

## SPECIAL MESSAGES

### HOW TO BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

#### Ephesians 5:15-21

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

We have been in a short series addressing the subject of how to get started in the Christian life, really focusing on transitional teaching, transitional passages, transitional truth -- truth that helps you move from head knowledge into action. This is a passage that relates back to a previous sermon. I won't take the time here to make the connection, but we want to talk today specifically about how to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Having said that, let me just explain that there are times in Scripture, particularly in the book of Acts and in some other places of scripture, where we hear about the Holy Spirit being poured out on someone, and that person having a dramatic experience with the Spirit of God. We are not against that. We are for it. We want the Lord to touch his people and to really – Acts 1:8 – to give power to his people to do his work. But that's not what this passage is speaking about. This passage is not speaking about a one-time experience or a dramatic single encounter. It's talking about a continual filling of the Spirit of God – you living filled up with God. So if you want to live filled up with God, this is a passage to go to for help with that.

Now, it's a little bit of a tricky subject, because if you are a Christian, and by that I mean if you've trusted in Jesus Christ and you know that your sin, your breach with God is healed and forgiven because of what Jesus has done, and you've received that as a gift, then the Scripture tells us that you already have the Spirit of God. We are not talking here about getting the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:3 tells you this: "...no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit."

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The only way you come to a place of knowing who Jesus is and trusting in Jesus Christ as the Lord of your life – he is your purpose and your reason, he is your savior – is because the Spirit of God is already at work in you. Jesus said that no one can enter the kingdom of heaven unless he or she is born again – unless they are born of the Spirit. He spoke of the new life that we have received. This is really great news! God wants to live within us. He wants to give you a new life, a new kind of life, a new experience, a new quality, a new abundance -- an eternal life in relationship with him where he fills you up. So, we follow Christ. The Spirit of God is already at work in our lives. He is already in us, but how do we get filled up? How do we live in that fullness?

As our children have gotten older and grown up, become adults (I use that word loosely, freely), as older teenagers and 20 somethings, most of our kids, for some period of time, lived at home, went to college, and worked before going off for college or other reasons. In those times, life is changing. Now this son is 20 and he's working. He's going to school. He's got a social life. He is active in church. And pretty soon, you're not even sure he lives there. You see the bed that's not made, but other than that, you're not entirely sure that he's there. Then out of nowhere, one night he pops in at 6:30 and he's like, "Hey, what's for dinner?" Dinner? How about a phone call? How about, "Mom, I'm not coming home, or I am coming home."

Sometimes, if you're a parent and you're old like me, then you know that there comes a season where you are figuring out how much freedom to give to your now emerging adults. Sometimes there is tension in that. You probably never experienced that if you have teenagers or older kids. You probably never had the tension of them wanting more freedom than you wanted to give them. But trust me, in rare situations it happens. Then, with that tension, sometimes...this is my suspicion, I just think they find ways to be gone. They are like, "Wow, I've got a busy day – leaving at 5:00 am; I'll be back at midnight."

Sometimes we Christians live like this with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is there. We have come into relationship with Him, but there is very minimal contact. There is very minimal fellowship. Then that kind of dinner reference where that son pops in: "Hello! I'm here!" When God does show up in our lives, we don't really know how to react. We haven't made room for God in the house.

This passage addresses how we do that. I'm going to give it to you in two parts.

- I. Preparation.
- II. Participation.

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Preparation, verses 15-17, and then Participation. Let's start with Preparation. In verses 15 through 17 he begins with "Look carefully then how you walk..." This really is the theme of this entire section. It goes all the way back to the beginning of chapter 4, verse 1, where Paul writes these words: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."

This is a transition verse. This is exactly what we are doing in this series. He has been teaching doctrine for three chapters. He has been telling you how you come into relationship with God, how you get saved – that you don't earn it. It's a gift. God says, "Listen, your relationship is broken with me. Sin is real. It may be unpopular in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to talk about, but it's a biblical reality. It is a reality, and it is the explanation for everything that's wrong in the world. But God loves you and he heals that breach by giving his Son to pay the penalty of that sin, to receive the gift of salvation.

