



SESSION 4

WHEN SUBSTANCES TAKE OVER

▶ **The Point**

Only God's Holy Spirit should dictate our thoughts and actions.

▶ **The Passage**

Ephesians 5:15-21

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

It takes true dedication to do what some people do.

- Ride a bicycle with only one gear three thousand miles across America.
- Hike all 2,200 miles of the Appalachian Trail.
- Climb the 29,029 feet of Mount Everest.

While we marvel at the skill and endurance such people display, let's remember one key factor: none of them did it alone. Only the most foolhardy would attempt an extreme sport without a support team. And, of course, they need special gear to accomplish these endeavors. We don't face life alone either. In spite of our American ideal of self-reliance, we can't go it alone. Unfortunately, too many people try to endure the rigors of life by relying on alcohol and drugs. Such reliance, though, can lead to drunkenness and addiction. God has a better plan. When we rely on God—the presence of His Holy Spirit in our lives—the path we walk is both rich and joyous. Living under the power of God is the best adventure possible.

▶ **The Setting**

Paul's letter to the Ephesians can be divided into two main sections. In the first section (1:3–3:21) Paul described how believers are new creations in Christ and all that this entails. In the second section Paul described how the reality of being new creations should be lived out in believers' daily lives (4:1–6:20). Paul especially emphasized how believers are to fulfill God's purposes as they live through the filling and by the guidance of His Holy Spirit.

What does the Bible say?

Filled with the Spirit (v. 18)—The Spirit’s filling refers to His control of a believer’s thoughts, emotions, speech, and actions.

Ephesians 5:15-21

- 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.**
- ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,**
- ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,**
- ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,**
- ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes



Notes

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 93 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): **“What’s the wildest, craziest thing you’ve considered trying?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, locate two blindfolds, one set of earphones to be plugged into a music source, one large pair of gloves, a whiteboard or poster, and markers. Call for three volunteers to participate in a

demonstration. Tell two of the volunteers that their task will be to draw a house with a man standing on one side of the house and a woman standing on the other side. Divide the whiteboard into two sections with a line down the middle. Select one volunteer to wear a blindfold, the headphones with music playing, and the large gloves. Put one marker in the blindfolded participant’s hand and point him or her toward the whiteboard. Allow the volunteer a couple of minutes to complete the drawing. For the second volunteer, put on the second blindfold but the third volunteer will guide the second with verbal commands, directing the hand if necessary to complete the drawing. Compare the two drawings. Explain that this session will explore the power and freedom we experience when the Holy Spirit is our guide.

GUIDE: Direct group members to **“The Bible Meets Life”** on page 94 of the PSG. Emphasize the importance of being influenced by God rather than other things by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to **“The Point”** on page 94 of the PSG: **“Only God’s Holy Spirit should dictate our thoughts and actions.”**

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Lord to raise our awareness of this important issue and stir our hearts to action. Thank Him for promising to guide us by His Holy Spirit.

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Ephesians 5:15-17 Commentary

[Verse 15] In order for believers to experience the abundant life God offers and to accomplish His purposes, we must walk wisely—that is, live each moment with God's guidance and empowerment. This first requires us to pay careful attention to how we live. The Greek words translated **look carefully** emphasizes diligent discernment—not only seeing with the eyes but also perceiving with the mind. Things are not always as they seem. We live in a world under the influence of our enemy. Satan is opposed to God and His purposes. (See 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:1-2; 1 Pet. 5:8.) If we are careless about how we live, we will fall victim to Satan's traps and schemes.

In order to imitate God—to do what is right according to His standards—we must be attentive and vigilant about how we **walk**. The Greek term translated *walk* has the meaning of having a consistency in how a person lives his or her life. The Book of Proverbs speaks to the need for such attentiveness, not just carelessly wandering through life. (See Prov. 14:15-18.)

Living God's way requires God's wisdom. The **wise** person is alert and discerning, recognizing the reality of evil and its ability to destroy us. (See v. 16.) We gain wisdom by asking God for it (see Jas. 1:5), having a healthy respect for and knowledge of God (see Prov. 9:10), knowing and following God's Word (see Matt. 7:24), and spending time with wise people. (See Prov. 13:20.) Those who ignore or reject these biblical instructions are considered **unwise** people (fools) who are deceived (see 14:8) and ultimately will be destroyed by their folly. (See 1:20-33.)

[Verse 16] The Greek word translated **making the best use of** can mean, "redeem" or "buy up." It pictures a person intensively looking for and seizing something valuable for his or her own use. The word for **time** in this verse doesn't refer to chronological time. Instead, it refers to strategic or opportune moments; taking advantage of the significant opportunities God gives us.

