

Fill 'Er Up

Ephesians 5:15-20

Introduction

My brother Tim and I operated a lawn mowing business when we were in high school. We had a riding mower and two push mowers and each week we took care of 19 lawns in our small town of Van Buren, IN. Most of the lawns were small enough that we each operated a push mower, so it was always a "rock-paper-scissors" decision whenever we had the opportunity to ride.

As a part of the business operation, my dad negotiated a deal with us. He would help us maintain the mowers and provide the gasoline we needed to operate them if we agreed not to charge him for mowing our family lawn. We thought that was a pretty good deal.

Here was the catch: The gasoline Dad provided was stored in the gas tank of the family car ... so whenever our five gallon gas can was empty, Tim and I had to syphon the gas we needed out of the car. Another rock-paper-scissors decision.

Just in case you have never had this experience, let me tell you how it works. Pay close attention because it is highly scientific.

- Step one: You insert a piece of hose down into the car's gas tank. We used a four foot section of clear plastic hose we bought at Hemmick's Hardware.
- Step two: This is the scientific part. You apply Aristotle's Horror vacui postulate. That postulate was first stated about 300 years before the birth of Christ. In plain English it means "nature abhors a vacuum." In practical terms it means you suck all the air out of the hose.
- Step three: You stop sucking before you get a mouth full of gas. Because, since nature abhors a vacuum, the gas runs up the hose to take the place of air you have just removed.

Nature abhors a vacuum. Something will rush in to fill in that empty space. It cannot stay empty. Jesus illustrated that principle in Luke 11. There He describes a situation in which a demon was cast out of a person, creating a spiritual vacuum. The person didn't fill that space with anything else, so the demon returned and brought along seven other demons. Jesus concluded:

And the last state of that person is worse than the first. (Luke 11:26b)

It is that same principle that Paul teaches here in Ephesians. Every one of us is filled with something. You cannot be empty. Nature will not allow you to be empty. So since you are going to be filled with something, Paul encourages you to:

... be filled with the Spirit ... (Ephesians 5:18)

Throughout this whole 5th chapter, Paul teaches his first readers (and now ... us) how to live a life that pleases God, The verses prior to today's reading talk about our character traits. For example, one of the great verses in that section says:

Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness. (Ephesians 5:11)

In the verses that follow today's reading Paul teaches his readers how the Christian life impacts our key relationships: husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees. And in it all he drives home this simple point:

Whatever you allow to fill the empty spaces of your life will determines the quality of the life you lead.

In today's text Paul begins his teaching with ...

#1: A Precautionary Word

In fact, he states the precaution twice.

***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. (Ephesians 5:15, 17)*

You see, living the Christian life doesn't happen automatically. It requires us to be careful. It involves conscious action on our part. Each day, Jesus said, we need to consciously pick up our cross and follow Him.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. (Luke 9:23)

Some days living as Jesus wants feels like coasting; it is so easy. Other days, however, it is a hard choice. Do we live life as God intends or do we do what our human nature is pushing us to do? Be very careful ... don't be foolish.

We never outgrow that. No matter how far along in our faith journey we may be or how spiritually holy the rest of the world may view us to be, it is a daily decision ... pick up your cross and follow me. Be careful ... don't be foolish.

The Christian world is in shock these days as story after story rolls off the presses about Bill Hybels the now-former senior pastor at Willow Creek Church. Hybels was a man whose faith and whose ministry was worthy of modeling. I own five of his books on such topics as prayer, evangelism and Christian leadership. Today his 25,000 member church is imploding as his secret life is unraveling. Hybels preached it but he didn't live in a way that was consistent with the precaution Paul offers here: Be careful ... don't be foolish.

Paul moves from a precautionary word to:

#2: A Prescriptive Word

He doesn't just give the "don't." He also offers the "do."

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit ... (Ephesians 5:18)

It would be an error of interpretation to make this teaching about wine only. Paul is trying to communicate that only the Holy Spirit can lead us toward the life God intends for us to live. His illustration is alcohol because that was obviously an issue to his first readers. But he could have easily used any other substance instead:

- Don't wrap your life around pornography
- Don't become driven by the things you own or wish you owned
- Don't become drunk on the applause of other people
- Don't let your occupation define your character
- Don't fill your life with social media
- Don't let your families allow you to push God into second place

Pick your favorite vice, and it fits the teaching. When God created you, Paul says, He designed you to be filled with His Spirit. But if you don't allow the Spirit to occupy that space, something else will. Because nature abhors a vacuum. Something will take over. You cannot be empty. It's just not possible.

And because people don't listen to this teaching, we see all around us people who are full of guilt, depression, addiction, anger. None of which is the life God intended.

Be careful ... don't be foolish ... let the Holy Spirit of God fill every cell of your life.

And then Paul moves on to offer:

#3: A Predictive Word

When our lives are filled with the Holy Spirit (rather than being filled with any other thing), Paul predicts that it will be seen in the way we live.

... 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 ... (Ephesians 5:19-20)

Specifically, Paul says ...

- First, it will show up in how you talk to one another. Instead of the bickering and unwholesome talk described earlier in Ephesians, our shared conversation takes on the flavor of the things of God – the kinds of things that end up being set to music.
- Second, it will be evident by how your communication with God. Your worship life increases – things like prayer, Bible study. Throughout Scripture worship is seen

in the music of the believer – so much so that the longest book of the Bible is the original hymnal of the church.

- The third way in which the Spirit's control of your life will be seen is in the increased level of your gratitude. We express our gratitude when we realize what someone else is doing in our lives. Spirit-filled people are a grateful people. They give thanks in every circumstance.
- The fourth evidence is in the verse right after our reading stops, but it is worth mentioning here. People whose lives are controlled by the Holy Spirit willingly submit to one another – they willingly serving one others rather than trying to dominate them so that they can exalt themselves.

APPLICATION

There you have it:

- A precautionary word (why you need to do it)
- A prescriptive word (what needs to be done)
- A predictive word (what happens if you do)

Now comes the practical part of making it happen. How do we make sure our lives are filled with the Spirit instead of something else? In one of our staff devotional times last week, we were talking about a similar subject. But in that conversation, we were focusing on how we remind ourselves to keep moving forward in our faith journey.

- Janet mentioned that she keeps Psalm 19:14 right by her kitchen sink:
*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.*
- Darla uses Psalm 51:10:
*Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

The prayer St. Francis is another good resource:

"Lord, make me an instrument of your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy.

What fills you up?

Amen.