

Pastor Tom Mortenson

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How Should We Then Live

Ephesians 5:15-16

Prayer: Father, I just want to come before you this morning thanking you for giving us the ability to do church when church seems almost impossible to do. We recognize that this is not church but this is something important, Lord, this is something that we can do to just extend our reach until we can do church again. And so we pray this morning, Lord, for the presence of your Holy Spirit, we pray that as we open up your word, open up your book, that you would accompany us and give us the ability to make this make sense. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Many years ago, actually back in 1976 when I was still living in California I had the privilege of attending one of the first presentations given by evangelical philosopher Francis Schaeffer and it was about the state of our culture and our place as Christians within it. He entitled his presentation "How Should We Then Live?" The preparation was outstanding and it proved to be incredibly prescient. That's just a fancy way of saying that he said a lot of things about the future that all happened to come

true. And what I was really struck by in his presentation was the word "then." "Then" is an interesting word. "Then" can be used as a noun or as an adjective or as an adverb, and in this case the word "then" as an adverb modifying the word "live." And it means "in that case." It means how should we then live in the case of what Schaeffer thought in 1976 was a culture that was falling apart. He had no idea how far apart it would come. Francis Schaeffer died some eight years later in 1984 and so he was spared seeing so much of what he predicted come true. My guess is that Francis Schaeffer could not have imagined our culture today. In 1976, AIDS was unknown, abortion had only become recently legalized and terms like surrogacy, gender fluidity, polyamory and designer porn, they were unknown at the time. Acronyms such as LGBTQ or HIV were unknown as well. And so too were SARS and MERS or the term COVID-19, the technical name that we give to the Coronavirus. Like I said, Francis Schaeffer was amazingly prescient. But God's knowledge of the future goes far beyond being prescient. He knows every single detail of every single thing that is going to take place three months, three years and three centuries from today. And he tells us in *Ephesians 5:15*: *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* I don't know that there was ever a time when we needed more to look carefully, number one, how we walk; number two, to walk as wise, not as unwise; and number three, to

understand how to make the best use of time because there's no doubt in my mind that these days are indeed evil.

So first God says we have to look carefully how we walk. That includes parents now trying to figure out how to educate their children who are looking at weeks and perhaps months of being out of school. It includes families trying to figure out how to accomplish the simple tasks that we're all used to accomplishing without compromising my family's health or the health of my neighbor. It should also include our ability to reach out with the love of Christ to friends and neighbors, to show them the love of Christ in a practical way and to demonstrate how knowing God and having his wisdom can have a practical, tangible effect in easing the stress and anxiety of living with this virus. If ever there was a time when we need to live not as unwise but as wise, it is now. And in order to do that, we first have to understand what wisdom is; and secondly we need to take steps to find out how to get wisdom; and thirdly we need to understand how to make the best use of time because the days are indeed evil.

So first let's look at what wisdom is and how we can obtain it. Eight years ago I did a study in the book of James on what wisdom is and how we can acquire it. And I said back then that wisdom, like joy and like patience, does not yield to a simple English

definition. And like with joy and with patience, we need to look to the scripture to find out just what wisdom really is. See, most folks confuse wisdom with intelligence and they are not one in the same. Biblical wisdom is not the ability or the intelligence to do well at jeopardy even if the topic is Bible verses. It's not just the accumulation of knowledge about things biblical even though the Bible is our source of wisdom. I mean you've often heard me use this simple two-word definition of what biblical wisdom really is but even that needs some further explanation. We've often described wisdom simply as skillful living. J. I. Packer describes it this way. He says: "Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it. Wisdom is, in fact the practical side of moral goodness. As such it is found in its fullness only in God." The power to choose the best and highest goal is something that God offers to us through wisdom. So practically speaking I would say wisdom is the power to perceive the word of God, the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God with a supernatural ability to connects all of those spheres together. I mean COVID-19 cries out for wisdom, and that wisdom consists of seeing the link between God's word, between the world that we live in, and between the kingdom of God. It's the ability to connect the dots in each of those spheres in a way that points directly to and from the mind of God. And the place that that first starts is

with the word of God.

