

Wise Living for Difficult Days

✦ “Buy out” opportunities. (vv.15-17)

✦ Fill up with the Spirit. (vv.18-21)

In the name of Jesus, our submissive Savior, dearly redeemed children of light:

When you are in a large crowd, do you ever take time to look through the windows of their hearts and souls? Sometimes their eyes shine with joy, but more often there is darkness, doubt and fear. Anxiety and sadness can cloud the eyes of someone driving a beautiful new car with lots of money and importance. She may be dressed in the finest silk with radiant beauty, her eyes are shaded with fear. Even in times of peace and prosperity we nevertheless live in **Difficult Days**.

This is one of the main things I love about the ancient Hebrew and Greek literature compiled over 2,000 years ago in the book known as the Holy Bible. “Bible” is a word that means “book.” Those who know and believe it’s message call it a Holy Book in which the holy God reveals His thoughts and feelings. God is not like a rich and powerful man who takes advantage of everyone else. The holy God who opens His heart in this Holy Book truly is the God of love and faithfulness. Today He freely shows us priceless secrets about **Wise Living for Difficult Days**. Maybe you know much about philosophy and science. But here is wisdom beyond wisdom, knowledge beyond knowledge. It warms our hearts and souls and give us useful tools **for Difficult Days** whether the sun is shining or hidden behind the clouds.

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Wise Living for Difficult Days comes near the end of an ancient letter written by a Jewish rabbi imprisoned for his faith. He was convinced that 4,000 years of prophecies had all come true in the Jewish Messiah known as Jesus Christ. Previously this prisoner tried to force his fellow Jews to deny Jesus who was crucified by Jews and Gentile Romans as a guilty criminal. But then Saul, also known as Paul, was struck blind on the Damascus road by this very Jesus, proving Christ had risen from the dead. Suddenly the lights went on deep inside his soul. Paul could see how all of history revolves around Jesus the Christ, the Anointed One of God. For the rest of his life Paul was so impressed by God’s undeserved love and kindness, God’s grace, that he kept telling everyone what God’s own Son did for us by dying on the cross and rising again. No matter how **Difficult** his **days**, Paul saw each on as an opportunity to glorify God.

Paul’s thirteen letters in the New Testament are a treasure of wisdom to read and study. Paul spent many years in prison though he was a model citizen honoring the government of the cruel Roman Empire which finally executed him. Paul in prison shared his faith with his guards no doubt showing them how we were “*dead in [our] transgressions and sins...by nature objects of wrath*” (2:1,3), hated by God for our selfish attitudes and hating God because of His holiness. “Wisdom” in God’s Good Book traces this rebellion all the way back to Adam who was created first by God to lead. Instead, he followed and listened to his wife rather than God. Adam brought sickness and death into God’s perfect creation.

But God promised that a Descendant of Eve, the mother of all the living, would bring life back into God’s world for Paul, for you and me, and for all people whether they believe it or not. But God wants everyone to believe in order to rejoice in Jesus as our loving Lord and Savior. And to everyone who does believe, the Lord says through His Apostle Paul, “*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.*” We are not to live foolishly for ourselves, doing and saying things that harm other people. **Wise Living for Difficult Days** is for God and for our neighbor.

God's Holy Bible was not written in English or Chinese. God the Holy Spirit breathed into His holy apostles, evangelists and prophets the words He wanted them to write first in the ancient Hebrew of the Old Testament, then for the New Testament in Greek which was the language of commerce and communication 2,000 years ago. Literally, in New Testament Greek God says, "*Buy out opportunities.*" In busy modern cultures, we much invest time and energy to *take advantage of* teachable moments when people will listen the Word of our God and Savior. It's like planting seeds in a field. First we must break up the soil, then plant the seeds and water them. God's Word of Law is like the plow that breaks our pride so that the dear Holy Spirit can plant the seeds of Good News and water them with Word and sacraments. Jesus Christ paid our debt to God with His own blood. And when He rose again from the dead, He gave us absolute certainty that He will come again as the friendly Judge to take us home to heaven. Now we want to thank and praise Him by understanding "*what the Lord's will is.*" First it is that we believe and then that we "**Buy out**" every **opportunity** to tell God loves for others.