The reason we must do this is **because the days are evil**. The evil world system (not creation as a whole) is opposed to God's standards and purposes. Satan, "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), blinds the lost so they will not turn to God in repentance and hinders God's work. Satan uses deception and other means in his attempts to distract us from God's ways and derail us from the strategic times we have to fulfill God's purposes.

[Verse 17] In light of all this, we must avoid foolishness. The fool is senseless and stupid, someone who acts without thinking. A foolish person is not discerning and thus easily deceived about what brings life and what leads to destruction.

In contrast, the wise person seeks to **understand what the will of the Lord is**. Understanding the Lord's will involves not only *knowing* but also *doing* God's will. Here God's will most likely refers broadly to His plans and purposes for all believers—our sanctification. (See 1 Thess. 4:3.) Sanctification refers to holiness—taking on the character of Jesus in how we think and act. This requires knowing God's Word and applying it in our lives. It also involves the working of the indwelling Holy Spirit.



10 minutes

STUDY THE BIBLE

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Ephesians 5:18

18 *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 5:18 on page 96 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the intoxicating effect of the wine being discussed and its use in pagan rituals.

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 96 of the PSG: **“What are some other things that control people in our culture?”**

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 96 of the PSG. After telling us in verse 17 to understand the Lord’s will, Paul gave us two clear commands regarding God’s will.

1. Don’t get drunk with wine (alcohol).
2. Be filled with the Holy Spirit.

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Pack Item 9**, the “Opioid Epidemic” handout, and distribute them to your group members. Use this handout to discuss the prevalence of opioid abuse among Americans and its impact on individuals and communities.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 98 of the PSG. Consider the benefits of living under the influence and control of the Holy Spirit. Read aloud the three verses given in the PSG.

TRANSITION: The next verses show us how we should let the control of the Holy Spirit govern how we live and act.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
Who do you know that especially models the Spirit-filled life?

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC BY THE NUMBERS

IN 2016...

- 114 People died every day from opioid-related drug overdoses
- 71.5 million people entered prescription opioid?
- 42,349 People died from overdosing on opioids?
- 2.3 million People had an opioid use disorder?
- 349,009 People used heroin?
- 192,000 People used heroin for the first time?
- 2.7 million People received prescription opioids for the first time?
- 12,867 Deaths attributed to overdosing on commonly prescribed opioids?
- 18,453 Deaths attributed to overdosing on synthetic opioids other than methadone?
- 15,869 Deaths attributed to overdosing on heroin?
- 506 to 800 in-utero deaths?

Ephesians 5:18 Commentary

[Verse 18] If we are to fulfill God's will by becoming like Jesus, we must live under the control of His Spirit rather than the control of anything else. Since some of the most common substances that can control human beings are alcoholic beverages, it seems natural for Paul to recall the words of Proverbs 23:29-35 that caution against the lure of **wine** and emphasize the consequences of drunkenness.

While the Ephesian culture (especially their pagan religious rituals) was greatly focused on intoxicants, it is unlikely Paul was addressing a behavioral issue on the part of the Ephesian Christians. Instead, he used a common activity in their society to contrast his theme of darkness versus light.

Getting **drunk with wine** is associated with a lifestyle that does not seek God's will or follow His ways. While drunkenness amongst believers at their gatherings was an issue for the church at Corinth (see 1 Cor. 11:21), there is no indication that this was also a problem with the Ephesian believers. In general, many of the believers in Ephesus would have certainly seen (and may have experienced) the consequences of drunkenness, which leads to **debauchery** (immorality). The Greek word translated *debauchery* emphasizes something without saving potential—something destructive and corrupted. A related term is used in the story of the prodigal son to describe how he squandered his inheritance on “reckless living” (Luke 15:13). While Ephesians 5:18 specifically mentions wine, Paul's warning can be applied to any substance that might control us, including other alcoholic beverages, illicit drugs, or even prescription drugs that are abused.

In contrast to being intoxicated with wine, Paul admonished that followers of Christ **be filled with the Spirit**. Paul's admonition pictures the believer being under the Holy Spirit's influence and control, leading to an obedient, productive, and beneficial life lived according to God's will. In the Greek this phrase has several distinctive elements. First, it is a command, which means obeying is not optional for believers. Second, it is in the passive voice, which indicates it is something done by someone else. We can't fill ourselves with God's Spirit; we can only yield to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to take control. Third, it is in the present tense, which denotes an action that happens again and again. While the Spirit remains with us and will be in us always (see John 14:16-17), this doesn't guarantee He will always be the primary influence in our lives. We must surrender to Him daily to be filled and controlled by Him. Finally, the phrase is a plural, which emphasizes its application for all believers.

