

Semicontinuous
1 Kgs. 2:10–12;
3:3–14
Ps. 111

Complementary
Prov. 9:1–6
Ps. 34:9–14
Eph. 5:15–20
John 6:51–58

Spirit-full Living

Goal for the Session Youth will explore and practice with gratitude the joy of Spirit-filled living as stated in Ephesians.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Ephesians 5:15–20

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Jaime Clark-Soles

Our passage juxtaposes two apparently incongruent facts that mark our daily existence: at one and the same time, the author declares that “the days are evil” (v. 16) *and* enjoins us “always and for everything give thanks to God in the name of Jesus” (v. 20, my translation). Has he forgotten by verse 20 what he declared in verse 16? No more than we have forgotten the prayers of the people by the time we sing the doxology. Indeed, we know this world of which he speaks, and if the language is to be at all useful, it has to cover the whole range of human experience, from realism to hope. Ephesians does this especially well.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” G. Porter Taylor

We are called to give thanks always and everywhere. Give “thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:20). This attitude of thanksgiving requires a radical openness to existence. We are to receive the day the Lord has made, certain that God is in it. Paul certainly distinguishes between the forces of darkness and the forces of light, but he refuses to limit God’s sovereignty or God’s presence. This is not a gnostic world; rather, it is God’s world and God is in all of it.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Paul V. Marshall

Both testaments reject “worldly” wisdom and offer advice on how to be wise in a godly way. This passage repeats the exhortation. The mark of the wise, according to this passage, is using time wisely, and using it to change the world. “Making the most” of the time, or more familiarly, “redeeming” the time (v. 16) carries with it the urgency of a shopper snatching up a bargain. Grab it while you can, the writer urges here. We all know that time we do not use is lost, but once again in Ephesians the writer adds purpose to what might be merely a statement of the wrong to be avoided or the virtue to be acquired.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Richard F. Ward

The value of drunkenness (v. 18) is not as a particular behavior, but as a metaphor. When the church is out of touch with its vocation, it moves through these evil times as one who is intoxicated—satiated and reeling, engaging in regrettable behaviors. If a quest for spiritual formation and maturity in the church displays a desire for balance and integration, drunkenness is the condition of being unfocused, off balance, and out of kilter with “what God wants for you” (v. 17 CEV). So how do we fill in the blank: “The church’s vocation is _____”?

FOCUS SCRIPTURE
Ephesians 5:15–20

Focus on Your Teaching

Most youth in your group will have experienced the exuberance of team spirit at sports games or school spirit during assemblies. What might be more challenging for them to envision is their daily lives as “Spirit-filled.” Paul states that a sign of a Spirit-filled life is being thankful. For some youth the practice of gratitude comes easily. For others, who may have experienced loss or tragedy, it is harder to be thankful. As they explore what it means to be filled with God’s Spirit youth can discover that gratitude can be a gift of connection and transformation.

O God, thank you for the gifts of your Spirit in my life and in the lives of each member of this group. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- Bibles (several different versions or paraphrases)
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- paper
- pencils
- ball
- spoon

For Responding

- option 1: media player
- option 2: copies of Resource Sheet 2, pastels, white paper, Bibles, candles and matches
- option 3: large empty plastic bottles, used magazines and calendars, scissors, glue sticks

For Film Connection

- Brave* (2012), media player

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you choose option 1 in Responding, contact youth and ask them to bring playlists that include songs that express joy and gratitude.

Greet youth as they arrive. Gather in a circle and take turns finishing the following sentences. Use a spoon as a microphone and pass it around the group; only the person holding the microphone can speak. Go around the circle a few times so individuals have a chance to finish more than one sentence.

- ✿ The high point of the past week was . . .
- ✿ I feel very happy when I can . . .
- ✿ I’m thankful for . . .
- ✿ I like to celebrate life by . . .

