

The Spirit-Empowered Life

Ephesians 5:15-21

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We're in a series exploring six "streams" that feed Christian faith and life. These are "core values" for the church's life and ministry. We've seen the Word-Centered Life. Today we'll look at the Spirit-Empowered Life. The others are the Compassionate Life, the Incarnational Life, the Committed Life, and the Prayer-Filled Life.

Each of these streams is vital and essential. Sometimes we may get the idea that the Holy Spirit is sort of an add-on that we could get by without. But the Holy Spirit is not an option like choosing heated seats or a different color interior in your car. The Holy Spirit is like the engine that gives the car power and makes it move. I guess we could also say the Holy Spirit is like the fuel or the battery as well. Those are all essential for a car to run and do what it's made to do.

Our text in Ephesians 5 is a good starting point for talking about the Holy Spirit and life in Christ. This passage comes in a section of Ephesians where Paul is writing about the "practical" aspects of Christian faith and life. He's calling the people to "walk" a certain way, that is, to have a way of life in Christ. He tells them to be careful how they walk or live in this world—not being foolish but understanding the Lord's will.

We're called to walk with God day in and day out. But what if we're too weak to walk? What if we're just too tired? What if we're crippled spiritually? How can we walk in wisdom and in the Lord's will by ourselves? We can't. We don't have it in us to live God's way on our own. But God has not left us on our own. Paul goes on to say, "Do not get drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit."

What fills our lives? How do we try to satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst? How do we deal with the problems and challenges and opportunities of life? We can't do it with our own strength or smarts. Paul says, "Be filled with (or by) the Spirit." The way he says it in Greek means "keep on being filled." Being filled with the Spirit is key. We can't cope with the temptations, challenges, or opportunities of living in this world without the

power of God's Spirit. But as we surrender to the control of God's Spirit and live daily in the flow of the Holy Spirit's power and love, the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to walk on with God day by day.

Earlier Paul told these Christians that we've been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (1:13). He also told them not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God (4:30). Throughout Ephesians, he speaks of the Holy Spirit giving strength and power and wisdom and revelation and unity. This is the Spirit who fills us. God's personal presence dwells in each of our lives and in our life together as the community of faith.

Paul's earlier prayer for these Christians shows us what "being filled with the Spirit" means: "I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith ... that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (3:16, 17, 19).

When we talk about the Holy Spirit, we're talking about God. Through the Holy Spirit, the triune God fills us with his own presence. God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit actually live in us. To be filled with the Spirit is to surrender to the Spirit's influence and control. The Holy Spirit keeps filling us, making us more and more like Jesus and empowering us for the life God wants us to live.

So we describe this stream of Christian faith and life as the *Spirit-empowered Life*. Richard Foster says that the Spirit-empowered life is, "A life immersed in, empowered by, and under the direction of the Spirit of God. ...through it we are empowered by God to do his work and to evidence his life upon the earth" (*Streams of Living Water* 132).

There are a lot of voices making claims about who the Holy Spirit is and what the Spirit does. It's important that we know for ourselves what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, and the Spirit's presence, power, fruit, and gifts, are part of our inheritance as God's children. There's so much that's available to us through faith in Jesus Christ. We need to know what the Bible teaches about this aspect of faith and life.

Let's look at some aspects of life in the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit gives wisdom and direction for walking with God. God communicates his will to us through his Spirit living in us. That doesn't mean we assume that every thought or impulse we have is from God. When we're making decisions, we need to check out those Spirit impulses with Scripture and other Christian believers. At the same time we can have confidence that God is able to get through to us, to speak to us, to give us wisdom and insight for living God's way.

Right after Paul says to keep being filled with the Spirit here, he goes on to show some of the results of being filled by the Spirit: speaking, singing, giving thanks, submitting. The Holy Spirit empowers and gives life to our worship and our relationships. The Spirit provides the content of worship: songs, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. The Spirit makes worship meaningful and vibrant as we sing from the heart. The Spirit inspires gratitude—no matter what happens, we can give thanks to God in the name of Jesus. Whether our worship is "traditional" or "contemporary," or whatever form it takes, God seeks people who will worship him in "in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24). The Holy Spirit makes our worship meaningful and alive with God's presence among us.

The Holy Spirit also empowers us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Earlier Paul said to "keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). This mutual submission to each other in Christ is one way we do that. But he's not just talking about relationships in the church here. He's also talking about family relationships. We need the power and influence of God's Spirit to relate to each other in healthy and life-giving ways.