After explaining this glorious doctrine, he then transitions into: "Now, this is how you live." He gives us the ways that we start to live that out. He talks about your walk. He is talking about your daily life. So here in chapter 5, as we read about being filled with the Holy Spirit, this is where he begins: Look carefully at how you are living. Look with precision and accuracy at exactly how you are living your everyday life. This is part of how you prepare for God to fill you and for you to live in his fullness. Then, returning to verse 15, he tells you, "...not as unwise, but as wise." "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise."

Now, here is what's fascinating. In the book of Ephesians, Paul connects this idea of wisdom with another word. It's the idea of mystery. I'll give you two examples. The first one is in chapter one, when he is just getting started. We read this: "In him we have redemption through his blood." This is what we remember today in the Lord's Supper – that we are redeemed, we are purchased, we are bought by God, by the blood of Jesus Christ. "...the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace."

Paul is praying. He is giving thanks and he is saying, "Listen, Ephesian Christians, understand that it's all God's grace. He loves us. He has removed everything between us and him. He has done it at a great cost. Look at this in verse 8: "...which he lavished upon us (his grace), in all (here's the first word I want you to see) wisdom and insight making known to us (second word) the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

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This is what he is saying. God's purpose has not always been clear. It's been a mystery. It has not been clearly understood. But in Christ, the eternal purpose of God is made known, and it is this: God loves you and he wants to live in you. He wants to have a relationship with you. He wants you to live as a part of a community of people that experience his presence and walk with him. He has given his only Son to make that possible. This is God's purpose, and now it is made clear in Jesus Christ.

Similar idea in chapter 3, verses 9 and 10: "...to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places."

Pau is saying, "You know, you may not know it, but there is a heavenly realm and all of God's creation looks on from that heavenly realm at the Church, because the Church now is living out the glorious plan and purpose of God." Isn't that great? If you're here and you are part of this community, you are part of the mystery now made known in Christ. It's glorious! The doctrine in Ephesians is amazing. He is saying, "Listen, it's not just one type of person. It's people from all races. It's all types of people, coming together in Jesus Christ, one people, saved by Christ, saved by the grace of God. God is filling us – it's glorious. This is his purpose.

This is what Paul says. "I want you to look carefully how you walk, in wisdom, understanding that is the purpose of God, understanding your purpose in life, understanding why you were created, understanding why you exist, understanding what God is doing."

If you get that central idea, the rest of verses 15 and 17, then it's a domino effect. You say, "Oh, I see exactly now how I get my house ready for God to fill." Let's look at the next few phrases. He says next, "making the best use of your time." The old King James said, "redeeming the time, buying back the time." Have you ever seen someone who is stalling and you say, "You are just buying time"? That's the idea here. He says, "You are trying to stretch the time so you can get more out of it." The idea that Paul wants to convey to us is that he wants us to make the best of every opportunity. Make the best of every chance you get – to do what? To live out the purposes of God, to live out the mystery of God that we are making clear as the Church in Christ.

He continues. "Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." Develop a clear understanding of the will of God. I think that this is really what he's after here when he says to

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carefully examine your life and look at how you are using your time. Are you using your time wisely, in accordance with the purpose of God and the plan of God? Are you growing in your understanding of God's will and God's purpose? This is how you prepare your life to be filled with the Spirit of God.

Right now, many of our church family are experiencing their world being turned upside down because of a hurricane that hit Puerto Rico. One of our Puerto Rican families shared with me today that they have six family members from Puerto Rico now living with them. One of our elders is not able to even be here because his parents, who need around the clock care, are now living with them. He is caring for them in this moment. There is this huge influx. Are you ready for this, South Florida? We have been told that there are now 60,000 more Puerto Ricans in South Florida than there were six weeks ago. Isn't that glorious?

