

“WHAT A SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE LOOKS LIKE” (Ephesians 5:19-21)

This morning we are going to look at what a Spirit-filled life looks like. Last week we talked about what it means to be filled with the Spirit, and today we are going to see the results of being filled with the Spirit. This helps answer the question a lot of Christians have: how do I know if I am filled with the Spirit?

As I was reading through our passage this week, a certain word came to mind and that word was disposition. The dictionary defines disposition as a person’s predominant tendency, mood, or inclination. A good example of a disposition is the seven dwarfs in the story of Snow White, each of whom is named according to their predominant characteristic.

- Sneezzy, not surprisingly, is always sneezing.
- Sleepy is always yawning and falling asleep.
- Happy always has a smile on his face and is cheerful.
- Doc, the leader, is always bossing people around.
- Grumpy is always complaining and arguing about something and says “no” to everything.
- Dopey is known for being silly and is the only dwarf that doesn’t speak.
- Bashful is always blushing and batting his eyes, shying away from people.

Our disposition may not be as exaggerated as the seven dwarfs, but each of us is known by certain characteristics and tendencies. The Bible has a lot to say about our disposition as a Christian and the qualities that should be consistent in our lives.

Last week we saw that every believer, at the moment of salvation, is indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. This means that the presence of God comes to live within us, and our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit. It’s only natural that with the presence of God in our lives, we will look and act much differently.

We also saw that while the Holy Spirit takes up permanent residence in our lives, in order to experience His presence and power, we must yield control of our lives to Him and say, “I’m all yours Lord. I can accomplish nothing without you. Take control of my heart and mind so that I can be filled with your power and presence.” As we move through our day we walk in the Spirit and practice the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and fellowshiping with other believers that keeps us in tune with the Spirit. We make sure that there is no sin in our lives that grieves the Holy Spirit or quenches His work.

When you are filled with the Spirit, there will a noticeable change in your life. Some of these changes are listed in Galatians 5 as the fruit of the Spirit. When you are supernaturally filled with the presence and power of God your life will overflow with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In our passage today in Ephesians 5:19-21 the Apostle Paul describes additional virtues that are the natural result of a Spirit-filled life. Let’s begin reading together in verse 18...

“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 from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

As a believer who is filled with the Spirit, three things will naturally flow from your life. The first is **singing**... *“speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.”* It’s a little surprising that singing would be the first evidence of the Spirit’s filling. I would expect Paul to say something like, “Be filled with the Spirit and you will move mountains and perform mighty miracles,” but he says, “If you filled with the Spirit you will sing.”

Notice three things verse 19 says about singing. The first is **why we sing**. Music is one of the most powerful forces in life – it’s the language of the soul, and is one of the main ways we connect with God and express our love and gratitude to Him. Singing is found throughout the Bible. The first time we see singing is after the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. When they made it safely to the other side they spontaneously broke out in song, praising God for delivering them from Pharaoh’s army and planting their feet on dry land. They couldn’t help but sing. They didn’t sing in Egypt, but now that they were set free from bondage, they had a new song in their heart.

Singing was an important part of Israel’s worship in the tabernacle. 4000 singers and musicians were set apart to serve in the tabernacle, and Israel’s feasts and holy days were all celebrated with singing. We read of Israel singing after experiencing a great victory over their enemies. Many of the psalms were set to music and sung together as a group.

In the New Testament we read that after the Lord’s Supper, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn before they went out to the garden. When Paul and Silas were put in prison in Philippi, they prayed and sang hymns as the other prisoners listened in amazement. Even when shackled and bound, the presence of God was with them and they sang. Singing was something the early church did each time they gathered, and the book of Revelation says that singing the praises of God will continue on into eternity.

Very rarely do you find people singing together as a group outside of church. It is something very unique to Christianity. Comedian Steve Martin wrote a song a few years back called “Atheists Don’t Have No Songs.” The song talks about how Baptists and Lutherans and Pentecostals sing joyfully about God, but for atheists there’s no good news – they’ll never sing a song of faith.” When Robert Ingersoll, the well-known atheist of the late 1800s died, his funeral notice said, “There will be no singing,” Those without Christ has nothing to sing about, but the Christian has everything to sing about, and singing is the naturally expression of joy and gratitude for all God has done.

For several years I led worship at summer youth camps. The first night of camp it was challenging to get the kids to sing – for some, singing together was something new and they just sat there with their arms folded. But as the week moved on, hour by hour the Holy Spirit had an opportunity to work in their lives. Some got saved – some rededicated their lives to Christ – and by Friday night they were singing. Some of the best moments of camp where singing around the campfire on the last night of camp, and sometimes we’d stay up to one or two in the morning just singing praises to God. The difference between Monday night and Friday night was that they now had something to sing about.

I read about a team of missionaries who for many years worked with an Indian tribe in Ecuador and were frustrated by the lack of results. Suddenly the Spirit of God began to move and a large number of the tribe were converted in a short time. One of the first evidences of their new life in Christ was a great desire to sing His praises. They had never sung before – now they stood for hours in their thatched-roof church and sang hymn after hymn. They had something to sing about.

Notice also **what we are to sing**. Paul says that when we are filled with the Spirit we will sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Psalms are the words of Scripture set to music, and we have an entire book of psalms in our Bible. The great thing about the psalms is that they reflect every mood we are feeling. If you're happy, there are happy psalms; if you're sad, there are psalms of lament; if you're discouraged, there are psalms about being discouraged; if you're afraid, there are psalms about being afraid. The psalms are deeply personal and express the wide range of emotions we feel.

Hymns are human compositions that focus the person and work of God – some focus on praising the Father, some the Son, and others the Holy Spirit. Some hymns include all three persons of the Godhead. I was surprised to read this week that during the dark ages – from about 300 AD to 1500 AD, there was very little singing in church. If any singing was done, it was by professionals who mostly sang in Latin. All that changed during the Reformation when church leaders like Martin Luther began to emphasize music, and Luther himself wrote a number of hymns. Over the past 500 years we have been blessed with thousands of hymns, and they continue to be written and composed.

Spiritual songs are songs of testimony written as a personal expression of praise to God. When I was seventeen years old, I was with a missions group that hiked to the bottom of the Grand Canyon to Havasu Falls, and one evening I was sitting by the falls and the moon was full and the sky was lit up with stars. I was overwhelmed by what I saw and was inspired on the spot to write a song. I went back to my tent and grabbed an old guitar that I had lugged down the canyon with me, and as I sat beneath the falls, the words and music of a song to God came flowing out of me. It was the 1970s and my song was a mix between John Denver and Barry Manilow. I'm not sure I can even remember the whole song today, but I think that's what a spiritual song is – a song of praise that comes from a heart filled with the Spirit.

Notice, third, **to whom we are to sing**. Verse 19 mentions two audiences to whom we sing. First, we are instructed to “speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” The word “speak” means to communicate, and the specific way we communicate in this verse is through singing. There is a special dynamic that takes place when we sing together. Ephesians talks a great deal about unity, and singing is a special way to lift up our voices together and bond us as one in Christ. Singing together encourages our faith, it softens our hearts and attitudes, and prepares our hearts to receive what God tells us in His Word.

Singing also has a powerful affect on those who do not know the Lord. As 1 Corinthians 14 talks about unbelievers who come to a church gathering, and as they hear believers sing from their heart and listen to the Word preached, they will say, “God is really among you! He's real, and I can sense His presence by the way His people worship.”

While we are to sing to one another, our primary audience is God. Verse 19 says, “**Singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.**” Worship begins in our heart, where our inner being is yielded to the Holy Spirit's control, and from our heart we outwardly express our praise and gratitude to the Lord. The good news is that you don't even have to be a good singer, and some of you say, “I'm not.” Worship is more about heart than it is about art. You can have a raspy, off-pitch voice and not be able to read a note, but still please God with your praises because they come from your heart.

The first characteristic of a Spirit-filled life is singing – an expression of the joy of the Lord in our hearts. The second characteristic is **thanksgiving**. Verse 20 says, “Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Gratitude is one of the most important qualities we practice as Christians, and being thankful is what sets us apart from those who don’t know the Lord.

In Romans 1 Paul describes the downward spiral of a world that rejects God, and surprisingly he says it the moral collapse of a culture begins with ingratitude. Even though God has revealed Himself through creation, and what may be known about Him is made plain to everyone, some people suppress the truth and refuse to believe. Romans 1:21 says, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Once the world rejects God as their creator, the natural result is that they won’t recognize all the good gifts and blessings of His creation. Instead of thanking, they live self-absorbed lives and are never satisfied.

All of us know what it’s like to giving someone a gift, or do an act of kindness, and not be told “thank you.” To not be grateful is an act of disrespect for someone’s kindness and generosity. Imagine how God feels when His creation does not express thanksgiving for all He’s given us. It’s especially disrespectful for those of us who live in America to not be grateful. Simply living in the United States, having a roof over our head, eating three meals a day, and having a phone and a car – we are among the richest people in the world. What’s more, we live in one of the best time periods in history in regards to comforts and conveniences, freedom, medical care, and opportunities to travel. One top of all this, as believers we have been saved by God’s grace, forgiven, and adopted into His eternal family. If we’re filled with the Spirit, the natural result will be to say, “Thank you, thank you, thank you,” and made gratitude a daily part of our lives.

Notice that Paul that we are to give thanks for “everything,” in every circumstance of life we encounter. This means we are to thank God for the good things that happen to us. You might remember the story of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus, and nine of them went on their way rejoicing that their life of affliction was over. Only one came back and thanked Jesus, and Jesus took note of it. When God remembers us, it’s important that we remember Him. Our natural, human impulse is that once our dilemma is solved, once the test result comes back negative, once the check arrives that we’ve been counting on – our tendency is to forget to thank God.