Let me tell you how God showed me that in my life. Way back in 1971 I had just graduated from college, I was about to marry the most beautiful, intelligent and kind woman I'd ever met and I thought I was literally on top of the world. I mean I knew nothing, nothing whatsoever of the Bible or of *James 1:5* which says: "*If any of you lacks wisdom,*" I certainly did but it was of absolutely no concern to me. I had no use for God's idea of wisdom because I was one of the smartest people I had ever met. I mean, I thought I was brilliant. I had no idea that I was a living, breathing biblical definition of what a fool is. I mean we think a fool is, you know, somebody who's a knucklehead, he's a nitwit, he's somebody who can't find his way out of a paper bag. Well God's word defines a fool very differently. *Psalm 14:1* says: *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God."* Well, those words and that idea really defined me. I mean I didn't just say that in my heart, I said it to anyone who would listen. I was a proud atheist who was extremely impressed with me and with my opinions. And I decided if there was a god, he had to be just like I had envisioned him. And when he wasn't, well, I just concluded that he didn't exist. I mean nevermind that my god was not a god at all. It was an idol that I had constructed inside my own mind. It's something that virtually every non-believer does. And I was as guilty as the

next person of saying, "My god is," and, you know, fill in the blank. I'd never had any inkling of knowing that the first part of wisdom is knowing or at least suspecting what *James 1:5* is saying when it says: *If any of you lacks wisdom.* I mean he's suggesting that you just might not have it. Well you know, that never occurred to me. And scripture addresses that as well. In *Proverbs 12:15*, it says: *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes but a wise man listens to advice.* *Proverbs 28:26* says: *Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered.*

Now if God's wisdom is something that connects his word to his world and his kingdom, then it follows that you can only get that wisdom when you are a child of God, when you acknowledge that you are a sinner hopelessly lost without Christ, when you turn to him and by faith accept his sacrifice on the cross as payment in full for your sin, when you understand that then you are able to stand before God clothed in Christ's righteousness instead of your own. Well, by God's grace in May of 1973 I did just that. God invaded my world and began the process of transforming my life into the image of his Son. The very first thing that God did when he opened my eyes was to introduce a genuine fool like me to the wisdom of his word. And it was a wisdom unlike anything I had been exposed to before, and that's understandable because God's wisdom is

antithetical to human wisdom. It is its direct opposite. And that's why God says in *1 Corinthians 1:18*: *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.* Through the miracle of God's saving grace, the foolishness and weakness of the cross that had seemed to ridiculous to me, well it now made perfect sense. And God makes that clear as well in *1 Corinthians 1:25*, he says: *For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.* I mean it seemed like every time I opened up the Bible God was exposing me to insights and ways of thinking that I had never ever thought of before. And dots between God's word and this world and the kingdom of God were being connected that had never been connected before, and they were all coming from the printed word in the pages of a book that I had had nothing but scorn for before. I spent the first 23 years of my life gleaning as much of this world's wisdom as I could and I found out over and over again that it was absolutely no match for God's wisdom. And I learned that that, too, was part of the wisdom that God had for me in his word. And there in his word he said this in *1 Corinthians 3:18*, he said: *Let no one deceive himself, if anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written "He that catches the wise in their craftiness."*

I've spent 47 years studying the wisdom that God has given us in his word and all that I have learned in that time could fit in a thimble with room to spare compared to the vastness of the wisdom that is there in God's word. It is God's wisdom coalesced into the printed word but that doesn't mean that it's available to everyone. The word of God is a closed book to anyone who doesn't have the wisdom of God to understand it, and you don't get that wisdom from training or genetics or from discipline. It's not like chemistry or physics or literature or even theology. Some of the most brilliant theological minds there are in places like Yale and Harvard and Princeton are hopelessly blind, deaf, and dumb when it comes to understanding the simple truths of the gospel. All three of those institutions were at one time, centuries ago, bastions of truth and wisdom because they sought that wisdom in order to give glory to God. In 1636 Harvard's charter said this: "Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life, John 17:3, and therefore to lay Christ in the bottom as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning. And seeing the Lord only giveth wisdom, let everyone seriously set himself by prayer in secret to seek it of him. Proverbs 2:3." See, in 1636 Harvard knew where wisdom came from. Well subsequently it has completely forgotten. Those places are now theological wastelands for the most part because God has

withdrawn his wisdom and kind of left them to pick over the carcass of man's wisdom.

