

A Discerning Life

Built Different #6 - Pastor Gary Combs - July 12, 2026 - Ephesians 5:15-17

INTRO: Good morning church! Today we are concluding our sermon series entitled “Built Different.” In Christ, we are “Built Different” because our lives are to be built on Christ alone and not this world. Our series is based around six (6) concepts of a life built different in Jesus from Romans 12:

Series Theme: Romans 12:1-2 (ESV) ¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, **that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

The result of having a “transformed” life with a “renewed mind” is the gift of being able to discern God’s will for your life. That’s why today’s message is called: **A Discerning Life.**

But what is discernment?

- Dictionary.com: the faculty of discerning; discrimination; acuteness of judgment and understanding.
- “Spiritual discernment is the ability to see life from a godly vantage point. It helps us navigate decisions with confidence. Through His Spirit, we can better distinguish between right and wrong, good and best, truth and error.” - Charles Stanley

Need: We all face decisions that Scripture doesn't answer explicitly. Whom should I marry? Which job should I take? Speak up or stay quiet? Say yes to one good thing, knowing it means no to another? Should I make this purchase? How do I respond to this trial or trouble? Decisions, decisions...

In a world full of competing voices, we desperately need more than information. We need spiritual discernment. The good news is that God doesn't leave His children to figure life out alone. Through Christ He gives us His Spirit, renews our minds, and teaches us to recognize His will. If you are in Christ, this life is available to you.

Trans: Paul now shows us what a life shaped by that renewed mind looks like.

BODY: In the apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he urged believers, knowing the days are evil, to live with spiritual discernment regarding the will of the Lord. We can live with spiritual discernment regarding the will of the Lord. How can we live with spiritual discernment regarding the will of the Lord. The text reveals **three marks** of living with spiritual discernment.

Text: Ephesians 5:15-17 (ESV) 15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

THREE MARKS OF LIVING WITH SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT:

1. Watching your walk.

EXP: (15) Paul says, “Look carefully how you walk.” This is not merely a warning to “Watch Your Step.” This is a command for believers to carefully consider their conduct, their character, their way of life.

“**Look**” (15) (βλέπω, *blepō*) (**Imperative**) - to see, discern; to see with the mind's eye, to have (the power of) understanding, observe, perceive, discover.

“**Carefully**” (15) (ἀκριβῶς, *akribōs*) - exactly, accurately, diligently; circumspectly

“**Walk**” (15) (περιπατέω, *peripateō*) - to walk. The Hebrew idiom for the whole conduct of life. Paul has traced the believer’s “walk” in Ephesians from: Before Christ, we **walked** according to the course of this world (Eph. 2:1-3); After salvation, we are created in Christ Jesus to **walk** in good works (2:10); **Walk** worthy of our calling (4:1); **Walk** differently than the Gentiles (pagans) (4:17); **Walk** in love (5:2). **Walk** as children of light (5:8); Now, we are to **walk** carefully (5:15).

“**Not unwise but wise**” (15) (σοφός, *sophos*) - wise, “the ability to make sound, intelligent judgments by applying accumulated knowledge, experience, and insight. While intelligence is the acquisition of facts, wisdom is the practical application of those facts for the greater good” (*Merriam-Webster*).

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ARG: Paul doesn't say, "Watch everyone else's walk." But, "Watch YOUR walk." Discernment begins with self-examination.

Proverbs 4:26-27 (NIV) Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.

But this self-examination is not with YOUR reasoning alone, but with God's wisdom:

James 1:5 (ESV) If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

Psalms 139:23-24 (ESV) Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

ILL: **Hiking a Mountain Trail.** The way you walk around your house is a lot different from how you walk a steep mountain path. You keep your eyes on where your feet are landing on the trail.

APP: Socrates famously said, "The unexamined life is not worth living." He says, "Know thyself." But Paul urges something deeper: examine your walk not merely by your own reasoning but "carefully... as wise," in light of God's revealed will and by the Spirit's help. Paul isn't calling for mere introspection, but for a walk examined with the wisdom of God. He calls for a spiritually discerning, examined life!

Are you watching your walk? What habits are forming your heart? What influences are directing your decisions? The discerning life begins with a humble willingness to look carefully, to lead an examined life.

2. Redeeming your time.

EXP: (16) So watch your walk... And now Paul calls them to "make the best use of their time." He literally, says to "redeem" your time. Living with spiritual discernment means being careful about how we "spend" our time.

"Making the best use" (16) (ἐξαγοράζω, *exagorazō*) - to redeem, to buy up for one's self, for one's use.