Explain that one of the themes explored in this week’s Bible reading is being filled with God’s Spirit, helping us to be thankful and grateful. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Session Resources) and invite youth to participate in the Opening prayer based on Psalm 111, the lectionary Psalm for this day. Form two groups to read alternate lines of the prayer, saying the last line together.

EXPLORING

Distribute Bibles and ask youth to find the Letter to the Ephesians. Review some information about the Letter to the Ephesians (see sidebar). Explain that the last two and a half chapters of this letter give some practical instructions for living as God’s people. This week’s reading includes some important advice about living wisely and about people’s relationship to God and with each other.

Ephesian Notes

- Ephesus was an important town in Asia.
- The apostle Paul lived and worked in Ephesus for about three years.
- The letter may not have been written by Paul, but it is similar to his writings.
- It summarizes many of Paul's important teachings.
- It might not have been a letter to one group of people, but instead meant to be passed among a number of churches in Asia Minor.

Invite volunteers to read Ephesians 5:15–20 from several different versions of the Bible.

- ✪ What advice do you hear in these verses about how Christians are to live?

Explain that it was sometimes very challenging to be a Christian during the time when this letter was written. One of the biggest difficulties was that some members of the church in Ephesus wanted to split into different groups. Look again at verses 15–17. In *The Message*, a paraphrase of the Bible these verses read: “Watch your step. Use your head. Make the most of every chance you get . . . Don’t live carelessly.” Ask:

- ✪ How do you think this advice would help the Christians in Ephesus?

The writer of this letter encourages God’s people to be “filled with the Spirit (v. 18). Other verses in this letter offer some ideas about what it means to live by the Spirit. Distribute the following verses among the youth: Ephesians 4:26; 4:29; 4:31; 5:3; 5:4; and the first part of 5:18. Ask them to read their verses and then take turns summarizing each piece of advice in one or two words for the rest of the group. Ask:

- ✪ What other things would you add to this list to describe what it means to be filled with God’s Spirit?

Look again at verse 20, which encourages Christians to “give thanks. . . . at all times.” Ask:

- ✪ Do you think this is possible? Why or why not?
- ✪ When is it hard to be thankful?
- ✪ What can help us to keep an “attitude of gratitude” during hard times?

Form two groups and distribute paper and pencils. Have each group look again at Ephesians 5:15–20 and make two lists: one for the things we should stop doing and the other for the things we should do. Then ask each group to choose an item from one of its lists and talk about how this advice could be applied to situations in life today. Discuss these ideas as a whole group.

Invite youth to look at the poem “Every Day” on Resource Sheet 1 (Session Resources), explaining that these are stanzas for a song. Invite a volunteer to read the poem aloud as the rest of the group claps a quiet rhythm in the background. Ask:

- ✪ What does this poem say about how to live “Spirit-filled lives”?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

- 1. Music Making** Youth will practice the joy of Spirit-filled living by exploring the gifts of music. Take turns listening to the selections of music chosen by participants. Ask youth to talk about how these songs describe joy and gratitude. Invite the group to imagine it has been commissioned to write song lyrics based on this week’s reading from Ephesians. Divide the lyrics among the group and have them rewrite each one. Read these aloud. What kind of music could go with these lyrics to portray the joy of being filled with God’s Spirit?

EASY
PREP

Set up the materials to form three centers: one with pastels and white paper, one with Bibles (different translations would be helpful), and one with several candles and matches.

- Spiritual Practices** Youth will explore the joy of Spirit-filled living by learning about Spiritual practices. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Spirit-filled Living) and invite youth to spend some quiet time reflecting on the questions at the top of the page. Then ask them to participate in one or more of the activities to learn about some practices. Encourage them to find ways to include a spiritual practice in their daily lives.
- Collage Bottles** Youth will practice with gratitude the joy of Spirit-filled living by creating “thankful collages.” Recall the advice given in Ephesians 5:20 to give thanks to God at all times. Distribute magazines and calendars and invite youth to cut out images and words illustrating things for which they thankful and glue these onto the bottles, overlapping the images to form collages. Encourage youth to keep these as reminders to practice having an attitude of gratitude each day.

