

A Life Lived Wisely
Ephesians 5:15-20
Second Baptist Church, Memphis
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What is your IQ? Do you know what it is? According to the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale, 90-110 is normal, 110-120 is bright normal, 120-130 is superior, 130+ is very superior.

When we talk about intelligence, we're talking typically about how we assimilate information, knowledge, and numbers, how we store those things, how we use information, knowledge, numbers.

Intelligence is very important in our culture. A rite of passage has become the SAT and ACT tests, whereby high school teens seek to prove their intelligence, to get into the kind of college they desire to go to. Then of course the "right college" will hopefully lead to the "right" careers, vocations, and financial futures.

We know all about this. We're a fairly intelligent group of people here this morning. I talked about this a little Wednesday night. We did a church wide survey back in May, and there were a lot of questions about your perceptions and thoughts about our church, but there were also some questions you had to answer about yourself to give us information about the people who make up our congregation.

One of the questions was about your level of education. According to the survey, about 70% our members have a college degree.

An article in the *Commercial Appeal* this week said that nationally 24% of Americans over age 25 have a college degree. Wednesday night Dr. Dan Lattimore, who is an administrator at the University of Memphis, said that in Tennessee it is 20%. In Shelby County 25% of adults have a college degree.

But at Second Baptist, 70%. And 41% of us actually have a graduate degree or post graduate study. The consultant we've hired who did the survey for us thought that number couldn't possibly be right. But it is. We're doing pretty well when it comes to intelligence around here, or education, at least.

But then, just as we start to feel good about ourselves, some people come along and complicate matters and start trying to say that there's more to life than intellectual intelligence—ability with information, knowledge, and numbers.

Several years ago, Daniel Goleman wrote a book entitled *Emotional Intelligence* that challenged our preoccupation with IQ, especially high IQ's. He wrote that IQ, a high IQ, in particular, is only part of being an effective human being.

Goleman said there is another dynamic that powerfully influences our success and happiness in life; he calls it EQ or Emotional Intelligence. Emotional Intelligence refers to understanding one's self, one's feelings, empathy toward others' feelings, the ability to demonstrate listening and understanding to others, effectiveness in communication, insight into and intuition regarding relationships, and insight into and intuition regarding different kinds of relational situations.

High IQ people can be short on EQ (emotional intelligence), resulting in all kinds of unhappiness and relationship problems.

[Thanks to Fr. Patrick Brennan for his comments on IQ and EQ in an article entitled “Spiritual Intelligence” on www.30goodminutes.org]

So here’s a whole other kind of intelligence: emotional intelligence.

Then, I got a letter home from my daughter Ivy’s second grade teacher, Mrs. Albert, Monday night. Monday was the first day of school for my kids. So Mrs. Albert sent home a letter introducing herself and talking about the year ahead. Listen to what she wrote:

Among the many things Grahamwood students are learning and I am reinforcing in the classroom is the idea that we are all intelligent.... We will be learning the different ways we are smart. Each child is smart in at least eight different ways. We are smart with words, numbers, pictures, nature, music, our physical bodies, our friends, and ourselves. Some of us might be more developed in some intelligence areas, and others will be more developed in other areas. The great news is that we can all cultivate all eight of our intelligences.

Now it’s really getting complicated. I’m feeling pretty good about my IQ, but then somebody comes along and tells me I also have to worry about my emotional intelligence.

And just when I’m starting to get used to the idea that there are two ways to be smart, now my daughter’s second grade teacher sends home a letter that tells me there are actually eight kinds of intelligences. And I read her list and think that I’m actually not so smart in some of those areas.

Smart with nature? I’m so dumb in the category of nature that I can’t even imagine how a person can be smart in nature. Is it the ability to make a fire with sticks? Smart in pictures? I would definitely be in the remedial group when it comes to pictures intelligence.

So here I’ve been fairly satisfied all my life in the area of intelligence, and then some people come along and muddy the waters, tell me that IQ is only one part of being an effective human being, that there are other ways to be intelligent, and that I may not be at the top of the class in quite a few of these things.

And then, to top it all off, one more blow to my fragile self-esteem, I read in Ephesians 5:15-20 that there is a sort of spiritual intelligence as well. And to make matters worse, this spiritual intelligence is not measured by how much I know about spiritual matters, but it is measured by the way I live my life.

And there goes my last bit of intellectual smugness right out the window.

What Paul is talking about here to the Christians at Ephesus is an applied spiritual intelligence—he calls it wisdom. I think that’s what he had in mind when he told them to *Be very careful how you live—not as unwise but as wise.*

See, Paul was not pleading with Christians to know more.

He was pleading with Christians to apply to their lives what they know. He was reminding us that the measure of the Christian life is not what we know but what we do with what we know.

He was exhorting them to turn their theology into autobiography. Your spiritual IQ is measured by the way you live your faith, your life.

Paul wants us to have a life that is lived wisely. And he says that the way we go about having a life that is lived wisely is to make the most of the time. Make the most of the time.

Now, there are two words for time in Greek: *chronos*, which is simply time as it passes on the clock, and *kairos*, which refers to special time, strategic moments. When Paul says to live wisely, *making the most of the time*, he uses the word *kairos* for time. Let me see if I can give a picture of the significance of the word choice—*chronos* vs. *kairos*.

A *chronos* person is master of the schedule, every moment is carefully used, there is no wasted time, he makes good use of his organizer.

