

5 | We Strengthen One Another



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I was embarrassed. I was at the gym, but at that moment I was hardly doing anything productive. I was lying flat on my back with heavy barbells pressing against my chest. No matter how much I tried to push, my arms refused to cooperate. They had given up under exhausted protest. I knew the first commandment of strength training and gym etiquette, but I had broken it—and now I sheepishly faced the consequences.

When lifting weights, always enlist a spotter—someone who both pushes you to persevere and intervenes if your arms give out. Yet there I was, imprisoned by the weights on my chest because I foolishly thought I could do it on my own.

I also need a spotter in my Christian life—and you do too. God gave us the church to be that help. Fellow Christians embolden us to persevere, and they intervene when our souls are discouraged and we feel beaten and weighed down by life's troubles. As God's Spirit works through us, He uses us to strengthen one another in a world that calls us to follow a different path.

GROUP TIME

THE POINT: We _____ one another to _____ as God desires.

From the beginning, people have tried to convince Christians that we can pursue Jesus while still sinning like the world. But that can't be. In his Letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul noted the contrast in verse 8 between who we once were to who we are in Christ. Living a life different from the world around us isn't easy; it's actually going to be quite difficult—but difficult doesn't mean impossible.

Ephesians 5:8-14 ⁸ For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light— ⁹ for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth— ¹⁰ testing what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Don't participate in the fruitless works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what is done by them in secret. ¹³ Everything exposed by the light is made visible, ¹⁴ for what makes everything visible is light. Therefore it is said: Get up, sleeper, and rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.

We can help each other _____ against the sinful ways of the world.

The challenge of holiness is seen in the two-fold opposition we face.

- ▶ **We battle temptations from the inside, from our own hearts.** Each of us has sinful desires that come from our own sin nature. You and I may have different struggles and long for different things, but the “old self” still draws us to sin.
- ▶ **We face temptations from the outside, from the sinful world.** Others lure us to compromise our faith by participating in things God opposes.

Like heavy barbells, this multi-directional opposition weighs heavily upon us. But with the Holy Spirit living inside us and “spotters” like the people of God walking alongside us, we can stand against any opposition thrown at us.

Our rugged individualism foolishly convinces us, *I've got this. I don't need anyone's help. I'm strong enough on my own.* But no matter how we may think we can face sin on our own, it's simply not possible. Why? Because God never created us to withstand sin in isolation. He has hardwired into our spiritual DNA a persistent need for spiritual support from the Holy Spirit and from the body of Christ.

Ephesians 5:15-17 ¹⁵ Pay careful attention, then, to how you live—not as unwise people but as wise— ¹⁶ making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

We can help one another make wise use of our _____.

Moses prayed, "Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts" (Psalm 90:12). Similarly, Paul taught the Ephesians to "Pay careful attention, then, to how you live—not as unwise people but as wise—making the most of the time" (Ephesians 5:15-16). Time matters. What distinguishes us isn't how much time we have, but what we do with the time we've been given.

ENGAGE

MAKING THE MOST OF MY TIME

Record your primary activities for your typical week in the spaces below.

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

Circle two or three places where you can intentionally leverage your time for God. What is God calling you to add, remove, or change?

Ephesians 5:18-21 ¹⁸ And don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit: ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making music with your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.

We strengthen one another as we're _____ with the Spirit and live in mutual submission.

When Jesus saves us, He also changes us. That change doesn't happen through a few simple tweaks here and there; rather, it's a total transformation of heart, mind, and will. The Holy Spirit of God coming to reside in us is means of that transformation. Rather than being intoxicated by selfishness and self-rule, the Holy Spirit leads us instead to worship and submit to God. Worship and submission foster right relationships with both God and other people.

DAY 1: Look for opportunities to affirm and help other Christ-followers.

Read Ephesians 5:8-10.

We were created for relationships, and relationships with other Christ-followers are vital to our spiritual growth. We need encouragement and support from others, and they need the same things from us. From this passage, we see several ways we can strengthen one another in standing against the sinful ways of the world.

- ▶ **We can affirm the fruit of the gospel in another's life (v. 9).** When we see our Christian brother or sister exhibiting Christlike character traits like goodness, righteousness, and truth, we should verbally recognize and affirm it. As we affirm God's fruit in others, we'll be more aware of it in our own lives.
- ▶ **We can help one another discern what pleases the Lord (v. 10).** We don't always see things as clearly as we should. Each of us brings our own biases to the table, and we can tire out spiritually on any given day. All of these things skew our discernment. We need each other's help in determining what pleases the Lord.

