

SESSION 5

We Strengthen One Another



QUESTION 1:

When has someone shown that they really had your back?

THE POINT

We strengthen one another to live as God desires.

THE PASSAGE

Ephesians 5:8-21

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I was so 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 here 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.

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.

People have always tried to convince Christians that we can pursue Jesus while still sinning like the world. But that cannot be! Note the contrast in verse 8 from the darkness we once were to the light we now are in Christ. Living a life different from the world around us is not easy; it's actually going to be quite difficult. But difficult doesn't mean impossible. We see the challenge of holiness 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" (Eph. 4:22) still draws us to sin.

- ▶ We face temptations 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 "spotters" like the Holy Spirit living inside us and the people of God walking alongside us, we can stand against any opposition thrown at us.

Our rugged individualism foolishly convinces us that “I’ve got this. I don’t need anybody’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.

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 one another’s lives (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.
- ▶ **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 is not. 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 is 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 that candle, Christians must spread God’s light among those they seek to influence. Let’s help one other shine in the world.

In this life, the world will throw a lot of temptations our way. But through Jesus and His people, we have the support we need to endure.

QUESTION 2:

What are specific ways to test what is pleasing to the Lord?

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.

Few commodities are more precious than time. We appreciate its value because once it's gone, it can never be replaced. We have no idea how much time we have left. Do we have years? Months? Days? Hours? No one knows except God!

Moses prayed, "Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts" (Ps. 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." Time matters. What distinguishes us is not how much time we have, but what we do with the time we've been given.

We can reduce human activity to two basic approaches; people approach life from either a worldly viewpoint or a godly viewpoint. The worldly approach is unwise, derived from human thinking; the godly approach is wise because it's based on God's Word. The question we must ask ourselves is: "What will be the driving force of my schedule? The world's priorities or God's priorities?"

Paul wanted the Ephesians to approach every moment in life with God's priorities in view. Because this first-century letter is twenty-first century Scripture for us, we should help each other prioritize our schedules with the same godly approach. Here are three ways Christians should rethink our use of time:

- ▶ **Live wisely.** Because our lives matter, Paul counseled us to “pay careful attention, then, to how you live.” We should use time wisely so that our lives reflect the wisdom of God. While the world generally lives thinking only of today, Christians should live today while also thinking of eternity. For example, the world treats a day off as an open slot for family barbecues, sporting events, hours at the lake, or an opportunity to sleep late. Christians, on the other hand, value a day of rest, prioritizing worship and fellowship with God's people. The world wakes up each morning and immediately gets to work on the day's business. But Christians prioritize personal time with God before getting started on the rest of the day's activities.
- ▶ **Live intentionally.** When Paul told us to make the most of the time, he challenged us to take advantage of every opportunity we have to do good. That means we should live life “on purpose.” Many people mindlessly approach life simply checking off the “to do list” and moving on to what's next. But Christians should seek to leverage every opportunity, every task, and every relationship for the sake of the gospel. For example, instead of eating every meal as a family alone, Christians might invite others to join them. Rather than mindlessly commuting to work, Christians could maximize that time by listening to Scripture, a sermon, or an audio book that challenges them to think biblically.
- ▶ **Live obediently.** Rather than being foolish, Paul commanded us to “understand what the Lord's will is.” 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. This doesn't mean everything we see the world doing is wrong, but it does mean we live by a different set of priorities; and those priorities tangibly affect the way we use our time.

As the body of Christ, let's meet our earthly responsibilities with eternity in view. And let's strengthen one another by being wise stewards of our time.

QUESTION 3:

What practices help you make the most of your time?

ENGAGE

The way believers use their time should look different from the way people in the world use their time. How many hours a week do you spend:

Reading the Bible

In conversation with friends and family

Watching TV

Volunteering in service opportunities

Engaged on social media

In Prayer

Worshiping God

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 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. In the public square, politicians treat their opponents like enemies of the state. As citizens, we castigate anyone who disagrees with us personally. People are intoxicated with selfishness, pride, anger, and hate. In virtually every part of our culture, we demonstrably live under self-rule.

We should not think our culture is the first to personify such bad behavior. Human beings have mistreated one another and resisted authority since the beginning of time. The characterizations noted describe some of the ways sin has manifested itself in our culture today. Because of sin, none of us perfectly thinks of others before ourselves or naturally defers to someone else's authority. 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. As Christians, 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 are not to let anything of the world consume and control us. Instead, we are to let God's Holy Spirit fill us and control us.

When Jesus saves us, He also changes us. That change doesn't happen through a few simple tweaks here and there; rather, it is a total transformation of heart, mind, and will. The means of that transformation is the Holy Spirit of God coming to reside in us. 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.

QUESTION 4:

What are some of the results of being filled with the Spirit?

To encourage a right relationship with God, the Spirit transforms reckless living to righteous living. He also transfers the direction of our worship from ourselves to God. When we are filled with the Spirit, our gratitude and love for God manifests itself in praise and worship directed to God, not ourselves. All of this is to the glory of God through Jesus.

To nurture right relationships with people, the Spirit transforms selfish living into submissive living: “submitting to one another in the fear of Christ.” 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 is best for you; submissive living wants what is 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 does not want His church filled with self-centered individuals who seek how 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.

QUESTION 5:

What does it look like for us to submit to one another as believers?

LIVE IT OUT

How might God use you to strengthen others in His church? And how might you allow His church to strengthen you?

- ▶ **Identify.** Through introspection and prayer, identify recurring sins and temptations that weigh you down. Confess those things to God and ask Him to bring others into your life to strengthen your walk.
- ▶ **Influence.** As you experience strength and victory in your own life, look for opportunities to influence others by being a selfless and submissive member of your church.
- ▶ **Invite.** Invite another Christian or a group of Christians to be a part of your fight against temptation. Confess your temptations to them and allow them to confess theirs to you. Stand together against those struggles.

God employs His Spirit and His people to strengthen us against the ways of the world.

