

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

Ephesians 5:15-21

"...be filled with the Spirit." (5:18b)

Depending on your church background, the idea of being filled with the Spirit (or Spirit filled) might bring up a variety of connotations. Regardless of the connotation such a statement has for you/us, we need to recognize the importance of this command. It is a key command for Christians, one which opens up the Christian life (and likewise, to not obey it stagnates us, leaving us powerless, useless, unfulfilled, joyless, etc.)

We were created to live life in God, for God, through God, with God (and seeing as God is Triune, feel free to substitute Jesus or the Holy Spirit where I've used "God".) When we don't live as God intended (in communion/fellowship with Him), our lives are less than what they could/should be...and all sorts of negative ramifications result. Most of the problems we see in the world can be attributed to this.

Another quick point to clarify is the difference between being "indwelt" with the Spirit, and "filled" with the Spirit. Everyone who accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior is indwelt with the Spirit; or as Paul states in Ephesians 1:13b-14, *"Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of His glory."* Now it's one thing to have the Holy Spirit in us, it's quite another to be yielded to the Spirit, to be walking/living in harmony with the Spirit, as we go about our days. A good image of this is John the Baptizer, when he heard that people were going after and following Jesus, said, *"He must become greater, I must become less."* (John 3:30)

By way of contrast, Paul often draws the difference between life according to the Spirit and life according to the flesh, or sinful nature. Two important and popular passages we want to be familiar with are Romans 8 and Galatians 5. For our purposes, let's call the flesh/sinful nature ("sarx" in Greek), the "self".

Let's think of the Self as a container of some kind. What is in the container of "me"? Pride/ego, anger, desires, fears, thoughts, emotions, memories, joys, hurts, etc. But at the executive center of it all is "me". And I (or you as the case may be) is trying to micro-manage everything as I think is best. Now it's popular, in the Christian world, to think I'm supposed to give "control" to God. I would want to caveat that a bit. We were given free will for a reason. If God's goal was to control us He would have made us robots. He wants us to live in partnership with Him (as opposed to a power struggle). We can go about our lives running on the limited power, perspective, and resources we have at our disposal, usually to our own short-sighted ends. Or, we can access the unlimited abundance of God (His love, power, and wisdom) and shoot for His higher/better goals. But the choice is ours. That's why I like the word yield (synonyms include concede, relinquish, acquiesce, surrender). He doesn't force Himself upon us, but allows us the space to recognize our need for His help. And then He lovingly offers us

the help we need...which is Himself. God allows us authority, if you will, over this little kingdom of Self. But His hope is that we'll recognize His greater authority over a much bigger Kingdom which we are invited to be part of...so long as we yield our kingdom/authority to His. Again, like John the Baptizer, more of Him, less of me.

The thing is, this type of yielding takes practice. It's a habit that needs to be developed. Additionally, life comes at us fast and furious. It's easy to lose sight of our need for God. (And it's easy to second guess God and think we know better—as human history so readily demonstrates.) Our fears and desires scream for attention. Do we trust that God truly knows best? Or do we need to look out for ourselves?

So how do we go about being filled with the Spirit? How do we go about yielding the Self to the divine Other? Are there practices we can do that help us develop this habit? Thankfully, yes. Now we quickly run into the proverbial “what comes first, the chicken or the egg?” scenario.

Paul offers 3 exhortations or “practices”. The question can be asked: are these activities we do IN ORDER to be filled with the Spirit? Or, are they activities we do as a RESULT of being filled with the Spirit? I believe the answer is Yes! In a mysterious way they are both the means and the evidence of being filled with the Spirit. (Paul's list is not exhaustive by any stretch. Christians have a long history of spiritual disciplines that are well worth learning/developing.)

First is Christ-centered community (verse 19)...which can take many forms...Paul offers a partial list. The point is, it takes others (the focus being on “*one another*”). Second, fostering an attitude of gratitude, “*always giving thanks...*” (verse 20). This is a crucial foundation. Grumbling and complaining (in its varied, subtle, and nuanced forms) is the antithesis of being filled with the Spirit because it's so self-focused. Third, submitting to one another...i.e. putting others before ourselves. This requires the relinquishing of the “me first” attitude/posture/mindset which is so prevalent and pervasive. This is what makes Jesus so unique. On the night He was arrested He prayed, “*Not my will but yours be done.*” (Luke 22:42b) Paul picks up on this all-important characteristic of Jesus that we are called to emulate: “*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who being in the very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*” (Philippians 2:3-8)

As we do this, we are filled with the Spirit. In closing, I want to make the point that this command to be filled with the Spirit is the overriding command that governs everything else in this letter up to 6:10...i.e. everything Paul is about to say about marriage, parenting, work relationships. We will not be able to fulfill Paul's instructions under our own power. At the same time (remember the chicken and the egg) following Paul's instructions of submitting to

one another (of which marriage, family, and work relationships are normal, everyday contexts in which we have the opportunity to live this out) is evidence of being filled with the Spirit.

It's all meant to drive us to God, and then to live as a reflection of God to the world around us.

- Q. What comes to mind when you hear “be filled with the Spirit?”**
- Q. What are some specific practices you do in order to yield yourself to God?**
- Q. What are some areas of life which you find it challenging to yield to God, areas in which you feel you need to have command/control of?**
- Q. Being “in Christ” and being “filled with the Spirit” are not solely individual endeavors. In what ways have other people helped you grow in Christ. In what ways are you helping others grow in Christ?**
- Q. Spiritual disciplines (or practices) can be categorized into individual/personal disciplines, and communal/collective disciplines. Which have you found helpful in connecting with God, and empowering to fulfill His mission in the world around us?**
- Q. Right now, at this very moment, how grateful are you feeling? (Be honest, you don't need to impress anyone...but please explain your response...i.e. what's going on in your life or heart?)**
- Q. What kinds of “power struggles” have you experienced (or are currently experiencing) with God? With someone else? Power struggles are often a symptom of fear. Can you identify what you're afraid of?**