What are some other ways the Holy Spirit empowers us? What else results from being empowered by the Spirit? Let's look at three things the Spirit empowers us for: the Holy Spirit empowers us to be like Jesus, the Holy Spirit empowers us to witness, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to serve.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to be like Jesus. Jesus lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. He was conceived when the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowed her (Luke 1:35). Jesus was full of the Holy Spirit, was led by the Spirit, and went into Galilee to minister

in the power of the Spirit (Lk 4:1, 14). We're transformed into the Lord's likeness as we see God's glory in Christ and the Spirit brings his glory to us (2 Corinthians 3:18). The same power that was at work in Jesus and that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in and through the church to do God's will.

The Holy Spirit also shapes our character to be like Christ's. In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul spells out the *fruit of the Spirit*: love, joy, peace, patience/ forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Love is the fruit, the mark of being filled with the Spirit. Love is our motivation for serving God and people. The Holy Spirit enables us to see people the way God sees them, with compassion and love. We begin to see people the way we see our own children—and we love them. I often pray for God to teach me, to train me, to help me see people the way he sees them.

The joy that the Spirit gives is expressed in worship like we saw a little bit ago. We also find joy in life. This steady and constant rejoicing in God has little to do with how we feel. It's a sense of well-being because God is with us and cares for us. The joy sustains us no matter what happens in our lives. My brother once met Bishop Ole Borgen, the UM bishop of Scandinavia. From the time they met at the airport gate to when they reached the baggage carousel, Bishop Borgen told him that they had problems with burnout among their pastors, but that their "Spirit-filled" pastors didn't burn out. The Holy Spirit sustains us all in the work God gives us to do.

Peace is wholeness, integrity, well-being, confidence in God's presence. As you go down the list of the Spirit's fruit, you can see other characteristics of love, other aspects of the nature of Jesus that the Holy Spirit can produce in us. In the Spirit-empowered life Jesus lives in us and through us.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to witness. Just before his ascension, Jesus told his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Paul tells Timothy,

“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline” (2 Tim 1:7).

I remember discovering that witnessing, telling others about Jesus, sharing faith, is part of Christian life. I had bought an “Archie” comic book, but it was a Christian version. The cover showed Archie and his friends driving in his old jalopy. A police officer was pointing at a street sign and saying, “Do you know this is one way?” One of the friends in the car said, “This is cool. The officer is witnessing to Archie!” In the 70s, “one way” was how a lot of people talked about Jesus and the salvation he gives.

Later, through an experience where I was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” I discovered the freedom and excitement of witnessing. I still did it in kind of sneaky ways—leaving little gospel booklets various places or plastering my riding lawn mower with Christian bumper stickers. I would talk one-on-one with some people. But I found that it was easier for me to prepare messages and talk to groups of people. God will work through our personalities and experiences. How can God work through you to share his message with people who need to hear it?

The Holy Spirit empowers us for service. In several places in the New Testament, we read about gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are abilities that the Spirit gives to people to enable us to serve, to build up the church, to show God’s power and activity in the world. Paul consistently connects the Body of Christ, gifts of the Holy Spirit, love, and service. These gifts are how the Holy Spirit equips and empowers the church (including each of its members) for ministry.

I have a pastor friend who had some people leave his church to go to another one because they wanted to get “baptized in the Holy Spirit” and “learn” to do some of these gifts. Sometimes people seek out certain of the gifts because of the excitement they associate with those gifts. But the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not toys—they are tools for ministry and service.

Lloyd Ogilvie writes,

Charisma is not given for our pleasure, but for Christ’s purpose. [“Charisma” here is the gift and power of God’s Spirit, including the various gifts the Spirit gives.] It is equipment for costly caring. Do you

want charisma? Get involved with people and the needs of society; get out on a limb in faithful obedience to the Master; stretch beyond your natural capacities; get over your head in the fast currents of conflict and change; dare to care about the tensions of insecurity and impersonality, loneliness and fear, lack of communication and fulfillment beneath the highly polished surface of the people in your life. Then you will both desperately need and passionately desire power to live a strategic life. And Christ will gift you with capacities which you could never attain or acquire by yourself. ...a special gift will be given for a specific opportunity we have to incarnate his love (*You've Got Charisma!* 20-21).

When we discover that God is calling us to do more than we can do on our own, that living the Christian life is bigger than we can handle, we're ready to be filled with God's Spirit, to enter into the Spirit-empowered life.

When I was in high school, one reason I was not a stand-out football player—besides being skinny and slow—was that I often held back in practice. I was trying to conserve my energy just to make it through practice instead of going all out and giving it my best. In the Spirit-empowered life, we don't have to hold back and conserve our resources. We can go all out for Jesus and know that he will strengthen and sustain us. He will empower us to go beyond anything we could do by ourselves.

Let's open up to the Lord and receive all that he wants to give us so that we can be the church, be the people he wants us to be and so we can do all that God wants us to do.