The apostle Paul's message is a valuable one: we were never meant to live the Christian life on our own.

Who do you see demonstrating Christlikeness? Find time to affirm and encourage him or her with a quick note or in conversation.

“For the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth.”

EPHESIANS 5:9

DAY 2: Stand against temptation and for the gospel.

Read Ephesians 5:11-14.

In his message, Paul also highlighted the impact of supporting other Christ-followers and allowing them to support us.

- ▶ **We can help one another expose darkness rather than participate in it (vv. 11-12).** The ways of the world are very popular, and the truth of the gospel isn't. Few people enjoy being in the minority, but we find strength in numbers. You and I are stronger when we stand with each other than when we stand alone.
- ▶ **We can help one another shine the light of Christ (v. 14).** It's remarkable how much darkness just a little bit of light dispels. One small candle can illuminate an entire darkened room. The candle's impact is marked by its contrast to the darkness. Like a candle, Christians must be different from those whom they seek to influence. Let's help one another shine in the world.

Are you investing in friendships with mature, growing Christ-followers who will help you stand against temptation? If not, start today. Get coffee with someone, or make plans for lunch soon.



DAY 3: Use your time, opportunities, and choices wisely.

Read Ephesians 5:15-17.

Paul wanted the Ephesians to approach every moment in life with God's priorities in view. Here are three ways Christians should rethink our use of time:

- 1. Live wisely.** We should use time wisely so that our lives reflect the wisdom of God.
- 2. Live intentionally.** Paul challenged us to take advantage of every opportunity we have to do good. That means we should live life "on purpose." Christians should seek to leverage every opportunity, every task, and every relationship for the sake of the gospel.
- 3. Live obediently.** Rather than being foolish, Paul commanded us to "understand what the Lord's will is" (v. 17). In other words, we should know God's Word. And *knowing* God's Word always means *obeying* God's Word too. In everything we do, every place we go, and every choice we make, we should strive to obey God and not to blend in with the norms of culture.

Ask God to reveal to you where you can make wise, intentional, and obedient choices. Then, take steps to implement these.

DAY 4: Follow the guidance given by the Holy Spirit.

Read Ephesians 5:18.

We don't live in a kind or submissive culture. People shout profanities at strangers on the highway. Parents throw punches over Little League® disputes. Friendships end over disagreements on social media. Because of sin, none of us perfectly thinks of others before ourselves. That's what makes Ephesians 5 so remarkable. It speaks as radically to our culture today as it did to the first-century Ephesians.

In verse 18, Paul gave yet another contrast between Christians and the world. Instead of the drunkenness and self-rule of his day, Paul told the Ephesian believers: "Don't get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit." As Christians, no foreign substance should intoxicate our minds. We should always be in complete control of our faculties so that we don't behave in reckless ways or believe things that are contrary to the gospel. It might be easier to commit to not getting drunk than it is to not conform to the way culture treats others. But we can be full of wrong thoughts just as we can be full of alcohol. The application, though, is the same: we're not to let anything of the world consume and control us. Instead, we're to let the Holy Spirit guide us and control us.

*Get in the habit of listening for God's guidance through the Holy Spirit.
As you pray and read God's Word, ask Him to show you His instruction.*

DAY 5: Choose to live submissively to one another.

Read Ephesians 5:19-21.

To nurture right relationships with people, the Holy Spirit transforms selfish living into submissive living: “submitting to one another in the fear of Christ” (v. 21). The word *submit* means being willing to yield your own rights or to lose your “self” for the sake of another. Selfish living seeks to promote yourself; submissive living seeks to promote others. Selfish living wants what’s best for you; submissive living wants what’s best for everyone. Selfish living mistreats others; submissive living honors others.

Living submissively is how God desires church members to live among each other. God doesn’t want His church filled with self-centered individuals who seek to advance their own personal agendas. Instead, He desires for us to speak to one another with holy words, songs, and prayers. And He wants us to treat one another with grace and kindness. The church is strengthened when believers live submissively by the Spirit.

Pray for each member of your Bible study group by name. Ask God to strengthen each person as you grow together in spiritual maturity.

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light.”

EPHESIANS 5:8