experience, which is not intended for apostles and prophets only, but for the mother with her children, the business-man in his store, the young men and women in office or shop.

The result of this baptism of spiritual power was very remarkable. Thousands were converted and baptized, and they continued steadfastly. Such converts are a gain to any church, and it becomes invested with a Divine attractiveness and adhesiveness.

The teaching of doctrine, breaking of bread, and fellowship in prayer were the beginning of Our Church-ordinances. When young converts are given to any Church, provision should be made for services in which they may take part. The principle of having all things in common seems to have been abandoned by mutual consent. It seemed necessary at the outset that the new converts might be trained in Christian living, but it was evidently liable to abuse, and might have allured into the ranks of the Church lazy and undesirable impostors. It is probably a much wiser principle to administer our property for God than to give it away. (See Mt 25:20, 21; Lk 12:42, 43, 44.)

Notice their exuberant joy (Acts 2:46, 47). It is characteristic of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life, and the result is love, joy, peace, etc., which is wonderfully attractive.

PRAYER - We ask of Thee, Heavenly Father, and claim of Thee by faith, this best of all good gifts, Thy Holy Spirit, that He may abide with us for ever, and that the fruits of the Spirit may abound in us. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk)

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SPIRIT CONTROLLED SELF CONTROL

Ephesians 5:18

Sensitivity to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, even in little things that seem harmless, marks the mature Christian. While preaching in a small church in Florida, a young evangelist noticed that his gold wristwatch sparkled in the light.

He wrote, "I saw people looking at it. The Lord said to me, 'Take it off. It's distracting.' I said, 'Lord, I can surely wear a wristwatch that my daddy gave me.' But it was sensitivity that God was teaching me—to be sensitive to the little things. I took it off and ... never wore it in the pulpit again."

It's not always easy to know when God is speaking, because inner urgings may arise from fear, selfish desire, or Satan. Yet if we learn biblical principles through reading the Word, and if we daily yield ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we will gradually come to recognize His gentle prompting. The writer of Hebrews said that mature believers have had their senses "exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb 5:14). Whatever exalts Christ over self comes from God, and we can obey with confidence. But whatever is

unkind, unloving, and self-seeking grieves the Spirit. When we do something like this, we must confess our disobedience to God at once to restore our fellowship with Him.

"Lord, make me sensitive" is a prayer that should always be on our hearts. —D. J. De Haan

**When we yield ourselves to the Spirit's control,
we do not lose our self-control.**

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Thoughtful Praises

Ephesians 5:19

November 23, 2003

wonder what God thinks about the way we sing at church. I'm not talking about the quality of our voices, but the honesty of our words. If we're being truthful, the following rewritten hymn titles might more accurately express what's in our hearts as we sing:

"Just As I Am" is "Just As I Pretend To Be."

"O How I Love Jesus" becomes "O How I Like Jesus."

"I Surrender All" is actually "I Surrender Some."

"He's Everything To Me" means "He's Quite A Bit To Me."

Jesus said that we are to worship Him in truth (John 4:24). Singing sincerely and with understanding is a serious challenge (Psalm 47:7).

Let's take up the challenge by seeking God's help to make the original titles of these hymns true for us. In repentance and without pretense, let's turn to Him just as we are. In His forgiving presence, let's declare total love for Jesus by surrendering all to Him. As a result, Jesus truly will become everything to us. Then we will be able to sing honestly about Jesus Christ and our love for Him.

As we make melody in our hearts to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19), let's worship in spirit and in truth. —Joanie Yoder

You are the chosen of the Lord
To sing His highest praise,
And through the melody of song
To show His wondrous ways. —Anon.

**To sing God's praise,
keep your heart in tune with Him.**

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THE BLESSING OF THANKFULNESS

Ephesians 5:20

F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk.

"Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually."-- Heb 13:15.

SOME PEOPLE seem born with a sullen and feverish temper, and it is very difficult for them to brighten into smiles and songs. But whatever our natural disposition may be, if we belong to Christ it is our bounden duty to cultivate a thankful heart. A melancholy person has a bad effect upon others. It is miserable to have to work with or under a confirmed pessimist. Nothing is right, nothing pleases, there is no word of praise or encouragement. Once, when I was at Aden, I watched a gang of Lascars trans-shipping the mails. It was a pleasure to see them, one after another, carrying the bags cheerily because their leader kept them all the time singing as they did their work. If, instead of finding fault with our employees or servants we would look out for things for which we could commend and thank them, we should probably find a miraculous change in their attitude.

The advantage of joy and gladness is that it is a source of strength to the individual soul, and to all others who come within its range, and commends our Christianity! Sidney Smith says: "I once gave a lady two and twenty recipes against melancholy; one was a bright fire; another, to remember all the pleasant things said to her; another, to keep a box of sugar-plums on the chimney-piece, and a kettle simmering on the hob. I thought this mere trifling at the moment, but have in after life discovered how true it is, that these little pleasures often banish melancholy better than more exalted objects." We may interpret the advice of this humorist

and essayist by turning into joyous praise all the incidents of our daily life, arising with gratitude and thankfulness from every good and perfect gift to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world is sad, and has to pay her jesters and entertainers; it is a mystery to her that the face of the Christian should be bright and smiling, although the fig-tree does not blossom, and there is no fruit in the vine. Let us count up our treasures and blessings, and we shall find that even in the saddest and loneliest life there is something to turn our sorrow into singing (2Co 6:10).

PRAYER - Help us, O Lord, to rejoice always; to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks. AMEN. (F B Meyer. Our Daily Walk.)

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GIVING THANKS ALWAYS

Ephesians 5:20

In the autobiography of the late Dr. Clarence E. McCartney, the following story is told: Two men were passing through a field in the country when they were charged by an enraged bull. They started for the nearest fence, but it was soon apparent that they couldn't make it before the animal reached them. One said to the other, "Put up a prayer, John. We're in for it!" But John answered, "I can't. I never made a public prayer in my life." "But you must," said his companion, "the bull will soon be upon us." "All right," panted John, "I'll give you the only prayer I know, the one my father used to repeat at the table: 'O Lord, for what we are about to receive, make us truly thankful!' " We may smile at this story; yet it is true that no matter what trials we may face, or how deep the waters through which we must pass, the true Christian should give thanks "always for all things."

Traveling to Cleveland for meetings, I had a tire blow out at seventy miles an hour. As I pulled the car to a stop without losing control, I breathed a prayer of thanks. But I forgot one thing—I didn't praise God for the blowout! In fact, I must confess that I was rather exasperated. It was dark and I was running a little behind schedule. I was tempted to murmur and complain, whereas I should have been thankful even for that seeming in-convenience. As children of God, it is wonderful to know that we can give thanks "always for all things unto God," because "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Ro 8:28).

In a world filled with trials, disappointments, and discouragements, what a joy to realize that things never happen by chance to the true believer. Someone has wisely said, "The experiences of life can either make you bitter or better." The key to becoming "better" is to give "thanks always for all things!"

'Midst sun or rain, 'midst good or ill,
Through all my earthly days,
May nothing bitter quell, O Lord,
My grateful song of praise! —G. B. Adams

If you find yourself wearing a "spirit of heaviness," try a "garment of praise"!

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An Ungrateful Grumbler

Ephesians 5:20

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. . --Psalm 103:2

Many years ago a magazine related the story of a young man by the name of Ben who had a habit of grumbling. He complained about the weather, found fault with his family and friends, and allowed the smallest things to upset him.

Then one day he read this rhyme: "When you have truly thanked the Lord for every blessing sent, then you'll have very little time to murmur or lament." He realized that his spirit of discontent had made him overlook the gifts God was constantly showering on him.

Ben determined that with God's help he would rid himself of this habit. So whenever he became irritated or began to complain, he would stop and thank God for the many good things he was enjoying. It worked! By centering his attention on praising rather than pouting, he found it much easier to avoid a grouchy mood.

As Christians, we have so much for which to praise the Lord. Thankfulness and an attitude of gratitude ought to be characteristic of

every believer (Ps. 34:1; Eph. 5:20).

All of life takes on a different hue when we spend our time counting our blessings rather than airing our complaints. Let's be grateful! --H G Branon

A grumbling mood of discontent
Gives way to thankfulness
When we consider all God's gifts
And all that we possess. --Sper

Blessings hemmed with praise won't unravel.

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"Peel It!"

Ephesians 5:20

November 24, 1999

The story is told of a mother and her 4-year-old daughter who were strolling through an open-air market. As the little girl stared at a large pile of oranges, a generous vendor took one from the table and gave it to her.

"What do you say to the nice man?" the mother asked her daughter. The little girl looked at the orange, then thrust it toward the man and said, "Peel it!"

Thankfulness is something we learn and grow into. What might be excusable in a 4-year-old would be rude and ungrateful from an older child or adult.

Yet, how easy it is to fall into the trap of responding to God's gracious gifts by thinking, "This is nice, but I'd like a little more."

An attitude of gratitude toward God is a mark of a developing spiritual maturity. In Paul's letter to the growing Christians in Ephesus, his challenge to follow Christ included "giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20).

Today, let's practice thankfulness to God—instead of complaining about what we don't have, instead of fuming about the unfairness of life, instead of asking for more for ourselves.

Instead of saying "Peel it!" let's say "Thanks." --D C McCasland

Some folks see so many thorns
They scarce can see one rose,
While others count two blossoms
For every thorn that grows. --Garrison

It's not what's in your pocket that makes you thankful but what's in your heart.

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Think--Then Thank

January 17, 2001

Ephesians 5:20

What character trait most clearly reveals a person's moral and spiritual health? Is it love? Is it integrity? Is it kindness, cheerfulness, or trust? Opinions differ, to be sure.

Otto Friedrich Bollnow, in his essay *Who Really Gives Thanks?* said, "There is hardly any other quality of man that is so suited to reveal the state of his inner spiritual and moral health as his capacity to be grateful."

Even if we may not agree with him, Bollnow's opinion is thought-provoking. After all, Scripture emphasizes the importance of praising God for His goodness and mercy. Many of the psalms are the outpouring of thankful hearts. For example, "Let the peoples praise You, O God; let all the peoples praise You" (Psalm 67:3). "Be thankful to Him, and bless His name" (100:4). And the apostle

Paul urged his fellow Christians to give "thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:20).

In light of this, take some time to recall the Lord's pardon, His constant protection, His faithful provision, and His abiding presence. Remembering to be grateful will help you to stay in good spiritual health and will bring honor to Him.

So, think—then thank! —Vernon C Grounds

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,
To His feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Evermore His praises sing. —Lyte

Giving thanks is a course from which we never graduate.

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Door Of Humility

December 9, 2005

Ephesians 5:21

Over the centuries, the entrance to Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity has twice been made smaller. The purpose in the last case was to keep marauders from entering the basilica on horseback. It's now referred to as the "Door of Humility," because visitors must bend down to enter.

As we age, bending our knees becomes more and more difficult and painful. In the physical realm, some people courageously undergo knee replacement surgery. To avoid years of increasingly painful joint damage, they endure several weeks of agony.

Like physical knees, spiritual knees can grow stiff over time. Years of stubborn pride and selfishness make us inflexible, and it becomes increasingly difficult and painful for us to humble ourselves. Seduced by false feelings of importance when others submit to us, we never learn that true importance comes from submitting ourselves to God and to others (Ephesians 5:21; 1Pe 5:5).

As we celebrate Jesus' birth, it's good to remember the Door of Humility, for it reminds us that we all need new knees—knees that will bend. Humility is the only way to enter the presence of God.

What better way to honor the One who bent so low to be with us. —Julie Ackerman Link

Christ's humble birth should help us see
What life in Him can bring;
It's not acclaim that we should seek
But service for our King. -Branon

The road to victory is paved with humble submission to God.