CLOSING

This week’s reading from the letter to the Ephesians reminds us that we are called to practice gratitude, giving thanks everywhere. Gather in a circle and throw the ball back and forth across the circle. As each person catches it, she or he gives thanks for something. Continue until all members of the group have had a chance to contribute several times. Then sit in a circle and ask youth to spend a few moments in silence. Say:

We give thanks to God for all our blessings . . .

(Name something for which you are thankful and invite youth to add some of the thanksgivings that have been named in the game.)

O God, help us to live our lives as a prayer of thanksgiving to you. Amen.

■ ENHANCEMENT

FILM CONNECTION

Brave is the story of Merida, a Scottish princess, whose life has been mapped out for her. Merida decides she wants to be free to follow her own path full of joy, adventure, and love. Watch the scene that shows the expectations Merida must face in her life and the struggles she has (Chapter 2: 4:25—9:16).

- ✿ What type of pressure does Merida’s mother place on her?
- ✿ Where does Merida’s true joy lie? What does she do to balance her life?
- ✿ What are some ways that we can find true joy, God’s joy, in our lives?

Session Resources

Opening prayer

- Group one: I give thanks to God with everything I have.
Group two: I'm so grateful for all that God has done for me.
Group one: God's love lifts me up when I'm feeling down.
Group two: God helps me to keep going when I want to give up.
Group one: God welcomes me back when I get off track.
Group two: God forgives me when I mess up.
Group one: God's generosity never runs out.
Group two: God's love lasts forever.

All: Thank you, God! Amen.

Every Day

Every day
I will offer you, loving God, my heart and mind
every way I discover you
in the work your hand has signed;
help me see I'm your image,
and you have dreamed what I might be—
every day
in your Spirit, I'll find the love and energy!

Every day
I will look to Christ, and give thanks for wine and bread,
through the pain and emptiness
where your world cries to be fed;
help me see I can work for change,
and wherever I might be,
every day
in your Spirit, I'll find the love and energy!

Every day
I will walk with you, answer your compassion's claim,
find my feet and my bearings
to try deep places in your name:
help me see I can speak for the faith,
when you're at work in me,
every day
in your Spirit, I'll find the love and energy!

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Holy Spirit
Espíritu Santo
Espírito Santo
Saint-Esprit
Heilige Geist

Spirit-filled Living

Spiritual Practices

Spiritual practices are activities that bring us closer to God. Spend a few moments thinking about the ways and places that you feel God's presence and the ways that help you connect to God's Spirit in your life. Answer the following questions on your own (you won't be asked to share your answers):

1. Circle all of the words that are most appealing to you:

God Jesus Faith Spirit Nature Creator Divine Silence Dance
Helping Moving Party Open Praying Talking Singing
Breathing Reading Writing Making art Walking Drawing
Sharing Bible Listening Trusting Teaching Dark Light Wisdom
Family Tears Laughter Happiness Sadness Routine Newness
Stillness Compassion Mercy Hope Ancient Stars Earth Fire
Water Air Drama Candlelight Poetry Gratitude Beauty Quiet

2. How might these words/activities help you to experience God's Spirit?

Spiritual Practices Ideas

People through the ages have used many different activities to help them feel close to God's Spirit. Here are some ideas that you can try:

Creating. Sit with an empty piece of paper and think about some of the things you are experiencing in your life. Take some pastels and begin drawing. Notice what God's Spirit may be saying to you through this kind of prayer.

Praying the Scriptures. Choose a passage from the Bible and read it slowly, aloud or silently. Read it again, noticing words that seem to be saying something about your life now. Listen to what God's Spirit may be saying to you through this kind of prayer.

Candle prayer. Sit quietly in front of a lit candle. Notice the light. Breathe in the stillness of the moment. Repeat a phrase such as "The light of God's Spirit fills me. Thank you, God."