JM Jason Mayfield

SERMON OUTLINE FOR PASTORS

FILLING THE SPIRIT-FILLED LIFE

Four Simple Ways to Nurture a Spirit-Filled Life

> Your life is going to be filled with something. Be mindful of what you fill it with, and fill it with things that nurture a Spirit-filled life: worship music, Spirit-filled preaching, serving others and generosity.

MAIN TEXT
Ephesians 5:18-19

SERIES
We're Openly Spirit Filled, Week 5 of 5

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BY
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AT A GLANCE

THE MESSAGE

1. Frame: Paul is subverting the culture, not moralizing about alcohol. Your life is going to get filled with something. Be mindful of what you fill it with.
2. Worship music. A simple swap at the ear gate. Secular music is not sinful unless it is, but take an inventory.
3. Spirit-filled preaching during the day. Faith comes by hearing. Bad preaching beats no preaching. You make better decisions when you are full of the Word.
4. Serving others. Gets you outside your own circumstances, which is where the flesh keeps you.
5. Generosity. Tithing and sowing enter you into a cycle of all grace abounding.



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READ THE ARTICLE

jasonmayfield.com/messages/filling-the-spirit-filled-life

PREACHING NOTES

Before You Preach

This message closes a five-week series on being openly Spirit filled. The earlier weeks taught what it means to be filled with the Spirit. This one is practical: once you are Spirit filled, how do you fill your life in a way that nurtures it?

Say up front that this is not a message about alcohol. Ephesians 5:18 is often preached as a temperance verse, but Paul is speaking into a culture shaped by the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine, where drinking and singing went together as a way to reach the divine. That background explains why Paul moves from "do not get drunk with wine" straight to singing.

The four points are deliberately "lower on the shelf." The go-to answer is always read your Bible and pray, and that stays true, but this message hands people simple swaps they can make this week. Keep it light and practical. It also sets up the next series on generosity, so land the fourth point with energy.

Introduction

We are closing out our series on being openly Spirit filled. We are not closeted Charismatics or private Pentecostals. We are an openly Spirit-filled church, though not an obnoxiously Spirit-filled one. Today: what it looks like to fill a Spirit-filled life. That is F-I-L-L-I-N-G, filling. (Though you are in a good church to feel it, too.)

> **EPHESIANS 5:18-19** ESV
>
> [18] And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, [19] addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

THIS IS NOT A MESSAGE ABOUT ALCOHOL

Make the clarification early, because some will assume the verse is headed toward a lecture or a loophole.

- Personally, I am a teetotaler. I have never tasted alcohol, and I do not endorse drinking it.
- Some of you do drink. There is no condemnation here. Sincere believers and whole denominations land in different places on social drinking. In the Assemblies of God we are not fond of it, and in my opinion your life will be better if you avoid it.
- Preachers who are not reading the Bible and praying tend to argue over frivolous things, and this is one of them. That is not where we are headed today.

THE STRANGE PART OF THE VERSE

Being filled with the Spirit instead of with wine makes sense on the surface, especially next to Acts 2, where onlookers mocked the Spirit-filled disciples, "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13), and Peter answered, "these people are not drunk, as you suppose" (Acts 2:15).

What does not seem to fit is the singing. Do not get drunk, but sing? They look disconnected, until you see the culture Paul was writing into.

Paul Is Subverting the Culture

Ephesians 5 is quietly subversive. In the household instructions Paul speaks directly to wives, to children and to slaves: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22); "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1); "Bondservants, obey your earthly masters" (Ephesians 6:5). Many read that only as a rigid chain of command. But in the Greco-Roman world, wives, children and slaves were placed under the authority of the head of the household and had little legal standing of their own. The surprise is that Paul addresses them at all. He talks to them as people who matter to God.

In Ephesians 5:18, Paul is doing the same thing. He is speaking into the culture.

THE WORSHIP OF DIONYSUS

The Greek world had many gods, and most people picked a patron god to devote themselves to. One of the most widely worshiped was **Dionysus**, the god of wine, festivity and religious ecstasy, worshiped by the Romans as Bacchus. His worship was not on the edges of society. It was woven into daily life across Greece and Rome.

His followers traveled in organized bands (the *thiasos*) of devotees and musicians, moving from city to city and bringing the worship with them. You did not have to go to the temple. The worship came to you. They sang, accompanied by wine, until they reached a kind of ecstasy, trying to lose themselves and be filled with the divine.