And the fact is when it comes to the word, the world and the kingdom, all of us lack the wisdom that God offers. It's a wisdom he offers us in his word. *James 1:5* says this, it says: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* Well the first thing we lack wisdom in is really is in understanding God's word. The second thing we lack wisdom in is not only the word but it's this world around us. The world is still trying to figure out how to deal with a virus that it never even knew of less than three months ago. And so too do we believers have this pressing need to apply God's wisdom to that world as we wrestle with it today. We can't begin to know or understand the world unless we understand it through God's word. And there we encounter a God who remained the same through plagues and earthquakes and famine and pestilence and flood. I mean he's been there, he's done that. And connecting his word to this world gives us the big picture that sees our lives in a context that takes us from eternity past all the way to the very end of days. *Proverbs 3:5-6* says: *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths.* I mean that rolls off my tongue because I believe that with all of my heart. I mean

it's not some type of Christian cliché that we put on a plaque on our wall, it's actually the way we orient our lives, and that's what God's wisdom is all about. I mean there's a reason why Proverbs says, *how much better to get wisdom than gold!* I mean it's one thing to understand that God's wisdom is the ability to connect God's dots, it's another thing entirely to be able to acquire the wisdom to do just that. And one of the most stunning things about wisdom is that as precious as it is, the requirements for gaining it are something that anyone can access simply by asking. *If any of you lacks wisdom* is James' way of stating the first part of a conditional clause. And he's stating the obvious, I mean, James is assuming that we all lack wisdom. He's addressing the very first requirement that God has for acquiring wisdom. It's just acknowledging that you don't have it. For many that is a large stumbling block.

Back in my foolish days, I thought why do I need wisdom from God when I'm already as wise as I need to be in my own eyes. And that's not just a problem for unbelievers, I mean, that's an attitude that can creep into anyone's heart if they're not careful. God gives his truth freely to anyone who sincerely asks for it but he hides it from anyone arrogant enough to think they already have it or that they are entitled to it. Unless we come to God with an attitude that we are helpless babes with no power or resources when

it comes to wisdom, well then we can't expect God to give it to us. And Jesus said in *Matthew 11:25*: "*I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.*" Jesus of course is referring to the wise and prudent here sarcastically. I mean those who already think that they're wise and prudent have God's wisdom hidden away from them.

So the first requirement in gaining wisdom from God is just acknowledging that you don't have it. The second requirement is as simple as it gets. Again *James 1:5* says: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* I mean there's all kinds of things that we ask of God that God might say no to for our good and his glory. I mean there may be issues that we have about health or relationships or employment or where we live, and all of those things are subject to God's individual will for each of us. Not so with a request to God for wisdom. I mean *let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach.* I can easily picture circumstances in which God denies our request for other things because he's got much bigger plans and a much bigger picture than we do, but I can't possibly imagine a time when God will deny our request for wisdom. I mean think about it, can you possibly imagine that? God's not the soup Nazi when it comes to wisdom.

His requirement for wisdom, his requirements are three-fold. I mean first you have to recognize that you don't have wisdom; secondly, you have to ask God for it, but there's a third requirement and this may seem strange at first, it's the reason why I firmly believe that I am wise and that I have gotten my wisdom from God. Here's why. You have to listen carefully to what the third requirement is. And the first one is this: *If any of you lacks wisdom, that's the first. He says: If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given to him.* That's the second requirement. Here's the third requirement. It says: *But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.* You see, that's the overlooked requirement but it's incredibly important. You simply have to believe God when he tells you that if you ask him for wisdom he's going to give it to you. Because if you doubt that you're going to receive wisdom from God, well then you won't. I mean it's really a matter of faith and trust.