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Submissive Leadership

Ephesians 5:21

February 23, 2004

A mild-mannered man was reading a book on being self-assertive and decided to start at home. So he stormed into his house, pointed a finger in his wife's face, and said, "From now on I'm boss around here and my word is law! I want you to prepare me a gourmet meal and draw my bath. Then, when I've eaten and finished my bath, guess who's going to dress me and comb my hair." "The mortician," replied his wife.

King Rehoboam tried that kind of self-assertiveness and it turned Israel against him. When he came to the throne, the people pleaded for less oppressive taxation. His older advisors urged him to heed their request, but his young friends told him to be even more demanding than his father. As a result of listening to his peers, 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel seceded and formed a new kingdom (2Chronicles 10:16, 17).

Good leaders don't rely on domineering self-assertion—not at home, nor in church, nor in business. Rather, they balance self-assertiveness (which isn't wrong in itself) with the principle of submitting to one another (Ephesians 5:21). They listen respectfully, admit when they're wrong, show a willingness to change, and mix gentleness with firmness. That's submissive leadership—and it

works!—Herbert Vander Lugt

Submissive leadership requires
A kind and gentle honesty
That will attend to others' needs
And win their love and loyalty. —D. De Haan

The only leaders qualified to lead are those who have learned to serve.

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For Better Or Worse?

Ephesians 5:22,25

February 15, 2003

Within a chip shot of our house is a golf course. When I stand in my backyard, I see ponds waiting hungrily for my next errant shot. At times I can imagine sandtraps and trees joking about my bad days.

I mention the sport with mixed feelings. I like to golf occasionally, but living so close to the course reminds me of my failures in playing the game, which has its disadvantages.

A similar problem can occur in marriage. Sometimes a husband and wife can lose sight of the hopes and dreams they once shared. Then the very presence of the other becomes a source of irritation, a reminder of past failures and disappointments.

When the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, he asked husbands and wives to turn their thoughts to their relationship with the Son of God (Eph 5:22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 30, 31, 32, 33). In Him we find undying love and forgiveness for our failures. In Him we find Someone who loves to forget the worst and bring out the best. He reminds us not of what we've lost but of what we have yet to find.

Forgive us, Father, for focusing on our flaws and failures rather than on the love of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to rediscover our spouse in the light of our Lord's great love for us. —Mart De Haan

REFLECTING ON MARRIAGE As a couple, recall the hopes and dreams you had when you were first married. Name some that have come true. Share with each other your hopes for the future.

Marriages may be made in heaven,
but they have to be worked out on earth.

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Work At It

Ephesians 5:22-33

November 3, 1999

If your marriage isn't working, take heart. Neither is anyone else's. In every healthy marriage, it's the people who work, not the relationship. A newspaper featured two headlines shouting from adjacent pages: In Japan, "Battered Wives Begin To Rebel," and "Britain Tries To Shore Up Marriages." Different countries and distinct cultures, but the same problems. Why?

Could it be that we expect another person to meet the deepest needs of our hearts? If so, we have placed an impossible burden on that person. Or is it our own reluctance to face the truth about ourselves, preferring to believe that it is our spouse who has a problem?

The divine commands for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:22-33 are the framework for success in marriage, not a checklist to use in evaluating the performance of our spouse. It's a place to find our own job description. The instructions are given to weak, sinful people who need a Savior and His transforming power.

Most of us would prefer a successful and fulfilling marriage that just happens by itself. But a growing marriage requires effort and perseverance. God calls us to work at our relationship with Him—and with the person we promised to love. —D C McCasland

"For better or for worse," we pledge,
Through sickness and through strife;
And by God's grace and with His help

We'll keep these vows for life. --D J De Haan

Success in marriage is more than finding the right person; it is being the right person.

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Realism And Romance

Ephesians 5:22-33

February 14, 1995

Good marriages have a balance. The practical realities of daily living are enhanced by the joy and spontaneity of continually falling in love with each other.