We also are to give thanks to God for the difficult, hard circumstances we encounter. As the Apostle Paul wrote these words about gratitude, he was sitting in a prison in Rome, and humanly speaking, he had every reason to be grumpy and ungrateful. But he wasn’t – as he says in Philippians, he had learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. Even though Paul had endured being beaten, shipwrecked, gone without food or water, and being thrown in prison many times for serving the Lord, he never lost his perspective. He said to the Philippians, “Being in prison has actually served to advance the gospel. I’ve shared Christ with each guard assigned to me, and they have gone and shared the gospel with others they know.” Paul practiced what he preached and was gave thanks in any and every situation.

Giving thanks for everything does not mean that you are thankful for bad, evil things that take place in a fallen world. If you get cancer, I don’t think praising God that you got cancer is what this verse has in mind. Cancer is a result of the fall and not part of God’s original design – neither is divorce or war or death. What you thank God for is that He is sovereignly in control, and you thank Him because He promises to work all things together for good.

This is why James 1:2-4 says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” In the end, you can thank God that no matter what happens to you on earth, you will live forever with God in heaven where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain.

Gratitude is an attitude that we develop by walking in the Spirit, and over time we learn to be grateful in all things. Matthew Henry, the famous Bible commentator, after being robbed, wrote the following in his diary, “I am thankful first because I have never been robbed before. Second, because when they took my wallet, they did not take my life. Third, because although they took my all, it was not much. Fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.” Spirit-filled people are characterized by gratitude in any and every situation.

In verse 21 we come to the third characteristic of a Spirit-filled life, and it’s another surprising characteristic: **submission**. Paul writes, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Submission is a word that can provoke a negative reaction because, in our fallen nature, we resist the idea of submitting. Yet, at the same time, everyone recognizes that without submission things quickly falls into chaos. Submission is designed by God to create order and structure and provide protection and blessing.

The Greek word for submission is *hupotasso*, a combination of two words... *hupo*, meaning “underneath” and *tasso*, meaning “to line up.” Together it has the idea of aligning yourself beneath someone instead of placing yourself over them. Submission is a key element in every area of life. On a football team each player must submit to their coaches and to their assigned roles in order to succeed. In the military there is a highly regimented rank and order. In a band or orchestra each person must follow the lead of the conductor and play their assigned part. In a country, each citizen must submit to it’s governing authorities in order to have a peaceful society. Without submission you have chaos and anarchy and disorder.

Submission is so important that Paul will devote the rest of chapter five and the first nine verses of chapter 6 to three key area of submission – in marriage, in parenting, and in the workplace. We’ll look at each of these in the weeks to come. But here in verse 21 Paul focuses on submission to one another in the body of Christ. We’ve seen through Ephesians that once we’re saved, we become part of a family of fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and God expects us to be part of and play an active role in the local church. If we’re not connected to a local church then the command to submit to one another doesn’t make sense. God’s will is that every believer be part of a church family where we rub shoulders with fellow, like-minded believers and together fulfill God’s plan and purpose for the church.

The Bible instructs each church to select qualified, gifted leaders to oversee the church, and in Hebrews 13 it calls on the church to submit to its leaders so that their work is a joy and not a burden. But here it calls on everyone in the church family to submit to one another. This means that we are to humbly place ourselves underneath others. The attitude of submission is summarized in Philippians 2:3-4 where it says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

It's common to think that a Spirit-filled church is a church full of energy and enthusiasm and emotion, and say, “That church has got the Spirit!” All these can certainly be signs of Spirit-filling, but one of the greatest evidences of being filled with the Spirit is how we treat one another.

- That we value and honor one another above ourselves.
- That we focus on the needs of others and not our own needs.
- That we don't try to dominate or control others and demand that everything is done our way.
- That we work together in a spirit of cooperation to fulfill the purposes of the church.

Without mutual submission you have chaos and disorder, you have hurt feelings and people who come and go. But when you have mutual submission, it creates an environment that is attractive and that people want to be a part of, and where the Holy Spirit is free to work.

Our motive for submission, verse 21 says, is out of reverence for Christ. Christ is our ultimate model of submission. Philippians 2 describes how Jesus, dwelling as God in heaven, left His heavenly glory and submitted Himself to the will of His Father to die for the sins of the world. While He was on earth, He sacrificially gave of His time and energy to minister to others. He looked not to His own needs and interests, but to the needs and interests of others. Although He was God in the flesh, he humbly stooped to wash the feet of His disciples, modeling for them the same humility and submission in which they were to walk.

As we reflect on our passage today, I would invite you to think about your disposition. When others look at your life, what do they see? If they were drawing a picture of you, like with the seven dwarfs, how would they draw you? Do they see a person who sings out of the overflow of a heart filled with joy and gratitude? Do they see a person who is thankful in all circumstances? Do they see a person who is humble and submissive and cooperative – who puts the needs and interests of others above yourself?

These characteristics do not come naturally to any of us – they come supernaturally by being born again and filled with the Holy Spirit of God. As you yield to His control and influence, your disposition will change day-by-day and the presence of God in your life will be unmistakable.