Pause here and let the congregation hear the echo: a traveling band, music, a crowd chasing an encounter. It should make us ask what we are really filling ourselves with when we gather.

That road leads to a false promise. You can drink and sing until the cows come home, and you will never be filled with divinity that way. The best you get is a hangover. That is the prosperity of worshiping Dionysus.

EVEN IF YOU ARE NOT PARTICIPATING

We tend to think of our culture as mostly Christian. In Ephesus, the church was an outrageous affront to normal, and the culture around it was saturated with Dionysus worship. Even believers who were saved and full of the Holy Ghost were surrounded by it. It could easily seep into anyone who was not on alert.

So Paul is not just passing along a rule. He is saying, "I know what is going on around you. You do not have to be shaped by it."

Paul's point: you are going to be filled with something. Television, news, the radio on your commute, conversations at the table, church, ballgames. Your life is going to get filled. Be mindful of what you fill it with, because if you are not careful, you give the culture an open door, and it influences you in ways you never notice.

Feeding the Flesh or the Spirit

Galatians 5 sets the works of the flesh beside the fruit of the Spirit. Something is always being nurtured in your life: the flesh or the Spirit.

> GALATIANS 5:16-24 ESV
>
> 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

The flesh is not always sinful. Sometimes the flesh is just selfish.

Whatever you fill your life with feeds one or the other. There is an old saying, often told as a Native American proverb: the wolf you feed is the one that grows. Feed the flesh and the flesh grows. Feed your spirit and your spirit grows.

THE CHURCH USED TO DO THIS BY DEFAULT

We can be grateful that much of the church's legalism is behind us. But some of that legalism had a measure of consecration built in.

- We burned vinyl records and broke CDs, and then listened only to Christian music. It filled our lives differently by default.
- We had a lot of church: Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, a prayer meeting and rehearsal. We were constantly filling our spirits.
- We had far less incoming noise. Twenty years ago, the only thing a phone could do was play Snake. Now the noise is in your hand all day.

Nobody is burning CDs today. But we have to be intentional about what we used to get by default.

Today: four simple ways to fill a Spirit-filled life.

The go-to answer is always to read your Bible and pray. It is like epoxy flooring, a two-step process, and it will change your life. That remains true. But today, here are four things a little lower on the shelf.

1. Worship Music

This is a simple swap, like trading a soda for something that is actually good for you. And it comes straight from the text: instead of being filled with wine and the songs of the culture, be filled with the Spirit, "addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Ephesians 5:19).

Music is part of daily life, and it is one of the main ways the culture makes its way into us. Even when you reject the culture, it is pervasive enough to get into you, with your consent, if you are not intentional.

- **Secular music is not sinful (unless it is).** You are not going to hell for listening to it. But take an inventory of what you are allowing in all the time.
- In the South we can treat country music like Christian music. But listen to enough songs about fishing, drinking, trouble with my woman and losing my job, and do not be surprised when your life starts sounding like the songs. Guard the "ear gate."
- The church used to paint all secular music as the darkest rock on the radio. Much of it is just bubblegum pop. But the days of innocent music are long gone. Read the lyrics of some of today's popular songs.

Some of you feel oppressed when you are actually just depressed, because you keep listening to music that is bad for you.

POSITIVITY BUILDS FAITH

What you consistently hear, speak and dwell on shapes what you believe is possible. Negativity breeds doubt. Positivity, especially Word-based positivity, creates an environment where faith can take root, and when you believe something is possible, it is easier to believe God will do what He said He would do.

Personal example: Be honest with the congregation. I listen to secular music; I am a musician and my taste is broad. But my kids will tell you that in the morning, it is worship music in the car. Why? Because I want to order my day toward the Lord. If your pastor is guarding his mornings, it may be time to change what you play at 8 a.m.

2. Spirit-Filled Preaching During the Week

This is another simple swap. You are constantly filling your ears with talking. Make sure some of it builds your faith.

> **ROMANS 10:17** ESV
>
> [17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

The 30 to 90 minutes of preaching on Sunday will not get it done by itself. Find a preacher who ministers to you, break a message into pieces and listen on the way to work. Sometimes you will not even catch everything they said, but something they said will make you hear something from God, and your faith gets stirred.