Okay. So how do I know if I've received this wisdom from God? Well again, God's word tells us how we can identify his wisdom. And in fact it's in the very same book of James. This is *James*

3:17. It says this: *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.* That's God's practical definition of what wisdom is. God's wisdom is first pure. I mean God's word points out first and foremost that the wisdom from heaven is pure and spotless and holy because this wisdom emanates from God himself. To see wisdom personified in the flesh one has to look no further than Jesus Christ. *1 Corinthians 1:23* says: *But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.* Jesus is the power of God and the wisdom of God and as such it is a wisdom that is absolutely pure.

Next, God's wisdom is peaceable. Now the Greek word for "peaceable" here is "eirenikos," it's a word that we get "irenic" from. Not ironic but irenic. Someone who is irenic is the exact opposite of somebody who's always looking for a fight. This is someone who is always looking for a way to find peace. I mean one of the first questions that I always ask of someone who we're considering for a leadership position is is he irenic? Is he always looking for what makes for peace? I mean I've known a lot of very smart and very gifted, angry people, and I can tell you that the havoc that they wreak chokes off any of the meekness of wisdom. I mean I've been at meetings that you could cut the

tension with a chainsaw because of the anger of just one person and that anger has the ability to poison everything and it makes it impossible for the meekness of wisdom to flow. I can tell you that I've been blessed with elders and deacons, all of whom have irenic spirits. And I can also tell you that the model for all of us when it comes to these qualities is the prince of peace, Jesus Christ.

James goes on to say: *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle.* Well *Matthew 12:20* quotes Isaiah, saying of Jesus, *"A bruised reed, he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory."* Well in the New Testament there was this woman at the well. She was a bruised reed. She had had five husbands and she was living with a man who was not her husband. There was also the woman who was caught in adultery. They were both smoldering wicks. Both were flagrantly and literally at the end of their respective ropes, and yet the meekness of Jesus' wisdom was focused on gently ministering truth to broken, flickering lives. Jesus' gentleness brought justice to victory by creating a place for the sinner to turn to instead of a theological hoop to jump through. Jesus could have pummeled those women with his righteousness and their sin but instead he led them gently to the truth. I shudder when I try to imagine how I would have responded to those women as a brand new Christian. I mean I had lots and lots of truth but not a whole lot

of grace. And by studying Jesus' wisdom as revealed in his word, I saw that his wisdom had the gentleness that I lacked as a brand new Christian.

James goes on to say: *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason.* Now the King James version calls this "easy to be entreated." Now the easiest way to find out if someone has this meekness of wisdom is just disagree with him or her. If they are easily entreated, that won't be a problem. I mean have you ever known somebody who becomes instantly defensive or argumentative or even brokenhearted if someone disagrees with them? These are folks who are not easily entreated. Those who are easily entreated are those who know they don't have all the answers. They may have firm convictions but they're always willing to hear somebody out when they disagree with them. Jesus was an absolute example of that. I mean consider the words of Lazarus' sister Martha. Just picture the scene, Lazarus is dead, he's in his tomb, Martha is standing by her brother's tomb and she finally sees Jesus and she says this in *John 11:21*, she says: *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* You see clearly Martha felt some level of comfort unloading on Jesus. And what this shows us is that Jesus was a man would was easily approached and easily entreated. And what is stunning though is that Jesus was easily entreated even though he was the only one who

ever walked the earth who had no reason to ever be entreated for the simple reason that he was perfect. He was flawless. There was no need to entreat him about something that needed to be corrected. Once again the meekness of his wisdom, that power that he had due to his perfection was a power that he kept always under control and so that he was easily entreatable, always open to reason. Again James says: *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits.*

Well, the first four aspects that we've looked at of the meekness of wisdom are passive. Wisdom is pure, it's peaceable, it's gentle and reasonable. But the full portrait of the wisdom from above is also active, it reaches out. It is full of mercy and good fruits. Mercy is grace, mercy is compassion that's extended to someone who is absolutely not entitled to it. It is always extended from the strong to the weak. It's not the victors who need mercy, it's the vanquished. And so mercy is something that can only be freely given, it can never, never be demanded. And when you fully understand mercy, then you realize that you've received something you couldn't possibly have earned. We go back to the debtor spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 18. He's forgiven this great debt by his master and he then goes on to beat and demand payment for a very small debt that someone owed him and he winds up being held responsible for his whole debt, not because he broke some kind of

debt rule but because he never really knew his master. You see, when you begin to know the master you understand that you don't really understand the mercy that you've been freely given without feeling fully compelled to extend it. You also realize that a refusal to extend mercy to someone means that in some way you felt entitled to something that never really belonged to you in the first place. Jesus made that clear to the debtor in *Matthew 18:32* when he says this, it says: *"Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt."*

