

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 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.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

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.

From the beginning, people have 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.

QUESTION 2:

Why is it significant that Paul says we “are light,” rather than “like light”?

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

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

Our rugged individualism foolishly convinces us, “I’ve got this.” But no matter how we may think we can face sin on our own, it’s simply not possible. Why? Because God 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, we should verbally recognize and affirm it.
- ▶ **We can help one another discern what pleases the Lord (v. 10).** We don’t always see things as clearly as we should. 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).** Few people enjoy being in the minority, but we find strength in numbers.
- ▶ **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. A Christian must be different from those he seeks to influence. Let’s help one other shine in the world.

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't be replaced. Raising time's value even more is the fact that we have no idea how much time we have left. Do we have years? Months? Days? Hours? No one knows except God!

QUESTION 3:

How might we be tempted to misuse time?

We can reduce human activity down to two basic approaches; people approach life from either a worldly viewpoint or a godly viewpoint. 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:

1. Live wisely. Our lives matter, so we should “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 only thinking 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 outings, 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. Christians, though, prioritize personal devotion with God before getting started on the rest of the day.

- 2. 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.
- 3. 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 and every choice we make, we should strive to obey God and not to blend in with the norms of culture.

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.

WISE USE OF TIME

Select a time slot on any given day when you may not be leveraging your time well for God.
Next to the time slot you selected, write a brief statement on how you can be more wise with your time.

6 a.m. – 9 a.m.

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9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

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12 p.m. – 3 p.m.

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3 p.m. – 6 p.m.

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6 p.m. – 9 p.m.

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9 p.m. – 12 a.m.

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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 should not think our culture is the first to personify bad behavior. Human beings have mistreated one another and resisted authority since the beginning of time. 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. 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 us. Instead, we are to let God's Holy Spirit fill us and control us.

When Jesus saves us, He also changes us through 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, which fosters right relationships with both God and other people.

QUESTION 4:

What are some specific ways we can turn to the Holy Spirit for strength?

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.

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. The church is strengthened when believers live submissively by the Spirit.

QUESTION 5:

How have you seen the teachings in these verses strengthen relationships?



"WE REALIZE WE ARE

ONLY AS STRONG AS OUR WEAKEST MEMBER

AND ARE COMMITTED TO HELPING ONE ANOTHER GROW AS CHRISTIANS."

Michael D. Lemay

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

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 your own sins.** Through prayer and introspection, 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 others.** 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.

- ▶ **Ask someone to help you.** Invite another Christian or 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. **Let us stand strong in the power in which we have been given.**