

# EPHESIANS

GOD'S PLAN FOR GOD'S CHURCH REVEALED

SERMON TITLE: "The Spirit-filled Life"

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SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5:18-21

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The Book of Ephesians is a beautiful picture of the spiritual blessings we have in Christ and as members together in Jesus' Church. When he arrived, Jesus revealed what was once hidden from us throughout the ages through the power of the Holy Spirit. As a result, we're introduced to something new—a life in Christ where we find THE answer to the brokenness of this world. But what should this look like? How should we, in the power of the Holy Spirit, live this new life? Jesus' church is meant to be a source of wholeness and life amidst a world of brokenness and death. What does this entail? What does it mean practically? In this letter to the Ephesians, Paul explains the mystery of the church and gives us practical insight into living as believers who have been raised from death to life by faith in Christ.

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Even a brief survey across Christian traditions will show that there are dozens of different views on living a Spirit-led life. And this is not a discussion for the margins of life with God. Being guided by and yielded to the Holy Spirit is *the way* that we are called to follow Jesus. So...

Does the Spirit still speak to us mysteriously? Can the Holy Spirit still move in our traditions and our liturgies? Of course, he speaks through Holy Scripture. But am I slowly plugging my ears to his voice if I think he *only* speaks through Scripture? That would be telling him what he can and can't do, right? And what do we do to experience the Holy Spirit? How do I live so that I'm shaped by, prompted by, and surrendered to God's Spirit? Also, how do I know when it's truly the Holy Spirit and not just a personal projection, a past denominational reflex, or the spirit of the age? In short...

What should the Spirit-life look like?

There are several places in the New Testament where Paul addresses this question, and one of the most straightforward of these places is Ephesians 5:18-21. In this single sentence, Paul encourages his Ephesian friends to faithfulness in the Spirit. But he starts in a strange place. He starts by telling them not to be drunk with wine (5:18). However, this is not a vague ethic for the Ephesians. The city of Ephesus practiced an array of sexual acts to show their loyalty to the Greek and Roman gods. The same was true of drunkenness. Dionysus was the Greek god of wine and religious fanaticism. The way that you would worship him is that you would go to his temple, drink too much, and then whatever you saw, said, or did in your altered state was thought to be from Dionysus. And Paul's getting ready to say that life in the Spirit isn't like life when you drink too much. But there are some parallels.

When you drink too much, you might say and do things that aren't really you, but you're still the one saying and doing them. And often it's about you. Wine-influenced words can be extra self-absorbed. This leads to debauchery, which just means indulgence and wastefulness. However, with the Spirit-life, it's similar *and* different. If our lives are guided by the Holy Spirit, we will say and do things that aren't really us, but at the same time, we're the ones saying and doing things differently. And a life submitted to the Spirit isn't self-focused, it's about others. This kind of life doesn't yield indulgence and wastefulness. Rather, it leads to intentionality and worship. Eugene Peterson writes:

"Christian maturity is not a matter of doing more for God; it is God doing more in and through us. Immaturity is noisy with worry-fueled self-importance. But maturity is quietly content to pursue a life of obedient humility. Christian worship is an intentional act of redressing the proportions and priorities – from me working for God to God working in me. This is the work of the Holy Spirit."

Peterson is right. And one of the dominant ways that the Spirit wants to work in and through us is with our words. This is clear from Ephesians 5:18-21. Paul mentions speaking, singing, psalms, hymns, thanksgiving, and submission. And even submitting to someone presupposes communicated needs and wants. Simply, Paul gives us four clear evidences of a Spirit-filled life:

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1. **Speak to one another with songful truth.** Yes, the application is melodic and corporate, and we should be singing. But the more subtle implication is that our communication with one another should be rooted in the truth of who God is. "Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" are divine categories for processing life. And that means I shouldn't talk to you based on my perception of you, but based on God's perception of you. This is about us speaking and singing with each other in such a way that we are lifted out of ourselves, and we see things the way God wants us to see them. Things like this happen when we sing with, to, and for one another. As Gordon Fee writes, "Where the Spirit of God is, there is also singing. The early church was characterized by its singing; so also, every generation where there is renewal by the Spirit a new hymnody breaks forth."
2. **Sing with one another from your heart.** This has to do with what happens vertically when we sing. Rabbi Heschel writes, "In singing we perceive what is otherwise beyond perceiving. Song is not only an act of expression, but also a way of bringing down the spirit from heaven to earth." Jonathan Aigner notes, "Singing is, in and of itself, a sacred duty. Not just hearing the music play, not just being taken to a certain place emotionally, but the actual act of singing. And John Wesley exhorts, "Sing lustily and with good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep. Lift up your voice with strength. Have an eye to God in every word you sing, and see that your heart is offered continually to him." Paul's point in Ephesians 5:19 is that the Holy Spirit wants to use singing to do heart-renovation on us. Singing is a space where the heavenly potter molds, shapes, and changes us. Song is one of the most-used tools in the Spirit's hands for transforming us, and we are called to yield to his presence and power by lifting up our hearts and our voices in song.
3. **Give thanks for everything because of Jesus.** Unspoken gratitude is like an unsung song; it's no song at all. And like singing, gratitude is another tool in the Spirit's hands to make us like Jesus. This should force us to reckon with the posture of our hearts: Am I more cynical or grateful? Do I complain more than I appreciate? Am I more suspicious or thankful? Do I grumble about people more than I value people? And if a general gratitude-check wasn't hard enough, Paul says to "give thanks *always and for everything*" (5:20)! This is about a constant posture of the soul. Because of Jesus, we can view all of life as a gift. Because of the gospel, when we are surrendered to the Spirit, we can live in a regular state of thanksgiving.
4. **Submit to one another out of reverence for Jesus.** This is not tough to understand, just to do. We primarily think of ourselves as having rights. But the Bible doesn't care about personal rights as much as it cares about personal responsibilities. And here, that means submitting to one another. This submission is a conscious decision about the dignity and worth of others, and making that a higher priority than your own wants and rights. And this is crucial to the Spirit-life because it's exactly how Jesus himself lived. When Jesus came from heaven to earth, he had all the rights of heaven, but he laid them aside, and walked perfectly in step with the Spirit. He submitted to his Father and to others by loving them, serving them, and caring for them. And then, his flawless surrender to the Spirit led him all the way to the cross. There, he took the judgment that belongs to us so that we might be welcomed into God's family and filled with God's Spirit. Jesus followed the Holy Spirit all the way to death and out the other side. This is what Paul says in Romans 8: "The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead now dwells in you!"

Now, as Jesus-followers, life in the Spirit is characterized by the exact same resurrection power found in the gospel. And the way that we taste and experience that resurrection power, the way that others can see the self-giving love of Jesus, is when we rethink our words, use them to sing, live in lavish gratitude, and learn the art of "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5:21). The Spirit-filled life is about trusting the Spirit to do what we can't on our own, and make Jesus glorious in our own lives. Yes, the Spirit still speaks in special ways to our hearts. Yes, he still speaks clearly through Holy Scripture. But against the backdrop of the spirit of the age, he also wants to continue Jesus' own resurrection life through ours. And that will happen as we believe and sing the gospel, see all of life as a gift, and submit to one another for and just like Jesus. This is not a vague invitation. This Spirit-filled life is actually possible.

***Community Group Questions***

1. What stood out to use most about this passage or message?
2. Who is someone you know who lives a life submitted to the Holy Spirit? How do you know?
3. Name a time where you specifically sensed the Spirit active during singing.
4. What are some of your favorite worship songs and hymns to sing? Why?
5. When are you tempted to be ungrateful? When is gratitude hard?
6. List ten things that you are thankful for.
7. What does it look like to submit to other believers?
8. When do you most feel the Spirit at work in your life?