- If ESPN is on in the background, a preacher can be on in the background. Nothing is wrong with sports, but nurture your spirit too.
- Turn off the 24-hour news. It is the same story on repeat, and the other channel tells you the opposite. You do not need it all day.
- You do not have to give five hours of your week to a talk show host or a podcast about the latest conspiracy theory.

Bad preaching is better than no preaching, because at least you got some of the Word. There is intrinsic value in keeping the Word in your ears.

You make better decisions when you are full of the Word.

Illustration: Sully and the human factor. In January 2009, geese struck Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger's airliner just after takeoff from LaGuardia, and he landed it on the Hudson River. Every passenger and crew member survived. In the investigation that followed, simulator pilots who turned back right away could make it to an airport. But that left out the human factor: the time it takes a person to recognize what has happened and decide under pressure. When the investigators added a delay of about 35 seconds before the turn, the simulated flights did not make it back. The 2016 film *Sully* dramatized that hearing.

You are living under the human factor, too. Most days the decisions are small. Then something of critical importance shows up, and you have to decide fast. When the Word of God is built up inside you, your decisions bounce off it, even when you do not realize it, and you come out with a better decision every time.

3. Serving Others

> **ROMANS 8:5** ESV
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> [5] For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

The culture feeds the flesh, and the flesh is constantly thinking about itself. You can watch a show, hear a song or turn on the news and walk away thinking about you. That is not always sin. Sometimes it is just selfishness. You can get trapped in your own desires and your own circumstances.

Getting outside yourself and considering the needs of others brings perspective and makes you grateful for your own life.

- **The Neighbor Box.** A food pantry shaped like a little house, stocked to help families who have come on hard times. Helping someone going through more than you are can be the wake-up call you need. (Update the local example for your church.)
- **Illustration: the hospital.** When I was hospitalized with COVID, all I could do was lie there and watch television, including reality shows about wealthy people bickering over small things. Lying in that bed, I would have loved to have their problems. When you are around people in a harder situation than yours, you see that yours may not be as bad as you think.
- When you serve people less fortunate, you will become either arrogant or grateful. I believe you will become grateful.

Serving also comes back to you:

> **PROVERBS 11:25** ESV
>
> [25] Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.

Illustration: Section 8. A friend who owns rental properties only rents to Section 8 tenants. When I asked why, he said, "The government writes me my checks," and they always arrive on time. When you serve people, your reward does not come from people. It comes from the Lord, and when the Lord pays, it always shows up on time.

JOIN THE TEAM

Easter Sunday is coming. If you are not serving yet, now is the time to jump in. Studies from Lifeway and Church Answers show that first-time guests often decide whether to return based on how they are greeted, treated and seated, because first impressions matter. Help us greet, treat and seat our guests in a way that leads them toward a life-transforming encounter with the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Update the serving opportunity and date for your church.)

4. Generosity

When we fill our lives with generosity, we nurture Spirit-filled living.

> **2 CORINTHIANS 9:7-8** ESV
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> [7] Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. [8] And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

When you tithe and sow financial seed, you enter a cycle where God makes "all grace abound to you" (2 Corinthians 9:8). Not some grace, all grace. I do not fully understand how it works, but I know that it works.

Say it boldly: **prosperity is a defining mark of Spirit-filled living.** Generosity and Spirit-filled living go hand in hand. Which comes first is a chicken-or-the-egg question, but they go together.

Part of the reason, I believe, is that it is nearly impossible to part with a significant sum of money, with nothing in return but obedience and faith, and stay unchanged. **If you have ever wondered how to have more faith, write a tithe check.** The first one is a real bridge to cross, and it is good to feel it.

WHAT IS COMING

Next, we begin a series on our next value: we are passionate about giving generously. Tell the church plainly why: the values and the calendar were set long before any current circumstances. The Lord is building His church (Matthew 16:18), so there is no need to manipulate anyone into giving. Invite them to come ready to hear what the Bible says about money.

Conclusion

You are going to fill your life with something, so fill it with things that nurture Spirit-filled living.

- **Worship music.** A simple swap: change the station or the playlist.
- **Spirit-filled preaching.** Find a preacher who resonates with you and trade an hour of news for an hour of the Word.
- **Serving others.** Get outside your own circumstances. Dwelling on them feeds the flesh; seeing how good God has been nurtures your spirit.
- **Generosity.** Tithe and sow, and enter the cycle of all grace abounding.

These are easy to start, and they pay huge spiritual dividends. If you receive the Word today, give the Lord a big praise.



ABOUT

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