"The time" (16) (καιρός, *kairos*) - due measure; a fixed and definite time, an opportune or seasonable time. Not *chronos* = clock time, but *kairos* = opportunity, season, decisive moment.

"Days are evil" (16) (ἡμέραι πονηραί, *hēmerai ponērai*) - full of labors, hardships; bad; evil. "The times in which you live are evil. There are many allurements and temptations that would lead you away from the proper improvement of time, and that would draw you into sin." — *Barnes' Notes*

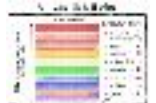
ARG: **Life is short, so don't waste your life! Spend your time with God's wisdom:**

Psalms 90:12 (ESV) So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Colossians 4:5 (ESV) Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.

ILL: **The Farmer.** A farmer has only a small window to plant his crops. If he says, "I'll get around to it next month," the opportunity has passed. The season changes. The harvest is lost.

A Human Life In Numbers. If global life expectancy is 71 years, then: Sleeping 23.6; Online 13.3; Being sick 11.9; Working 10.27; Commuting 4.3; Eating 3.4; At school 1.9; the rest 2.3.



Pastoral Picture. I've never heard someone nearing the end of life say, "I wish I'd spent more time scrolling... answered a few more emails... watched one more season of that show." What I hear is, "I wish I'd spent more time with my family. I wish I'd told more people about Jesus."

"Only one life, 'twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." — C.T. Studd

APP: Instead of asking, "What do I have to get done today?" ask, "Lord, what opportunities have You placed before me today?" The discerning Christian recognizes that every day is a gift from God and every moment is an investment in eternity. You may not be able to add more days to your life, but by God's grace you can fill them with what matters most. So **don't merely count your days, make your days count for Christ.**

3. Understanding the Lord's will.

EXP: (17) Watch your walk, redeem your time... Now Paul gets to the goal: "Understand the will of the Lord."

"Do not be foolish" (17) (ἄφρων, *aphrōn*) (**Imperative**) - without reason, senseless, foolish, stupid; without reflection or intelligence, acting rashly.

"Understand" (17) (συνίημι, *sunīēmi*) - literally to put together, to comprehend, to set or join together in the mind. This is about putting the pieces together, it isn't merely acquiring information but spiritual insight.

"Will of the Lord" (17) (θέλημα, *thelēma*) - will, choice, inclination, desire; of what God wishes to be done by us. Throughout Scripture there is a distinction between God's specific will (what He has ordained personally) and His revealed will (what He has made known in His Word).

ARG: We can understand God's will because "we have the mind of Christ."

1 Corinthians 2:14-16 (ESV) The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

APP: How do we come to understand the Lord's will? Notice Paul does not say "figure it out on your own." The very next verse tells us:

Ephesians 5:18 (ESV) And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit

Understanding God's will is not the achievement of the strong-willed; it is the fruit of the Spirit-filled life. So this final mark drives us back to grace. Saturate yourself in His Word, where His will is revealed. Pray that God would fill you with the knowledge of His will. Walk in step with the Spirit, who gives us the mind of Christ. The discerning life is not straining to be wise enough, it is surrender to the God who makes us wise.

CONCLUSION: We have seen three marks of the discerning life this morning: watching your walk, redeeming your time, and understanding the Lord's will. But I want to close by pointing you to the only One who ever walked this life perfectly. Think of it:

Jesus watched His walk with perfect care. "I always do the things that are pleasing to him" (John 8:29).

Jesus redeemed every moment of His time. "We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work" (John 9:4).

Jesus understood and obeyed the will of the Lord completely. In the garden, facing the cross, He prayed, "Not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). This is the discerning life in its perfection: a Son who so understood the Father's will that He walked, with open eyes, all the way to Calvary.

And here is the gospel: He walked that road so that we could be forgiven for all the times we haven't. Every unexamined step, every wasted hour, every time we leaned on our own understanding instead of His, Jesus carried all of it to the cross.

That is what this whole series has been about. For six weeks we've traced what a life built on Christ looks like. A surrendered life. A sacrificial life. A worship-filled life. A counter-cultural life. A transformed life. And finally, a discerning life. But hear me, not one of these is a ladder you climb to earn God's love. Every one of them is what happens to a person who has been saved by grace and is being made new by the Spirit. You don't manufacture this. You receive it.

So the question that ends this series is not "Are you trying hard enough to be different?" The question is: "Have you come to Christ, the One who was truly built different, and let Him make you new?" Because the moment you do, His Spirit begins the work. The walk gets more careful. The time gets more precious. The will of God gets clearer. Not by your strength, but by His grace. Don't waste your life walking in the darkness of this world. Come to Christ. Walk carefully. Walk wisely. And walk as one who is built different, because in Christ, you are.