It's tragic that it happened, and it's tragic that so many have been displaced. So many of you are touched by that, we begin to think, "Wait, wait, this is more than just a trial. This is more than just a travesty and a tragedy. God has a purpose!" When God scatters people like this, he has a purpose. And it's more than just better food in South Florida. His purpose is always: "I'm going to restore my creation. I'm going to save people and bring them into relationship with me. Not some kind of superficial religion or just feel-good spirituality – I'm going to transform lives -- so transformed, that they are going to order their whole lives around 'What is God doing in the earth today?'" And it's glorious.

We think sometimes of the idea of stewardship as Christians, so we give our tithes and offerings. We talk about being stewards of time and money and our abilities. What we mean by that, if you're new to church life, what we are saying when we talk in that language (it's a biblical idea), we are saying that God is the owner. He has made me and everything I have is really his. I'm just the manager. I'm just managing God's time and money and the abilities that he gave me. And one day I'm going to stand before God and I'm going to give an account. If I've trusted in Christ, my sin is forgiven. I'm not going to stand there and pay for my sin. It's paid for. I'm right with God. But the work of my life will be tested. Paul tells us in Corinthians it will be tested by fire. So all the ways we prop it up will be removed and really, what's been built in Christ will remain. Our lives will be tested.

Sometimes when I hear people talk about stewardship and they talk about money, what they mean by that is that you just don't spend it. You just save and you watch every penny. You are really,

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really, really careful about how you spend your money. I don't think that that's really a good understanding or definition of what stewardship is. You know what stewardship is? It's using the money for what the owner wants you to use it for. It's using your time for what the owner wants to use it for. It's using your abilities for the owner's purposes.

We have people all the time coming to this place, calling, wanting help. Sometimes we are able to help. Sometimes we're not. And you know what? Sometimes we get taken advantage of. Sometimes we get fooled. People tell us lies. I know, it's unbelievable. You wouldn't imagine it, but they make up the craziest stories. And you know, I don't think you'll ever be a good steward if you just live your whole life never to be taken advantage of. You do your best. You discern the situation. You help a single mom. You help a foster child. You give in various situations. Sometimes it's understood and appreciated and returned and you say, "Wow, this investment paid off!" And other times you feel like, "Wow, it didn't." Stewardship is doing the master's plan.

When my wife and I were adopting Joshua and Caleb, we were deep into the process and we were not sure that we were going to be successful. I was starting to doubt, "Is this even the right thing?" I was looking at their ages: 10 and 12 years old. They didn't speak English. This was going to be such an upheaval in their world. "Lord, am I going to be successful? Is this right?" I remember God speaking so clearly to me, "I'm calling you, Brian, to be faithful, not successful." And I said in my heart (I didn't have the nerve to articulate it), "Yes, but I would like to be successful." God in his mercy often gives us grace for that.

People, friends, do you want to experience the life God has for you? Do you want to know the presence of God in your life? You have to live his purpose. He won't fill your life for you to live your purpose. You've got to get on board with God, sold out to his purpose.

When I got married, I had a wonderful plan for my marriage and my wife. I was pretty confident that she existed solely to make me happy. That plan didn't last very long. It didn't work. It was an upheaval for me to realize that real joy and peace were found in having a marriage that fulfilled the purposes of God and not my own personal expectations. And you can apply that to every single blessing of God in your life: your children, your work, your money, your time, your talents. The good news is that when you give it to God, he multiplies it. He blesses it. It's better. It's just awesome.

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So, one of those sons that we saw occasionally, who was living here and going to college and working- he joined the army. He had the nerve to leave me and go join the army. He graduates from basic this week. He called us Thursday night at like 11:30. Now, we go to bed at 7:30. That's a slight exaggeration. But we were in bed and Caleb calls. He must have told us he loved us 10 times in this conversation. We were both lying in bed just crying.

I want to tell you, I'm trying to illustrate for you, when you say yes to the purposes of God, you think you are dying. You think, "I'm spending money, I'm risking everything, I could lose everything" -- and the return is just unspeakable. You say, "I don't deserve this." I want to give you a vision today for living in the purpose of God and not your own plan.

I've got to move on. I've got to move to Participation because we only have three or four more minutes.