Well, that's mercy. And along with mercy are what we hear is good fruits. Let me repeat again. James says this: *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits.* What are good fruits? Well, they're the fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, gentleness, self-control. And you know the key to getting the fruit of the spirit is the same as the key to wisdom itself, you never get the fruits of the spirit by trying to appropriate them as individual character enhancements. I mean you can certainly improve some aspects of your personality through books and seminars and teachings and those are good things

but they're not the fruit of the spirit. The fruit of the spirit is the invisible presence of the Holy Spirit made manifest in the lives of his sheep, and there's only one place that you can get them, there's only one place that it comes from and that it comes from abiding in Jesus. Is there a difference between the patience that you can get from a seminar or books and the patience that you get from the Spirit of Christ? Absolutely. I mean on at least three different levels they're extraordinarily different. The first level is the world's patience is really is reflection of your own efforts. The fruit of the spirit's patience is a reflection of the "Spirit of Christ in you" efforts. And secondly the world's patience, well it basically glorifies me. The fruit of the spirit's patience glorifies God. And thirdly, the source of the world's patience is self. The source of the fruit of the spirit's patience is Jesus Christ. You see, the key to gaining all of the wisdom that James is speaking of here is the same key for gaining the fruits of the Spirit and it's not by seeking the fruits out. It's by seeking out their source and that's Jesus Christ. Jesus put it very plainly in *John 15:4*, he said this: *"Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* I think I can boil down what James is saying about

wisdom to a street translation of what Jesus just said about fruit and what Jesus is simply saying here is that the more you hang around Jesus, the more like him you are going to become and that includes wisdom, the more his wisdom will become your wisdom. *Abide in me and you will bear much fruit* and again wisdom according to James is full of mercy and good fruits.

And finally James says this, he says: *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.* Now partiality was familiar territory for James. I mean we looked at the scripture awhile back and this was *James 2:1-9*, he says this in that section, he says: *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.* And I asked back then when we were looking at this, I said, why do you think God is so exercised about partiality? Well, morally speaking again it goes back to this debt that everyone of us owes. You see, God sees us as tapped out. He sees us as not having a leg to stand on because God sees everyone of us as debt ridden servants, the same kind of servant that Jesus was speaking of, that morally speaking, all of us are beggars. Beggars that he loved, beggars that he died for, beggars that he's made into co-heirs with Christ but beggars nonetheless and the church that James was writing to was in no position to practice any form of one upmanship whatsoever.

Partiality attempts to ignore our status as beggars in order to pretend that there's different levels of quality between us. The meekness of wisdom precludes that. Sincerity also precludes that. The King James translates "sincerity" as "without hypocrisy." And again to be hypocrite simply means to have two different faces, one face for the front of a person and another face for his back. Those are two different personas occupying the same person. Hence that person can praise God with one face and he can curse his brother with the other. And James says: *My brothers and sisters, this should not be.* The wisdom from above has but one face.

So let me conclude by asking three very important questions. Number one, how do we get this wisdom from above? Well, James has the first and obvious answer. He says: *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.* Question number two: What does wisdom consist of? Again James says: *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.* And thirdly, how do we know that we've received it? And again James asks and answers that same question. This is *James 3:13*, he says this: *Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom.* I mean all James is saying is the proof of the pudding is in eating. What he's saying

is that Godly wisdom is not a theoretical construct, it's not a philosophy, it's not a matter of self-improvement. God's wisdom is in essence a lifestyle, it's a pattern of living that flows out of a person who abides in Christ. J. I. Packer points out how it becomes a lifestyle. He says: "Not until we become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God's holiness and sovereignty acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom become ours."

