

Live each day knowing God's purpose as one influenced and led by the Spirit

15-16 Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.

"Be very careful" – literally 'walk circumspectly' or colloquially we would say 'watch your step'.

"Unwise... wise" – a distinction made in Proverbs and OT wisdom literature where the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. See Job 28:28; Proverbs 1:7, 9:10, Psalms 19:7, 119:98, Matt, 7:24; James 3:13-17.

• **For further study**, read what Paul writes in a similar vein in Colossians 3:15-4:1

17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

"Do not be foolish" – the "unwise" v.16 or "foolish" person does not understand or consider God's purposes. God's purposes are a major theme of Ephesians.

"Understand" – avoid the tendency to be led by feelings and emotions, but gain a perspective of what God is saying, from Scripture and Holy Spirit revelation.

18-20 Do not get drunk on wine, which

leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Drunk... filled" – someone inebriated by alcohol has surrendered control to drink. The person filled with the Spirit of God surrenders control to Him.

"Be filled" – the tense is present continuous i.e. 'be being filled'. What is in view is a moment-by-moment repeatable action, and Paul elsewhere commands believers at Ephesus to do this. This shows that not all Christians are Spirit-filled. All, however, have been sealed by the Spirit of God, Eph 4:30.

"Filled" is plēroō which relates to being filled with the whole measure of the "fullness", plērōma, of Christ urged in Eph. 3:19 and 4:13.

"Sing and make music" – participative worship and "making music" is an outcome of being filled with the Spirit, and also an empowering of encouragement, witness and service.

IN PRACTICE God sent His Son, Jesus, to give us the way from death to life.

Fortunately He didn't leave us there, but gave us His Holy Spirit at Pentecost to be our Teacher and Helper in this new life. Solomon had to check his ego and follow the Lord's ways: this was wise and brought blessing on the whole nation. Jesus shocks us into thinking about whether we really do receive Him, trust Him and make Him part of us and Lord of our hearts. Now Paul reminds us we are living in a world whose values are selfish and evil – our witness for Jesus is in being different, in being like Him. So he tells us, "Be [continually being] filled with the Spirit." How do we do that? Ask! Like an electric charge, it runs out with the drain this world puts on us. We need to be intentional about asking to be filled with the fullness of God – and our lives will show it, with an inner joy that carries us through.

QUESTION *How important is it for you to be filled with the Spirit? How free are you about asking God for more?*

PRAYER It is so encouraging, Father, to be reminded of Your good promises for me so that I can discern Your ways, know Who to turn to for life and life eternal, and be able to ask day by day for Your Spirit to fill me and empower me. Fill me afresh with Your Holy Spirit, Lord, and may He be my Helper in walking with You closely and consistently. I ask this for Jesus' glory, Amen.

Church calendar readings for Sunday, August 19, in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: **How to live in partnership with God**

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 » God promises Solomon a wise and discerning heart

John 6:51-58 » Jesus' promise of eternal life through Him

Ephesians 5:15-20 » Our promise of an ongoing spiritual enabling

1 Kings 2:10-12; 3:3-14 » God promises Solomon a discerning heart

God appears to Solomon in a dream and covenants with him

2:10-12 Then David rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. He had reigned forty years over Israel—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

"Rested" – as with "laid to rest", 1:21, a usual expression for death.

"Forty years" – he became king at age 30, 2 Sam. 5:4

3:3 Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

"Except that" – Solomon should have been more attentive to Deuteronomy 12. Local sacrifices to the Lord, common practice before the temple was built, were at first tolerated by Solomon. Later his downfall came through being drawn into worshipping other gods at high places, as also happened with Israel and Judah.

4-5 The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At

Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

"Most important high place" – after the Philistine destruction of Shiloh, Gibeon, six miles north west of Jerusalem, hosted the tabernacle and altar of burnt offering, giving it unique significance, 1 Chron 21:29, 2 Chron. 1:2-6. It was the last of the pre-temple shrines.

"The Lord appeared" – Solomon's local sacrifices seem to have been well motivated, in this period.

6 Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

"Great kindness" – the Hebrew for this word is chesed, also translated 'faithful love', 'unfailing love' and 'mercy'. It has overtones of God's favour by reason of covenant and the original promises made to Israel through Moses, also His recent covenant with David, 2 Samuel 7:8-16. Covenant faithfulness is important in OT theology.

For further study, see 2 Sam. 7:15, Psalm 6:4, Deut 7:9,12.