In light of other biblical passages, it is possible to misunderstand Paul's emphasis in this verse. The Book of Acts describes early believers who were filled with the Holy Spirit and on occasion did miraculous things like speaking in “other tongues” (different languages). (See Acts 2:4.) In the Letter to the Ephesians, however, Paul emphasized the normal, day-to-day life of every believer rather than an occasional, supernatural manifestation of the Spirit's power in a particular believer's life. Elsewhere, Paul described the Holy Spirit as being the source of the believer's “power and love and self-control” (2 Tim. 1:7).



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

Ephesians 5:19-21

19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Ephesians 5:19-21 on page 98 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 99 of the PSG: **“In what ways does thankful living help us in our relationships with others?”**

GUIDE: Use the Commentary on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the various ways Paul challenged believers to speak to one another and to the Lord.

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 99 of the PSG. In verses 19-21, Paul described how the Holy Spirit influences the lives of believers.

- ▶ **Our words.** When it comes to indulging in alcohol or substances, friends easily influence each other.
- ▶ **Our attitude.** We are to give thanks (1) “always” and (2) “for everything.” As we grow in Christ, letting His Spirit lead us, we see life from His perspective.
- ▶ **Our actions.** We are to relate to one another with a submissive attitude. All Christians should practice submission, but we all know it can be tempting to place conditions on our actions based on the actions of others.

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 99 of the PSG: **“How can our group better model these verses for others?”**

GUIDE: Refer back to **“The Point”** for this session: **“Only God’s Holy Spirit should dictate our thoughts and actions.”**

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How would you describe submitting to one another in the fear of Christ?

Ephesians 5:19-21 Commentary

[Verse 19] As the Holy Spirit fills us, He will influence our thoughts, words, and actions. If we will allow Him, the Holy Spirit will control how we live and act. Beginning in this verse, Paul noted some practical results of the Spirit's filling. While some of the actions in verses 19-21 sound like orders—things we must do—it's probably best to understand them as outcomes—evidence of God's Spirit is controlling us.

When we come into a faith relationship with Christ, we become members of God's family. Our actions as a part of this family have a direct impact on other believers. One way we do this is by **addressing one another**. While believers can address one another for a variety of reasons—encouragement, instruction, and so forth—Paul's emphasis in these verses appears to be on worship.

Paul wrote believers should speak to one another in **psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**. **Psalms** refer primarily to those psalms in the Old Testament. The **hymns** Paul referred to were probably words of praise to God written by the first-century believers. **Spiritual songs** could have been testimonies about God's goodness, presence, and provision in a believer's life. **The Lord** is the object of our praise and the **heart**, directed toward God, is an essential part of our worship.

[Verse 20] Paul emphasized that our lives should be characterized by **giving thanks always and for everything**. Our thanksgiving is to be directed toward **God the Father**. He is the giver of "every good gift and every perfect gift" (Jas. 1:17) and "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3). While difficulties and sufferings are never easy, even in the midst of such experiences we can thank God because we know He works all things together for the good of those who love Him as He conforms us into the image of Christ. (See Rom. 8:28-30.)

The Greek word for **thanks** has the meaning of expressing gratitude toward someone. Ultimately we give thanks to God the Father for the perfect sacrifice of His Son, **our Lord Jesus Christ**. Because of what Christ did for us, we can experience God's constant presence with us (through His Holy Spirit living in us) and receive His guidance and power to live a life that pleases God. Thus it is **in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ** that we express our thanks to God.

[Verse 21] As we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us and control our lives, we will experience right relationships with **one another**, that is, other believers. This happens only when we are humble, having the same attitude Jesus had when He submitted to His Father's plan and gave Himself as a sacrifice for our sins. (See Phil. 2:5.)

The Greek word for **submitting** means subjection. The emphasis in this verse is on a voluntary attitude and action of giving. Submission does not reflect a person's value; rather it emphasizes the person's viewpoint. The Lord Jesus demonstrated this submissive viewpoint (or attitude) when He took the basin and towel and washed the disciples' feet as an example of humble service. (See John 13:1-17.) Our submission to other believers should occur **out of reverence for Christ**, that is, out of a deep respect for Christ.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 100 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **Confess.** Ask the Lord to reveal to you things in your life that are holding you captive. Pay attention to the things you turn to for comfort. Confess any substance abuse to the Lord and ask Him to set you free.
- ▶ **Discover.** If you need specific direction in your life, seek to discover God’s will. Commit to spending time daily reading God’s Word to understand His plan. Pray and seek the counsel of others as well.
- ▶ **Lean on others.** Surround yourself with people who will help you walk in the Spirit. Ask them to keep you accountable and to encourage you.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 100 of the PSG:

There are many ways to live a life of adventure. Some are fraught with dangers and filled with pain. God offers a better way, a path of adventure guided by His Holy Spirit.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Lord for helping us stay clear of substances that would lead us astray from His plan for our lives. Praise Him for being our Teacher and our Guide in leading wise lives.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra