

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR AUGUST 22-23, 2021**

¹⁵ Consider carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise people, but as wise people. ¹⁶ Make the most of your time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ For this reason, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸ And do not get drunk on wine, which causes you to lose control. Instead, be filled with the Spirit ¹⁹ by speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (singing and making music with your hearts to the Lord), ²⁰ by always giving thanks for everything to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
(Ephesians 5:15-20 EHV)

People talking on cell phones while driving are eight times as likely to crash as the average driver. People who text on cell phones while driving are 23 times as likely to crash as the average driver. I don't know what the stats are for eating cheeseburger/drinking coffee/putting on makeup/reading/messing with GPS, but it's clear that we are a nation of drivers that engage in risky, distracted, inattentive driving. Multitasking while driving is nothing to be proud of. It's just plain dangerous.

There's a lot of dangerous carelessness out there. Someone tosses a cigarette out a window in a National Forest, and the next thing you know, 100,000 acres go up in smoke. Parents don't pay enough attention to their kids – what they're doing, where they're going, who they're with. People fail to watch what they eat, drink, their overall health. What's at work here is more than a short attention span, more than the non-stop information age overwhelming us with information and responsibility. It's really spiritual ADD, or SDD – Spiritual Deficit Disorder.

Paul addresses this: ***“Consider carefully, then, how you walk, not as unwise people, but as wise people.”*** This is not a THEY problem, people out there somewhere. This is a WE problem. We need to pay attention to how we live. We tend to draw a line between other people and ourselves. It goes like this: I/we tend to explain other people's bad behavior in terms of their character flaws, but I/we tend to explain my own bad behavior in terms of extenuating circumstances. So when I see someone else yelling at their kids, I assume it's because they can't control their temper. But when I find myself yelling at my kids, I assume it's because they were misbehaving so badly that even Mr. Rogers would yell at them if he were trying to parent them.

But what this really is, is sin. Sin is what makes this world such a mess. Not an occasional lapse or bit of carelessness here and there. It runs deep within you and me – every selfish behavior/hurtful word/ episode of anger/greedy motive/sexual misdeed/act of secret cruelty that I think no one else will ever know about. It all adds to the stain and stench of sin that separates me and you from God.

Is there a cure for SDD, Spiritual Deficit Disorder? There is. His name is Jesus. He meets our deficit/disorder – let's call it what it is – sin. He took away our sins with his sacrificial life and death and fills us instead with the Holy Spirit. Using Word and Sacrament, the Spirit fills us with faith - faith in Christ that sees us through this life and takes us into the next. Until then, and for right now, Paul's encouragement is very much in place:

“Consider carefully, then, how you walk” Literally, be accurate, be on the beam.

Sad to say there is a lot of inaccuracy and carelessness in the Christian life. Paul mentions drunkenness. Other big areas of “foolish” carelessness include sexual sin, which Paul discusses extensively in these last chapters of Ephesians. Also, materialism. So often, our eyes are bigger than our wallets. There's so much out there that we want, really want, no, need! I need these things. I will not be denied. And we are careless. We rack up debt. Sins of the tongue are hard to control – careless words are out of our mouths before we realize it.

Paul says, ***“Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.”*** God's will is not a mystery. It's all right here in his Word. In fact, God has given us a handy summary called the Ten Commandments. We can boil it down further for brevity's sake to seven bullet points:

- Have no other gods.
- Don't misuse God's name.
- Pay attention to the preaching of his Word.
- Honor and obey your parents and authorities.
- Sex is for the bond of marriage alone.
- Don't kill, steal, or tell hurtful things about your neighbor.
- Have pure desires.

But very often, people – even Christian people – will do one of three things: 1) say, “I know what God says, but it doesn't all apply to me.” For example, someone who comes to church every week – wouldn't dream of missing church – but openly disagrees with God's Word on things like gay marriage, priorities in life, how to raise children. Or 2) do a great job of pretending, putting on their church face, their spiritual mask on Sunday, but then do whatever they want the rest of the week. 3) say, “I don't get it” and give up.

There's no excuse for any of these attitudes, especially when **GRACE FILLS HEARTS WITH THE SPIRIT.** What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? Some take this to mean nothing more than to believe in Jesus and act according to his will. But the way this phrase is used in the Bible indicates that this is beyond anything normal. It's above average. It's extreme Christian living. The Bible says that Joshua, the great general of Israel who crumpled the walls of Jericho with the sound of trumpets and who made the sun stand still like no man ever will again, was filled with the Spirit. King David was filled with the Spirit. Despite persecution, Peter, filled with the Spirit, proclaimed the resurrection. Stephen faced martyrdom filled with the Spirit. The believers at Pentecost spoke in foreign languages while filled with the Spirit. John the Baptist and his mother Elizabeth were filled with the Spirit for their unique role in preparing the way for the Savior. Jesus went into the wilderness to resist Satan's temptations for 40 days without food yet filled with the Spirit. Extreme Christian living. Above average, Spirit-filled living. Is this for you and me?

Paul says, ***“Be filled with the Spirit.”*** OK. So how can ordinary people live Spirit-filled lives? Do we need to change jobs? Do we need some sort of spiritual Olympic routine that begins at 4 a.m.? Not at all. Paul explains, ***“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.”*** This isn't anything out of the ordinary. We're not talking singing on American Idol or auditioning for the heavenly choir. In fact, the emphasis here isn't on the music but the message, because it says, ***“speak to one another.”*** We help one another be filled with the Spirit when we share the Word of God with each other – worship, Bible study, singing.

Paul continues, ***“Singing and making music with your hearts to the Lord.”*** This is personal, this is contemplation of the Lord and his Word in your heart. A heart focused on the Lord and his promises is being filled with the Spirit. Such a heart will be ***“always giving thanks for everything to God the Father.”*** A constant attitude of gratitude. You don't need to belong to certain Christian denominations in order to be Spirit-filled. Lutherans are Spirit-filled, usually a bit less demonstrative, but still Spirit-filled. You don't need to be a Bible patriarch or a Bible-toting matriarch in order to be filled with the Spirit. No pilgrimages to Jerusalem or Rome or synod headquarters in Milwaukee are necessary. God the Holy Spirit pours himself into you through the sweet sounds of God's Word, filling you up with wisdom, understanding, energy, and God himself.

Is there a need for this kind of Spirit-filled living, for hearts to be connected to the 24/7 flow of God's amazing grace? There is. ***“The days are evil,”*** Paul says. If the days were evil 2000 years ago, what are they now? Let me ask you – are they evil just for you? How about your kids? Grandkids? How about your co-workers? Neighbors? They are evil for everyone. All the more reason to be careful how you live and to make the most of every opportunity. You're not just living for yourself, but for others. You and I live to impact others with careful, joyful, Spirit-filled living. Spirit-filled means to be Word filled.

So it starts there. Here in the generous 24/7 flow of God's grace in worship and Bible study. It continues in personal study all week long, not just in the pastor's office, but in your offices and homes and hearts. Make the most of these opportunities! Then make the most of confronting unhealthy addictions and sinful

tendencies by tuning to God's plans and promises, avoiding temptation, praying for help from God. Make the most of improving your marriage – any relationship – by engaging in open, honest communication to – not at – each other. Make the most of witnessing to others about the hope and help you have in Jesus.

And do this carefully. Intentionally. Pay attention to God's will and Word. And God's grace will continue to fill your heart and life with the Spirit. Allow me to illustrate the difference between careful, deliberate, intentional use of the Spirit and pretending that we're Spirit-filled. Two glasses of water, two packets of Alka-Seltzer. Drop a packet of Alka-Seltzer, wrapper on, into one glass. Then drop unsealed pack into second glass. Both glasses have the Alka-Seltzer, just as all Christians have the Holy Spirit. But which glass gets the full benefit of the tablets – the one that's opened/used. So it is with the Spirit and the Word. Open it, use it, live Spirit-filled, extraordinary lives that honor God and serve others. To his glory.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Stephen W. Luchterhand". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
Minocqua, WI