Realism can help a husband to see that he is taking his wife for granted and is not being sensitive to her feelings. It can cause a wife to see that her critical comments are tearing down her husband's self-respect.

Realism is not enough, however. Romance, often discarded after the wedding, keeps a marriage from growing dull. It can prevent the kind of situation depicted in the cartoon of an elderly couple sitting on the front porch of their home. The husband is saying, "Sometimes, Sarah, when I think of how much you mean to me, I can hardly keep from telling you so."

Paul's words in Ephesians 5 encourage a love between two people that reflects Christ's self-sacrificing devotion to His church. In addition, it's a love filled with kindness and tenderness.

Whether you're dating or have been married half a year or half a century, Christ can help you balance your relationship with realism and romance. Keep drawing on His love and see what it does for your marriage. --D J De Haan

Despite the faults that partners have,
Their marriage still can thrive;
But both must look to God for help
To keep their love alive. --J D Branon

The bonds of matrimony aren't worth much
unless the interest is kept up.

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When To Speak Up

Ephesians 5:22-33

September 25, 1995

Good communication is essential for a happy marriage. Poet Ogden Nash seems to have hit on a formula to help us remember how to communicate effectively. Nash, in his witty style, wrote:

If you want your marriage to sizzle
With love in the loving cup,
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;
Whenever you're right, shut up!

There's some immensely helpful truth in that four-liner--truth that is supported by Scripture.

Let's look at the two major points. First, if we are wrong we need to admit it. Not only marriage, but all relationships benefit from this kind of honesty (Pr 12:22). Protecting ourselves when we're wrong makes resolution impossible.

On the other hand, we can be equally hard to live with if we insist that we're always right--and afraid to let our spouse know that we are fallible. According to 1Corinthians 13:4, "[Love] does not parade itself, is not puffed up." No one likes to be around someone who always seems to be patting himself on the back.

Two simple guidelines for a marriage that pleases God: Admit wrong and keep quiet about being right. It's a good way to keep the relationship strong. --J D Branon

Button up your lip securely
'Gainst the words that bring a tear,
But be swift with words of comfort,

Words of praise, and words of cheer. --Loucks

Let your speech be better than silence;
otherwise be silent.

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Avoiding The Greener Grass

Ephesians 5:22-33

August 25, 2006

Nancy Anderson says she grew lukewarm in her faith and thus believed the world's lie: "I deserve to be happy." This led to an extramarital affair that nearly ended her marriage. She wrote her book *Avoiding The Greener Grass Syndrome* to help keep her painful story of infidelity from "becoming someone else's story."

In her book, Nancy offers six action suggestions on how to build "hedges" to protect your marriage and to help make "a good marriage great":

Hear—give a listening ear to your spouse.

Encourage—build up your spouse by focusing on positive qualities.

Date—celebrate your marriage by playing and laughing together.

Guard—establish safeguards by setting clear boundaries.

Educate—study your mate to truly understand him or her.

Satisfy—meet each other's needs.

The grass on the other side of the fence may look greener, but faithfulness to God and commitment to your spouse alone bring peace of mind and satisfaction.

When you avoid the greener-grass syndrome by loving and respecting your spouse, your marriage will be a picture of Christ and His church to those around you (Ephesians 5:31, 32). —Anne Cetas

When you look at someone else's life,
Thinking that it's better than your own,
Just remember what God's given you
Was designed for you alone. —Hess

Jesus Christ is the only third party in a marriage who can make it work.

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Ephesians 5:25

Spurgeon, C. H.