There's a number of people I've met who stand out in my mind as having possessed Godly wisdom. None of them were particularly brilliant in academia but all of them understood things that geniuses can only guess at. I think of people like Rosie Zaorski who was a member here for many years, she worked in a factory, she was a janitor for many years before dying of a vicious disease. She passed the test that James spoke of because by her good conduct she showed her works in the meekness of wisdom. She was a person who to the best of her ability she was pure, she was peaceable, she was gentle, open to reason, she was full of mercy and good fruits, she was impartial and sincere. So were Helen and Bob Sorenson and Bertha Moore and Jean Warner and Eleanor Machette and Donna Tetter and others who used to be part of this body who are now gone on to be with the Lord. They were not theologians, they were not rocket

scientists, they just understood the value of what it is they had been given. They understood *Proverbs 16:16*, which says: *How much better to get wisdom than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.* And because they had that gift they were able to do what James concludes with, and he says this: *And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.* I mean wouldn't you want this to be something said about you after you left this earth? And it can be. I mean it's not rocket science. I mean you get wisdom by acknowledging that you don't have it, by asking for it, and then believing God when he says he's going to give it to you. And if we ever needed wisdom, it is right now.

And again this brings us back to the scripture that we started out with. This is *Ephesians 5:15*. God says: *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* I don't have to tell you this is the first time ever in my life that everybody that I know is facing an existential threat. I mean a minor threat but a threat nonetheless. I mean for the first time there is out there a looming threat that you might catch a virus with a fatal consequence. I mean if you're young and healthy, that threat is greatly reduced. If you're over 60 and you have any type of underlying condition, that threat becomes significant. But

understand, this is not the first time that Christians have faced a pandemic. If you go back to the middle ages you'll find that there was a series of plagues that advanced Christianity from a small localized belief to where it became the predominant faith in all of Europe and from Europe to the rest of the world. I mean historians believe that one of the major reasons why Christianity spread throughout Europe was that during the great plagues it was Christians who ministered to the people who were sick and dying often at the cost of their own personal health. And it was that display of supernatural love that literally changed the demographics of Europe. See, at the height of the plagues, fear and despair was so great that as people even started to get inklings, they started to be shown symptoms of the disease they could be shunned and thrown out on the streets where there was nothing but death and dying. And the reality of death and dying was so prevalent and so immediate that many Christians adopted the attitudes that at least they could choose to die in a way that honored Christ and kingdom and so they willingly ministered to those people. And as with any plague there's always a percentage of people who were able to survive the disease. And in the face of such displays of Christ-like love, so many Europeans converted to Christianity that the demographics of Europe literally shifted with the people surviving the disease overwhelmingly becoming Christian. I mean it's just another example of Romans 8:28. God causes all

things including plagues to work together for good. And he's placed every one of us providentially in a position to be able to explain and demonstrate his gospel to people like I was once, who previously might not have had any interest whatsoever. I mean we're not in the middle of a plague like that in Rome. We're in a unique period of time and people have the opportunity to view the gospel of Christ as lived out in the lives of people who don't have to give in to fear in a time when everyone around us seems to be.

This takes me back to the question I stated the very beginning. It's a question that every Christian should be asking all the time. It's a question that I ask virtually every day and my wife will attest to it. It's a question I pray to God for an answer to every day, and the question is: How should we then live? And the adverb "live" applies to us today facing a virus that threatens us physically, spiritually, and economically. You know, folks say we're in a war. Well that's largely true but we Christians have known that we've been in a war from the very beginning, a war between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness and from the very beginning we know that God has been there in the middle of that war with us. *Psalm 90 says: LORD, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.* I mean today we find

ourselves as believers in a position to address the fears that so many of our neighbors have who don't know Jesus Christ. And God is calling us to *look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of time, because the days are evil.* And the one thing that we need to look carefully at the question how should we live is the one thing that Moses asked for as well when he said in *Psalm 90:12: So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.* I hope we know by now that wisdom is ours for the taking, that it's the one thing that God promises without reservation to anyone who asks for it. The one thing that we need for today is the one thing that I pray for every day this way, I say, Lord, you made a promise in your word. You have said to us, *if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him* and Lord, we are calling to you to honor your promise to any and all of us who are calling out to you lacking wisdom, asking you to give it to us generously and without reproach, trusting that you will give it to us. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.