

SESSION 5 - CONNECTED IN SERVICE

SMALL GROUP MEMBER BOOK



# CONNECTED

MY LIFE IN THE CHURCH



THOM S. RAINER

## GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

In order to make the most of this study and to ensure a richer group experience, it's recommended that all group participants read through the teaching and discussion content in full before each group meeting. As a leader, it is also a good idea for you to be familiar with this content and prepared to summarize it for your group members as you move through the material each week.

Each session of the Bible study is made up of three sections:

### 1. THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE.

An introduction to the theme of the session and its connection to everyday life, along with a brief overview of the primary Scripture text. This section also includes an icebreaker question or activity.

### 2. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

This comprises the bulk of each session and includes the primary Scripture text along with explanations for key words and ideas within that text. This section also includes most of the content designed to produce and maintain discussion within the group.

### 3. LIVE IT OUT.

The final section focuses on application, using bulleted summary statements to answer the question, So what? As the leader, be prepared to challenge the group to apply what they learned during the discussion by transforming it into action throughout the week.

For group leaders, the Connected Leader Guide contains several features and tools designed to help you lead participants through the material provided.

## QUESTION 1—ICEBREAKER

These opening questions and/or activities are designed to help participants transition into the study and begin engaging the primary themes to be discussed. Be sure everyone has a chance to speak, but maintain a low-pressure environment.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Each "What Does the Bible Say?" section features at least four questions designed to spark discussion and interaction within your group. These questions encourage critical thinking, so be sure to allow a period of silence for participants to process the question and form an answer.

The Connected Leader Guide also contains follow-up questions and optional activities that may be helpful to your group, if time permits.

## DVD CONTENT

Each video features Eric Geiger interviewing Dr. Thom Rainer about the primary themes found in the session. We recommend that you show this video in one of three places: (1) At the beginning of group time, (2) After

the icebreaker, or (3) After a quick review and/or summary of "What Does the Bible Say?" A video summary is included as well. You may choose to use this summary as background preparation to help you guide the group.

The Leader Guide contains additional questions to help unpack the video and transition into the discussion. For a digital Leader Guide with commentary, see the "Leader Tools" folder on the DVD-ROM in your Leader Kit.

## **SESSION 5 - CONNECTED IN SERVICE**

The Point: Serving in the church is not about what I want.

The Passage: Ephesians 5:15-21

The Setting: Living out the theology of redemption encompasses much more than observing a brief checklist of “bad” behaviors to replace with “good” ones. It involves a complete lifestyle change—how you walk or live. It means living as wise people rather than continuing to follow the foolish walk of the non-Christian. It means choosing to submit to the Holy Spirit rather than fleshly appetites. It means interacting with other Christians in a manner consistent with your connection to them, that is, the person of Jesus Christ.

### ***Question #1: What is something you always wanted but never got?***

Optional activity: Divide participants into two or three subgroups. Instruct each subgroup to design a not-for-profit ministry that could impact the world in a positive way. Use the following questions to help group members think through the different aspects involved in creating such a ministry:

- What would be your ministry’s primary purpose?
- How would your ministry be financed?
- What kinds of employees or volunteers would your ministry require?
- What obstacles would you need to overcome in order to get your ministry off the ground?

Call the group back together after 5-10 minutes. As time allows, encourage group members to share the key elements of their ministry ideas.

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Video Summary: This week’s video message speaks to how we use the time we have to connect through service. The word used in verse 16 for “time” is *kairos*. This word choice is significant because Paul was communicating that we have a finite amount of time and we need to make the most of it. This passage should communicate to us that we need to approach our service as a part of the body with a sense of urgency.

### **The POINT**

***Serving in the church is not about what I want.***

### **The Bible Meets Life**

It’s not about us.

Have you ever wondered what it takes to meet the demands of a diva? For one rock star, those demands include a 200-person entourage with 30 bodyguards, personal chefs, a yoga instructor, an acupuncturist, and an on-site dry cleaner. This person needs 20 international phone lines and lots of flowers in the dressing room—lilies and roses (white and light pink only) with stems trimmed to exactly 6 inches. Oh, and the hotel room must be emptied of all furniture, because she ships her own furniture directly from home.

“Outrageous!” we say. Yet Christians sometimes approach church life with a similar mentality. We expect the church to cater to our preferences and serve our needs. Sometimes we even get angry and threaten to leave when things don’t go our way.

Today we’ll explore what the church might be like if members focused less on getting what we want and concentrated more on serving others.

WATCH THE DVD SEGMENT FOR SESSION 5, THEN USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS TO TRANSITION INTO THE STUDY.

- In what ways does the sense of urgency communicated in this passage change the way you view your responsibility to connect with other believers through service?
- You have a limited amount of time. What will you do with it?

## What Does the Bible Say?

ASK FOR A VOLUNTEER TO READ ALOUD EPHESIANS 5:15-21.

*Ephesians 4:25-32*

<sup>15</sup> Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise—<sup>16</sup> making the most of the time, because the days are evil. <sup>17</sup> So don’t be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. <sup>18</sup> And don’t get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless actions, but be filled by the Spirit:

<sup>19</sup> speaking to one another  
in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,  
singing and making music  
from your heart to the Lord,

<sup>20</sup> giving thanks always for everything  
to God the Father  
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

<sup>21</sup> submitting to one another  
in the fear of Christ.