A *kairos* person is master of the opportunity. She may do nothing some of the time just thinking, watching, but when the strategic moment arises she acts in the right way at the right time. She makes the most of the opportunity.

This is the picture that Paul paints for us in this letter. When he talks about making the most of the time, he's not talking about people who run around frantically trying to fill up every second with activity. He's talking about the person who never misses an opportunity when it comes.

Henri Nouwen, well known Catholic priest and spiritual writer, was once walking across the campus of the University of Notre Dame with an older, experienced professor who had spent most

of his life there. This professor said to Nouwen, *You know, my whole life I've been complaining that my work was constantly being interrupted, then I discovered that my interruptions were my work.*

There was a man who was becoming sensitive to the *kairos* moments of his life, someone who was learning what it means to make the most of the time.

Sometimes we get so caught up in the *chronos* moments that we miss the *kairos* moments God gives us, even in things that interrupt the plan or the schedule. The Christian who lives a wise life, a spiritually intelligent life, is someone who sees the *kairos* moments in every day, making the most of every opportunity.

So Paul goes on in the rest of these verses now to give specific examples of living wisely and living foolishly.

Verse 17 says, *So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.* The opposite of being foolish is understanding the will of God.

If we are going to live with spiritual intelligence, if we're going to have a high spiritual IQ, we have to know "what the will of the lord is." We have to know what is pleasing to God. The "will of the Lord" is the standard for living a wise life. If you're going to make the most of your time, you'll have to live every day oriented toward the will of God.

Next Paul contrasts being filled with wine with being filled with the Spirit. Let's be honest. Jesus and the disciples drank wine. No question about that. The target here is drunkenness.

And actually, it helps to get the point of this to know that some pagan religions in those days did make use of alcohol to produce religious experience.

So what Paul is saying here is that Christians are not to live like pagans who get drunk to induce a religious experience; rather they are to receive the ecstasy that comes from the Spirit of God. The Christian, then, in a sense, is to be “drunk,” not with wine, but “with the Spirit.”

And then Paul goes on to say that being filled with the Spirit has specific results — singing, making music in your hearts and giving thanks (vv. 19-20). These activities are not isolated, personal experiences, but community events. The effect of the Spirit is congregational worship.

And it seems to be no accident that he emphasizes the importance of thanksgiving in worship. The natural outpouring of the Spirit-filled Christian results in "giving thanks to God the Father." The spiritually intelligent Christian lives in a constant state of thanksgiving, giving praise to God for what God has done.

And so what we have here is a passage of scripture that speaks in general about living wisely and making the most of the time and then goes on to speak to us specifically about what a high spiritual IQ life looks like: a life that lives out the will of God, a life that is full of the Spirit of God, a life that engages in worship—making music and giving thanks.

As I studied this passage this week, I’ll be honest here and say that I wasn’t real excited about preaching on this. It seemed to me to be pretty dry. It’s basically just a straightforward list of

things. What else can you say about it? Where’s the power in reading a list of activities?

So I kept thinking about this contrast here between the wise and the foolish. And I remembered that Jesus had something to say about those who were wise and those who were foolish. As was Jesus’ way, he took an abstract concept like living wisely and living foolishly, and he told a story that gave it life.

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus says:

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!

Every person is building his or her own house.

Not only does everyone build his own house, everyone must live in the house he builds.

Every person must live with himself. That’s certainly true. A person can never get away from himself.

I remembered yesterday morning a story about a wealthy man who laid some blueprints before his assistant and told him, *I’m leaving on an extended trip and I want you to build a house for me in that location above the lake. I’ll be gone for ten months. Here are the plans and specs and funds to cover the cost.*

The astute employee saw a chance to feather his own nest. He

hired a crooked contractor, employed unskilled labor whenever possible, and put cheap, inferior material into the building. When it was finished, it had the appearance of magnificence, but it was really a poorly constructed, insubstantial shell of a house.

When the employer returned and went with his assistant to see the building, which looked quite beautiful overlooking the lake, he asked him, *What do you think of it?*

I think it's wonderful, the assistant replied.

I'm glad you like it. I'm retiring from business; I won't need your services much longer and I want you to have a nice house in your retirement. This house is yours.

It is not wise to erect a shabby building when the house we are building is our own. It is not very smart to play tricks on ourselves and weaken the structure of our own house. If we lie and cheat and cut corners, we are not really putting something over on other people. We are not being clever. We're just building a house on sand, putting cheap, shoddy stuff into the place where we live.

Every person must live in his own house, the house which he himself has built. You can move from here to anyplace in the world, but you can never get away from yourself. You live in the house you build. All of us are builders. You live in the house you build.

And when your life goes through a storm, the storm will reveal whether you have built wisely or foolishly.

The measure of the Christian life is not how much we know but what kind of life we build. You or I might have a high IQ. We might be well-educated. You might have a high EQ (emotional intelligence). And then you might have all the different kinds of intelligences, even, that Mrs. Albert says they're going to work on in second grade: words, numbers, pictures, nature, music, our physical bodies, our friends, and ourselves. You might be smart in all of those areas.

But the measure of being a Christian, of having a high spiritual IQ, has nothing to do, really, with any of that. Our 70% college degrees doesn't help us here. The measure of being a Christian is how I live my life. Have I made the most of my time? No matter how smart you are, the key question is, Is your life a life that is lived wisely or foolishly?

Don't wait until a storm comes to realize that, smart as you are, you have lived foolishly.