

## LIVING THE WORD—Week 4 (Aug. 30-Sept. 5)

### *The God-Filled Family: How God Can Transform Our Families*

In this series we are considering what it means to have families shaped by the presence of God. As a guide we are using Ephesians 4:17-5:21, which talks about living with a renewed attitude and a new self made to be like God. We hope this study will help us grow in that new reality.

#### **Sunday, Aug. 30: A Family That Always Gives Thanks**

*“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5:15-20 Today’s NIV)*

In this final section of our series, Paul calls us focus on being filled with the Spirit so that our hearts overflow with thanksgiving. God’s people must be careful to go about their lives wisely, understanding the Lord’s will. The age in which we live is full of evil, and we must make the most of the time we have. In Greek, 5:18-21 is one sentence focused on the call for a Spirit-filled life. Rather than live wasted lives of drunkenness, we should be filled with the Spirit. The next 5 verbs in the sentence describe some of what the Spirit-filled life is like: speaking to each other in songs, singing and making melody to the Lord, giving thanks to the Father, and submitting to each other.

Paul places special emphasis on singing, both to God and to each other. Songs are not only a vital part giving thanks and praise to God, they are also one way in which we speak the truth to each other, impart grace, and build each other up (4:25, 29; see also Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 14:26). The admonition to sing to each other in a letter focused on life together in the body of Christ may have in mind a group of believers facing each other in the living room of a house church. That image may also be an encouragement to envision our homes as a daily place of song and praise.

The distinction between the terms “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” is not entirely clear. “Psalms” are likely the Old Testament psalms, which were used by the early church in its worship and teaching; “hymns” may refer to songs of praise; and “songs from the Spirit” (more literally, “spiritual songs”) may mean songs sung by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 14:13-17). On the other hand, no real distinction may be intended. This may be another example of Paul’s habit of stringing together synonyms for emphasis. His point may simply be “sing all kinds of songs to each other.”

All of this should arise from hearts that are always grateful. Thanksgiving should constantly characterize the Christian life (cf. Col. 3:15-17; 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:18; Phil. 4:6)—not merely as a habit of speech, but as the attitude of a Spirit-filled heart. A home full of God’s Spirit should be a home filled with thanksgiving, joy, and music—because the hearts of the family members are filled with the love of God.

The call to submission in v. 21 not only closes the description of the Spirit-filled life, but opens a discussion of relationships in a Christian household (5:21-6:9)—a passage that God-filled families should take to heart.

**Questions to discuss with your family and home church:**

1. What sounds (noises, voices, conversations, etc.) would you expect to hear in a typical American household?
2. What is the difference between asking if something is wise and asking if a Bible verse commands or forbids it (some of the men may think of the summer Wednesday night series with Andy Stanley on *The Best Question Ever*)?
3. Why do you think Paul contrasts being filled with the Spirit with being drunk with wine? How are the two alike? How are they different? What other influences could shape the attitudes in our families and the way we speak to each other?
4. These verses are often employed in debates over various worship issues. How might such debates miss the real focus of this passage? How can Christians with different opinions and preferences about worship still speak to each other in song and live together in love?
5. Why do you think Paul emphasized singing and thanksgiving in his description of the Spirit-filled life? Why would a God-filled home be full of singing and thanksgiving?
6. What are some ways we can live this out in our families? What might it look like?
7. Pray together that God would help our families be full of thanksgiving.

**Next week we begin a new study:**

*When God Is on the Throne: Discovering the Mysteries of Revelation*