Here's an example much like Paul in prison. One of our elderly members has lost her memory and is in a special home where nurses can keep her safe. Recently when I came to visit her, she was sitting at the end of the hall in her wheelchair sobbing. Her daughter sat helplessly while I knelt beside her. "What's wrong?" I asked with my arm around her shoulders. "I'm so useless," she said. "My life is not worth anything anymore." "But that's not true," I gently chided her. "God's own Son Jesus died on the cross for you. He bought you with His holy, precious blood. He made you His own in Baptism. You are worth everything to God!" When I returned a few days later, she was in the activities room playing balloon with ten or twelve other patients. She was glad to let me share our story about Jesus and happy songs with all her friends. By faith she can still "**Buy out**" **opportunities** in old age and she will...

✦ **Fill up with the Spirit.** (vv.18-21)

Rich and poor alike suffer **Difficult Days**. But many try to drown their sorrows with drugs and alcohol. Wine helps them forget for a little while, drinking too much is a sin. And God says this about those who live a life of drunkenness: "*Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*" Since all of us have been "*greedy,*" God's Law says we're guilty of all these sins. But our gracious God also says through Paul: "*That is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NIV) Now **Fill up with the Spirit** instead of with wine.

God gives us several ways to **Fill up with the Spirit**. Paul says this happens while we are "*speaking to each other in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, while singing and making music in our hearts to the Lord, while always giving thanks over everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God our Father, and while submitting to one another in respect to Christ.*" (vv. 18-21 literal)

We know what this is like to **Fill up with the Spirit** whenever we come and sing the songs of faith and praise in worship. Our hearts may feel empty and cold when we leave home, but we hear God's Word in song from fellow saints forgiven by Christ, and our hearts fill up with joy and gladness. Sadness and fear run away like dust and dirt washed from the streets in a good summer rain.

This often happens to me at night. Sometimes I wake up worried and upset about things. And the devil keeps whispering in my ear about my sins and shortcomings. I know that I deserve only God's wrath and punishment because I have not been the good Christian, father and pastor which God demands and which He deserves because of His holiness and love. I try to remind myself of comforting passages like Isaiah 1:18: "*Come now, let us reason together,*" says the LORD. "*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.*" And this Good News from God begins to open my heart once again. To really fill it up with the Holy Spirit and chase away my doubting fears I like to listen to MP3 files of the Psalms on my cell phone. After a

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few minutes my heart is at peace once again, filled up and overflowing with *“psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,...singing and making music...to the Lord.* Sleep settles like a feather bed in the peace of Christ Jesus my Lord and Savior.

Wise Living for Difficult Days teaches us to **“Buy out” opportunities** when we **Fill up with the Spirit.** Richard Warnecke, Pastoral Director of WELS Kingdom Workers, tells the story of a woman named Ruth who sat every day for two weeks after 9/11 near “Ground Zero” in New York City. She was waiting for her husband to walk out of the rubble and come home to her. As a non-practicing Jew, she had no real hope, only her memories of the way things used to be. When Pastor Warnecke and a fellow Christian named Mark heard her story, they were at loss what to tell her. Finally, Mark shared the Good News about Jesus, the Messiah God sent through the Jewish people, so that all people might know the love of God and have His help in such hopeless times.

The following day the National Guardsmen excitedly called out to fellow military Mark and “Father Warnecke” that for the first time since the disaster Ruth had not come back. A few weeks later while WELS volunteers were singing songs of comfort and peace in NYC parks, who should walk up to them but Ruth? She was just emerging from the smoking rubble of her life. Her Lord Christ had put her heart back together and gave her the confidence to press on through the pain.

As has often been said, “Man’s extremities are God’s opportunities.” In His divine grace, God wants His people to *buy out* every opportunity by spending the resources, time and energy to share the love of God in Christ. First, use God’s Word and sacraments to **Fill up with the Spirit** from God’s wonderful gift of music. Then you will freely and joyfully **“Buy out” opportunities.** This is **Wise Living for Difficult Days** and the priceless treasure makes us love to praise the Name of Jesus! Amen.