### II. Participation.

In verses 18-21 he writes:

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Now, here's what's interesting. He starts with: "Don't get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." Do not get drunk. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. The idea here on "don't get drunk" is that debauchery is excess. In some ways, if you want to understand the whole idea here, Paul is saying: Don't allow ungodly excess in your life, because it will keep you from being filled with the Holy Spirit. It will keep you from living in the purposes of God. So if you have faith to participate, you do it. You do it unto the Lord. You give thanks for it. But you don't allow ungodly excesses in your life. Instead, you want to be filled with the Spirit.

You might say, "Alright, Paul is telling me to do this, but he doesn't exactly tell me how to do it." You are saying, "Alright, prepare." But now he begins to describe what it looks like when the Spirit of God fills you. If I can be honest, I say this respectfully, but to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century it seems a little weird what he tells us to do. He is describing something very specific. He is saying, "If you want more of the Spirit, then go with the Spirit when the Spirit shows up, doing what the Spirit does."

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Because if you don't participate, if you don't give yourself to it in faith, you are going to quench and grieve, and the Spirit of God isn't going to fill you in the same measure.

He really gives you five things, and I'm going to summarize them as three. Here they are:

- 1) Worship,
- 2) Thanksgiving, and
- 3) Submission.

Worship. We'll start with three things: Speaking, Singing, and Making Melody.

Speaking – "...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." Here's what I want you to see. When God comes in, your life is characterized by wanting to worship God and glorify him. I said this is a little odd for us, because am I going to greet you with a hymn? Am I going to address you with a song?

I'm like, "Wow, how do we even do that?" He is describing horizontal relationships and a vertical relationship with God, and it's all influenced by an attitude of worship. Our relationships, not in some kind of phony way, where we just give trite little glib sayings that are superficial and without meaning – we are honoring and glorifying the Lord with our lives. We are living lives of worship and it shows in the way we speak to one another and in our worship. We come together because we want to experience the presence of God. We want to honor him. We want to worship him, and we want to do it in community where we connect with one another. So we live a life of worship.

I was thinking about this and just how this works. When this happens, God wants to do things in your life. He wants to use you for his purpose. I was thinking of Kathy Roe. Kathy Roe has been part of our church for 10 or 12 years. I don't know if she's here. One day I was sitting in my office. I was just minding my own business, doing what I do, and the Spirit of God prompted me: "Go down to the washateria" -- does that word date me? Laundromat -- thank you! "There is someone there that I want you to talk to."

I wish that that happened to me all the time and that I had those kinds of impressions from the Lord. But I did that day, and I went down and met Kathy for the first time. She was an employee there, and she became a Christian. She came to church here, accepted the Lord, and now she works for one of our ministry partners: Hope for South Florida, 10 or 12 years later.

I share that as an illustration to say that what God has for you is more than just some "woooo" experience in God. I'm all for "woooo" experiences in God. I want God to touch me. That would be

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wonderful. But isn't it exciting to be a part of God saying, "I want to fill you because I've got a purpose to do. I've got a plan to do." We get to be a part of the transformation of lives, a part of restoration! Yes? Yes! Thank you!

Now, think about this for a minute. Some of you are thinking, "I don't know, Brian, this is kind of crazy stuff. You are saying that God's going to take my money, God's going to take my time, God's going to take my talents. God's going to take everything. I'm going to have nothing left. I'm not sure I want to give God that." Listen, I've got news for you. If God wants it, he'll just take it! He's God! Right? It's not about that. No, no, no, no. God invites you to a life with him that's glorious! Let him fill you. Let him just fill you with his purposes and with his Spirit.

Some of you right now are hearing this message and you are thinking of the areas where you have told God "no." "No, you can't go here. You can't go in this room in my house. You can't go there." You have all these rooms. Single men, when you get married that's one of the things you are going to find out. You are going to find out you cannot occupy the entire house. Certain towels are not for public use, or certainly not for your use, right? Well, that's what we do with God. I'm sorry, that was probably an unhelpful image, but that's what we do with God. We have all these areas that are off limits to God. Don't do that. Let him have his full purpose.