Morning and evening

What a golden example Christ gives to his disciples! Few masters could venture to say, "If you would practise my teaching, imitate my life;" but as the life of Jesus is the exact transcript of perfect virtue, he can point to himself as the paragon of holiness, as well as the teacher of it. The Christian should take nothing short of Christ for his model. Under no circumstances ought we to be content unless we reflect the grace which was in him. As a husband, the Christian is to look upon the portrait of Christ Jesus, and he is to paint according to that copy. The true Christian is to be such a husband as Christ was to his church. The love of a husband is special. The Lord Jesus cherishes for the church a peculiar affection, which is set upon her above the rest of mankind: "I pray for them, I pray not for the world." The elect church is the favourite of heaven, the treasure of Christ, the crown of his head, the bracelet of his arm, the breastplate of his heart, the very centre and core of his love. A husband should love his wife with a constant love, for thus Jesus loves his church. He does not vary in his affection. He may change in his display of affection, but the affection itself is still the same. A husband should love his wife with an enduring love, for nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." A true husband loves his wife with a hearty love, fervent and intense. It is not mere lip-service. Ah! beloved, what more could Christ have done in proof of his love than he has done? Jesus has a delighted love towards his spouse: He prizes her affection, and delights in her with sweet complacency. Believer, you wonder at Jesus' love; you admire it—are you imitating it? In your domestic relationships is the rule and measure of your love—"even as Christ loved the church?"

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The Measure Of Love

Ephesians 5:25

April 4, 1997

Love delights to give. Tell me how much you give and I will tell you how much you love. Giving is the acid test of loving.

The greatness of God's love for us is demonstrated by His priceless gift to us. How much did God love a lost world? So much that He gave His only Son (Jn 3:16). In Ephesians 5:25 we read, "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Just as God's loving and giving are inseparable, so too our giving is an expression of our love. This goes much deeper than just putting something in the offering plate on Sunday. It begins with giving ourselves to the Lord each day of the week.

In 2Corinthians 8, Paul commended the churches in Macedonia for their generous giving (vv.1-4). Their liberality was the result of their dedication to Christ, for Paul said that "they first gave themselves to the Lord" (v.5). When we do that, He then has all of us, including our possessions.

How much do you love? The answer can be seen in how much you love to give. --M. R. De Haan, M.D.

Grant us, then, the grace for giving
With a spirit large and free,
That our life and all our living
We may consecrate to Thee. --Murray

You can give without loving but you can't love without giving.

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She's Worth Listening To

Ephesians 5:22-33

June 10, 1996

We don't normally think of writer C. S. Lewis as a humorist, but he made me smile with this line: "Husbands were made to be talked to. It helps them concentrate their minds on what they're reading."

But what's funny in an obviously tongue-in-cheek remark is not funny in real life. That's why those of us who are husbands need to realize how rude and insensitive we are when we show more interest in the newspaper than we do our own spouses. If we are guilty of reading or watching TV when we should be zeroing in on what our best friend and lifelong companion is saying, we need listening lessons, beginning with these suggestions:

Look at your wife when she talks to you. Respond when she makes a statement. Participate eagerly in conversations with her. Show by your attitude that your other interests can wait.

Actually, these basic listening principles apply to all relationships. It's one of the best ways we can demonstrate that we care about the welfare of others.

If a husband loves his wife as Christ loved the church-- and that's what he's commanded to do in Ephesians 5:25--he will spend time focusing on what she has to say. It will show her she's worth listening to. --J D Branon

Thinking It Through
What distracts you from listening to your spouse?
When could you take time to listen today?

A big part of loving is listening.

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The Family Matters

Ephesians 5:25-31

July 3, 1999

Chris Spielman has made a living as a tough, hard-nosed linebacker in the National Football League. His intense play and love for the game are well-known by those who follow the sport. But when his wife was diagnosed with cancer before the 1998 season began, Spielman chose to miss an entire year of football to take care of her. He told reporters that his decision was based on his love for his family. He explained, "I told Stephanie that I want to be the one to take her to treatments. I want to be the one to hold her hand. I want to be the one to take care of my kids when she can't."

It's exciting to hear of men who take their family responsibility seriously. Scripture is clear in pointing out that husbands and dads have an obligation to love their families in a caring and compassionate way. The Bible states, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loved the church" (Eph. 5:25). "Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies" (v.28). "If anyone does not provide for ... those of his household, he ... is worse than an unbeliever" (1Ti 5:8). "Husbands, ... dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife" (1Pe 3:7).

