

# Photos of the Faith – Music Notes

## *Ephesians 5:15-20*

### Introduction

In 1988 the Los Angeles Dodgers won the World Series, beating the heavily favored Oakland A's, four games to one.

The MVP of that series was a pitcher named Orel Hershiser. He shut out the A's in game two and came back to pitch a complete game two-hitter in the final and fifth game. In that final game, just before he was to go out to the mound to pitch the ninth inning, a TV camera found Hershiser standing quietly by himself in the dugout. He was leaning against the wall and you could clearly see his lips were moving. It was obvious that he was saying something to himself, but no one could make out what exactly it was.

A few weeks later Hershiser was a guest on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. Carson referred to the clip, and asked Hershiser what he had been saying to himself in that moment.

"I wasn't saying anything," Orel responded.

"Well, then, tell us what you were doing."

Finally Orel replied, "I was singing."

"Singing?" Johnny said. "I didn't know you were a singer."

"I'm not."

Johnny persisted, "What were you singing? Sing it for us now."

"No, I don't want to sing."

By that time the audience was chiming in with "C'mon, sing it, sing it to us!" Finally, Orel Hershiser, somewhat embarrassed, agreed ... and then he started to sing:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below.  
Praise Him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Johnny Carson was speechless. The whole audience was dead silent. Then one person started clapping, and soon the whole audience joined in applause. For years afterward, Carson would refer to that song as one of the classic moments in Tonight Show history.

If I were to invite you all to sing that song right now, I think I know what would happen. Not only would you sing it – and sing it well – just as we would get to the final word "Amen" this room would break out into beautiful four-part harmony. No coaching would be required. It would just happen.

Harmony would happen.

Today we are in week six of our seven part sermon series titled "Photos of the Faith." Each week as we highlight the lectionary reading from Ephesians we capture the teaching in a picture suitable for framing. Just like the pictures from your vacation help

you remember where you went and what you did, these photos help us remember what our journey of faith should be like:

- Week 1: A plumb line
- Week 2: A brick
- Week 3: A measuring cup
- Week 4: The number 1
- Week 5: A bottle of perfume

And now this week: Music notes. Here's the verse in our text that prompts me to capture this as today's picture:

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord ... (Ephesians 5:19)

When I read those words, I realize this is a passage about harmony.

- Not the kind of harmony that equals a lack of conflict – like a ceasefire in the Middle East –
- Or a temporary lack of disagreement – like we saw when the Republicans and Democrats came together to pass the infrastructure bill this past week.
- This is the harmony that results in the beautiful music our lives make as we live out our faith within the family of God. And that's key...within the family of God.

You see, harmony is a relational word. It takes at least two to make it happen. The text makes that clear: “speak to one another.” In order for harmony to exist there has to be an “another.”

So where does harmony come from? Well, the text says:

### **#1: HARMONY HAPPENS WHEN TOGETHER WE ARE IN TUNE WITH OUR OPPORTUNITIES**

Look at verse 16:

Make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:16)

When Paul wrote these words, Roman persecution of the Christians had not yet happened. But it was coming. Everything in the culture around them was showing how non-Christians were moving deeper and deeper into depravity. The beauty and strength and majesty of the Roman empire – everything that had made it great – was eroding away into a sea of debauchery and self-gratification.

The History Channel has a fascinating program that describes how at the precise time Christianity and the teachings of the church began to expand, the traditional values of Roman culture began to disintegrate. This increasing evil was one of many factors that led to Rome's eventual demise in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century.

Paul saw it coming. “We are living in evil days” he tells his readers. Work together, he says, to make sure that you are capitalizing on every opportunity to talk about the faith.

When I first memorized this passage, the phrase translated here in the NIV as “make the most of every opportunity” was in the King James “redeem the time.” That phrase really communicates well that how we spend our time is important. We are all given an equal amount of time each day. How we use it determines its value. When we redeem the time for Christ, we place the utmost value upon it.

Churches can easily get sidetracked with non-essential things. Families can get sidetracked. Everyone and everything clamors for our attention. So in the text Paul tells us:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise ... (Ephesians 5:15)

Just because it is an opportunity doesn't mean that it is a wise opportunity. In the verses that follow today's text, Paul will get very pointed with husbands and wives, parents and children, about how God and the things of God need to be at the center of their lives.

In fact, in this text related to this point of the message, he first drives the point home:

Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. (Ephesians 5:17)

So when together we are pursuing God's will, we are making the most of every opportunity, and together our lives rise before the Father in harmony, a sweet song to His ears.

The text goes on ...

## **#2: HARMONY HAPPENS WHEN TOGETHER WE ARE INSTRUMENTS OF THE SPIRIT'S POWER**

Look at verse 18:

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit ... (Ephesians 5:17-18)

One of the participants in our Thursday Bible study asked for a definition of debauchery. Curious, I later looked it up:

*Debauchery* is behavior considered excessively decadent, indulgent, and depraved. It's especially used to collectively refer to drug use, excessive drinking, promiscuous sex, and all other kinds of uninhibited immoral activity. It has traditionally been used in a negative way by those who condemn something as immoral or sinful. But increasingly it is also used in a somewhat ironic way by those who engage in such activities to celebrate it or make it seem fun.

A. C. Welch said:

You have to fill a person with something.

I was reminded of one of the frightful teachings of Jesus. He was addressing the religious leaders, calling on them to stop resisting the Gospel and come to a point of faith. Here's the teaching:

When an evil spirit is expelled from someone, it drifts along through the desert looking for an oasis, some unsuspecting soul it can bedevil. When it doesn't find anyone, it says, "I'll go back to my old haunt." On return it finds the person spotlessly clean, but vacant. It then runs out and rounds up seven other spirits more evil than itself and they all move in, whooping it up. That person ends up far worse off than if he'd never gotten cleaned up in the first place. (Matthew 12:43-44)

And then He lowers the boom:

That's what this generation is like: You may think you have cleaned out the junk from your lives and gotten ready for God, but you haven't been hospitable to my kingdom message, and now all the devils are moving back in." (Matthew 12:45)

You have to be filled with something. What is on the inside, motivating you as you live each day? In this context, debauchery is defined as anything that doesn't lead you toward a life filled and directed by the Holy Spirit.

When God's people are filled by God's Holy Spirit, beautiful music happens. Our lives become a symphony of praise and thanksgiving. We find joy in the midst of sorrow. We might even find ourselves able to sing the doxology in a pressure packed World Series moment.

## **APPLICATION**

When I was in about the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, my Aunt Doris decided it was time for me to learn how to harmonize. She has a beautiful alto voice. In those days I attended church with my aunts, uncles and grandparents, and they all liked to sing. Aunt Doris sat beside me in the pew during church services. She told me, "I won't let you sing melody anymore. You have to harmonize." And then she began to sing alto into my ear so that it was the only note I could hear. And it worked. Within a few weeks I could sing alto without her prompting.

A few years ago Karen and I went back to my home church to attend the funeral of another relative: my great aunt Myrna. We sat with Aunt Doris. She was on my left. Karen was on my right. As the first hymn was announced, she looked and asked, "Are you going to sing tenor or bass?" I smiled. She didn't. Then she said it. I knew it was coming. "I won't let you sing melody. You have to harmonize."

As God's people, we have been called to live lives that harmonize. (Sing the doxology.)

Amen.