Let me move on quickly to Thanksgiving. "...giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." We are giving thanks constantly. We are giving thanks for everything. We are giving thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are giving thanks to God the Father. This is what God will do when he comes in.

I remember how a brother who was a police officer came to the Lord. He got saved, got baptized, and told me: "Brian, literally, I went outside and the grass was greener." He said, "My whole perspective was changed." When God comes in he fills us with thanksgiving.

I was actually thinking about how a father is someone who comes into your life and helps you see and realize your potential, who believes in your potential. Dads, I think that's part of our roles, and I think fathers in the Lord. They see your potential and they speak it in your life.

Now, some fathers are hard and some are soft. Some fathers speak your potential by saying, "Wow, you are really coming up short of your potential. You are dramatically disappointing me." They are always hard, right? Some fathers are really soft. They are always affirming and encouraging you. The truth of the matter is, dads, we often get it wrong and we get it out of balance.

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But I will say this just as a parenthesis to dads: One of the things your sons and daughters really need to hear from you is: “You are going to make it! You’ve got the goods. You will make it. I see God in you. I see God at work in you.”

When we have that, it feeds our soul. I mean, I’m now in my fifties. I call my Dad on Sunday mornings. My dad will be 85 in January and my dad prays for me. He blesses me. He tells me, “I’m proud of you. I’m proud of the man that you are.” And man, that nourishes my soul.

Some of you are thinking, “Man, I don’t have that. In fact, I had the opposite. My dad was absent. My dad was abusive. My dad was a huge disappointment. My dad hurt me.” “Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father” -- to God, your Father. You see, all of that is healed in Jesus Christ. God is your Father. There is a place where you don’t have just a good, earthly father; you have the perfect Father, who is seeing your potential, who is blessing you and gifting you and resourcing you and fitting you into his purpose. He is saying, “Son, come, trust me. I want to live in you. I want to fill you and I want you to fulfill the purpose that I have for you.” Isn’t that amazing?

On the next to the last trip to Africa when we were doing the adoption, I had to do some medical testing with Joshua and Caleb. So we went to a hospital and we were in a huge room with several hundred people. I was literally the only white person in the room. Some of you are thinking, “Yeah, it’s about time there’s a little flip on that whole deal.” But I was the minority in that room. I waited for the boys to get their blood taken for blood tests. I waited and I waited and I waited. I was there most of the day.

I’m a westerner. I’m American. I’m a consumer, and you just don’t make consumers wait all day, right? So every few minutes I’m going up. I’m telling the people, “Hey, what’s going on? We had an appointment. We’re this. We’re that. Why isn’t anyone seeing us?” I’m pushing, I’m pushing, I’m pushing, and they are just, “Yeah, we don’t understand you.” The whole day I’m sitting there, there is a gentleman about my age who is outside cutting the grass. It’s just a little square and he’s got a machete. He’s bending over, taking blades of grass, and chopping them. He was there all day long. I know because I was there all day long.

Sometimes we travel to other countries and we see that people have less material stuff and we think, “Well, that should make us grateful.” But you know, it’s really not about the stuff. Stuff doesn’t really make you better or happier on the whole. Maybe it makes life easier in some ways, I don’t know. But what catches my attention is not, “I am rich in stuff,” but “I’m rich in opportunity.” The opportunity for education, for various avenues of work, for relationship, for mobility, on and on and on, and I see this man who is being faithful with the only opportunity he has. He is working for pennies all day long, bending over with a machete to cut the grass.

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You can count on this: If there is not a gratitude that fills your heart, the Spirit of God has been diminished significantly. Because it's not about how much you have or how easy you have it. You have a Father who loves you and you are walking right smack dab, right down the middle of the avenue of his will. He is doing something. If you can see it, he wants to fill you and get you on board with accomplishing his purpose.

I've got to stop. I'm out of time. The last one was submission. As the Spirit of God fills us, it becomes less about us and more about others. We give our lives to help other people. I'm going to ask you to bow your heads right here.