Let's give of ourselves for our families. When we do, we follow the example of Christ, who gave Himself for us. --J D Branon

O Lord, our God, our homes are Thine forever!
We trust to Thee their problems, toil, and care;
Their bonds of love no enemy can sever
If Thou art always Lord and Master there. --Hart
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Family matters matter to God.

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A Good Husband

Ephesians 5:25-33

September 6, 2005

Early in their marriage, the well-known preacher W. E. Sangster (1900-1960) told his wife, "I can't be a good husband and a good minister. I am going to be a good minister."

Sangster was in demand as a preacher and lecturer and was often away on speaking tours. When he was at home, he seldom took his wife out for dinner or an evening of entertainment. Nor did he help with household chores. His son noted these failings, yet out of respect for his father he wrote, "If a 'good husband' is a man who loves his wife absolutely ... and dedicates himself to a cause that is greater than both of them, then my father was as good a husband as a minister."

No doubt Sangster was committed to his wife, but I believe he could have been a better husband and a better minister if he had been more concerned for her needs than for his busy schedule.

Many people in responsible positions have demands placed upon them, some that are unavoidable. But if a Christian husband takes seriously Paul's instruction to love his wife "as Christ also loved the church," he will find ways to give of himself for her, even in little things. That's how Christ, our example, loved the church. —Herbert Vander Lugt

A marriage that's neglected
Brings pain and bitterness;
But one that's daily nurtured
Brings peace and happiness. —Sper

Nurture your marriage and you'll nourish your soul

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True Love

Ephesians 5:25-33

December 4, 2003

One day I got a call from a young man named Ewing. He and our daughter Julie had known each other for nearly a year, and they

were in love. Ewing wanted to know if he could marry Julie. After asking him several questions and getting the responses I needed to hear, I gave him my approval. Then came a big surprise. I asked him when he wanted to marry Julie, and he replied, "In 2 or 3 weeks." He loved Julie so much that he wanted to be with her all the time. True love called for action.

About a month later, just 2 weeks after the wedding, my new son-in-law said to me, "I just want you to know that Julie is my best friend. We have such a great time together."

Some of us who've been married a long time may think that our experience makes us experts on matrimony. But I believe we can learn from newlyweds. First, when two people are truly in love, they will deeply care for each other and cherish their time together. Second, true love means that a couple's relationship will be characterized by the good each one does for the other. How can two people with those characteristics be anything but best friends?

Jesus is the ultimate source of love and respect (Ephesians 5:25-33). True love is Christlike love. —Dave Branon

Look upon your partner's need—
Love demands the loving deed;
Let your love be love that's true,
Prove it by the deeds you do. —Anon.

A successful marriage requires falling in love many times—with the same person.

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One Day Is Not Enough

Ephesians 5:28-29

February 15, 1996

Why are we so stubbornly neglectful at times about the relationship that can bring us the most happiness?

It's no secret that outside of our fellowship with God, the most vital connection we have with anyone is the one we share with our spouse. Yet how often do we treat that relationship with the attention it needs?

When God ordained marriage in the Garden, He offered us a remarkable relationship. When nurtured, it brings happiness, peace, fulfillment, purpose, and growth. The irony of this close connection between two people, though, is that when it is not nurtured, it can bring frustration, pain, sorrow, anger, and bitterness.

That's why I wonder why we are so stubbornly neglectful about this vital relationship.

On certain days throughout the year, we are expected to show special attention to the one we love. On those days we find it easy to demonstrate the qualities that brighten a marriage. But shouldn't we do this every day? Shouldn't we love, honor, cherish, communicate, forgive, respect, and guard this relationship all the time? We will if we want the joy God intended for us to experience in our marriage. --J D Branon

A marriage that's neglected
Brings pain and bitterness;
But one that's daily nurtured
Brings peace and happiness. --Sper

Nurture your marriage,
and you'll nourish your soul.