> continued

7-8 "Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number.

"A little child" – Solomon, 20 years old, is aware of his lack of experience for his new responsibility.

"Too numerous" – this recalls the origins of the twelve tribes in one family in Egypt, now settled and knowing God's 'rest' under David's unifying rule, Genesis 46:26-27, Deut 7:7 and God's promise made to Abraham and Jacob, Gen. 13:16, 22:17-18, Gen. 32:12.

9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

"Discerning heart" – a phrase meaning being able to hear all sides of an argument and come to a true decision. Requesting wisdom marks a change of emphasis from military success to good governance.

10-12 The Lord was pleased that Solomon

had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

"Long life... wealth... death of enemies" were usual requests to deities from ancient near eastern monarchs.

13-14 Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – both wealth and honour – so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."

"And if you walk in obedience..." – a conditional promise. Later in life, Solomon reneged on the condition and did not stay obedient to Moses' law as David had. He reigned for 40 years, 1 Kings 11:42, and did not live much beyond the age of 60.

IN PRACTICE Solomon's strength was understanding the principle of covenant in partnering with God - "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom". The wisdom of discerning what is God's way starts with having a heart set on God's purposes. Then there is an alignment which extends to others in wise governance. Solomon asked for this (as we can) and the Lord was pleased with his request.

Solomon's weakness was in not being consistent, not following through. The slide always starts in small ways. We know God will bless our commitment to Him, to walk with Him and live life His way. But are we consistent in our partnership? Are we swayed by others? Will we too easily take the path of less resistance?

Solomon started by relying on the Lord's help. But wealth and success made him careless about his "walk in obedience". The lesson for us is about having a heart to rely on the Lord and follow His ways - and being consistent in our resolve.

QUESTION *How committed, and how consistent are you, in partnership with God?*

John 6:51-58 » Jesus' promise of eternal life through Him

Jesus explains that He is the living bread and the way to live for ever

51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh,

which I will give for the life of the world."

"Living bread" – Jesus unveils His gift as He links two ideas: 1, He is the "living bread" who satisfies spiritual hunger. 2, He becomes this spiritually satisfying answer by sacrificing His physical body

to death on the Cross; in this sense He says that the spiritually satisfying "bread" is "my flesh".

"I will give" – Jesus sees clearly what must happen "for the life of the world", the first of many such explanations of how eternal life was linked to the manner of his death to come, to perplexed hearers. However, they would have been familiar with Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 which foretold the crucifixion 700 or more years beforehand. The giving would be costly to the Giver.

52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

"Give us His flesh" – Jesus used physical object references as metaphors to teach spiritual truths, and He was often misunderstood at first.

53-54 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

"Eat the flesh" – cannot be understood literally because no one ever did that. It is a graphic picture of complete trust in Him and – later – having a participation in His death. His shocking language is explained later in verses 60-63.

IN PRACTICE Jesus had a hard word for His hearers, shocking them with the suggestion that they should eat His flesh and drink His blood, which sounded like a shortcut to judgment, not salvation. However, His Jewish midrash style of teaching, contrasting what was before with what is now, had clues about the Passover. They would eat the flesh of the Passover lamb, and drink the "blood of grapes", Gen. 49:11, the wine with the meal.

Jesus made His hearers work to grasp what He was saying, and for those that did, it was profound and unforgettable teaching. His promise of eternal life for us - by believing in Him, 'flesh and blood' and nothing held back - is so simple, we want to dismiss it. We would rather try to earn our salvation through church attendance and dutiful service. We, like Jesus' first hearers, need a bit of a shock and need to think, to really take on board what Jesus is saying about us trusting Him.

QUESTION *Are there ways in which you are consciously, or perhaps unconsciously, trying to earn favour and salvation because it's too hard to believe and receive?*

"Whoever eats... and drinks..." – In Jewish idiom, as in English, 'flesh and blood' stands for the whole person. Jesus is not speaking about the Lord's Supper, which came later, see Luke 22:19. However this is a parallel theme. Being united (the meaning of communion) with the "Son of Man" to receive eternal life would later be represented symbolically in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.

55-57 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

"The one who feeds on Me" – there is being intellectually persuaded by Jesus, there is following Jesus, and there is 'feeding on Him' in a deeper and ongoing internalising of Jesus, His life, His values and the attendant risks.

58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

"Ate manna and died" – the manna was God's provision of food for that day. Jesus is God's provision of life, not for a day but for eternity.