Response: What’s your initial reaction to these verses?

- What questions do you have about these verses?
- What new application do you hope to get from this passage?

## Key Words

**Filled by the Spirit (v. 18)**—“Spirit” here is the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. Being filled with the Spirit reflects being under His leadership and empowerment.

TURN THE GROUP’S ATTENTION TO EPHESIANS 5:15-17.

## Question #2: Who has been a model of wisdom in your life?

Be sure the group is responding in a way consistent with Ephesians 5:15-17. This question allows group members to unpack their definition of wisdom by describing an individual in their lives.

Optional follow-up: How would you define or summarize the concept of wisdom?

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#### MOVE TO EPHESIANS 5:18

Paul urged church members to avoid foolishness and live wisely. Of course, everyone wants to be wise. We don't intend to act foolishly. But you may be surprised at the level of foolishness present in today's churches. My research team conducted a survey in which they questioned churches identified as self-serving and inwardly focused. The results revealed 10 behavior patterns of members in such churches:

1. **Worship wars:** Church members clash over music styles, instrumentation, and order of service.
2. **Prolonged minutia meetings:** Leaders spend an inordinate amount of time in meetings.
3. **Facilities focus:** The church places a high priority on protecting rooms and furniture.
4. **Program driven:** Programs become an end instead of a means to greater ministry.
5. **Inwardly focused budget:** A disproportionate share of the budget is used for the needs and comforts of church members rather than reaching people outside the church.
6. **Inordinate demands for pastoral care:** Church members place unreasonable expectations on the pastor and staff to care for them—even when they have no significant need.
7. **Attitudes of entitlement:** Church members act as if they deserve special treatment.
8. **Greater concern about change than the gospel:** Church members get fired up if you move their classroom, but they don't care much about participating in the work of the gospel.
9. **Anger and hostility:** Members regularly express hostility toward staff and other members.
10. **Evangelistic apathy:** Members care more about their own needs than the greater eternal needs of the world and community around them.

These patterns are foolish because they work against our mission as church members and followers of Christ. We need to live wisely, which means serving others in a way that's motivated by God's priorities, not our personal wants and comfort.

#### ***Question #3: What are the implications of being filled by the Spirit on a daily basis?***

The emphasis in this question is on the regular, or "daily," practice of being filled by the Spirit. Group members should discuss what this implies about how they should use their time and energy.

Optional follow-up: Every Christian is indwelt by the Spirit, but not every Christian heeds the direction and instruction of the Holy Spirit. What are the implications when we don't allow Him to fill us on a daily basis as it relates to serving through the church?

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SPENDING TIME

Create a pie chart to show how you spend your time during a typical day.

What are some ways to incorporate serving others into each section of your day?

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## MOVE TO EPHESIANS 5:19-21.

It’s our nature to be selfish. It’s our nature to want others to serve us rather than be the servants. So how do we make the change to live wisely among our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ? Is it just a matter of stiffening our resolve and willing ourselves to serve whether we like it or not?

No. According to Paul, the answer lies not in seeking greater control, but in surrendering control to the Holy Spirit (v. 18). Daily submission to the Spirit helps us bear the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control (see Gal. 5:22-23)—in our relationships.

To “be filled” with the Spirit is to be controlled and empowered by Him—but it’s not a one-time event. The verb suggests continuous action. It really means to “go on being filled,” indicating a daily process of submission to the Spirit. Just as Jesus said His followers must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Him (see Luke 9:23), we must daily surrender control of our lives to the Spirit. The Spirit then motivates us to make God’s priorities our passions.

Look at the example of the early Christians. The Spirit showed His presence and power in their lives when church members sold their possessions and shared daily with those in need (see Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37). The first Christians were characterized by an attitude of willing self-sacrifice in which generosity won out over selfishness. The early Christians were also serious about sharing their faith (see Acts 2:14-41). God’s priorities became their priorities, and they were driven by a passion to share the gospel.

Likewise, when we live under the influence of the Spirit, we will serve others, give generously, and share our faith rather than focus on getting what we want out of church. We’ll be empowered to live as God wants us to live when we submit to His Spirit.

***“We will never find joy in church membership when we are constantly seeking things our way.”***  
**—Thom Rainer, I am A Church Member**

#### **Question #4: What changes must we make in order to serve the way God wants?**

Encourage group members to examine the text more closely as they consider changes they can make to become more effective at serving. Point out the differences between an impulse that originates in the heart and a sense of obligation.

Optional follow-up: What benefits might you expect personally when you make these changes?

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Ephesians 5:19-21

In verses 19-21, Paul described the influence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Believers filled by the Spirit choose to fill their speech with praises for God (v. 19), continually give thanks to God (v. 20), and submit to one another (v. 21). These three attributes are the opposite of entitlement.

Being filled by the Holy Spirit affects the way we live each day—it changes our actions and attitudes. We experience a genuine appreciation for what God has done in us and through us, we recognize that we’re undeserving recipients of God’s grace and mercy, and we live in a state of continual wonder at everything we’ve been given. Such an attitude of praise and gratitude compels us not only to serve God, but also to serve one another.

Jesus, the Servant King, set the ultimate example for how to humble ourselves this way. The cross was not Jesus’ preference (see Luke 22:42), but He declined His preferences, desires, and comfort—and He did it for our benefit. To follow Jesus is to do the same for our brothers and sisters in His body, the church.

All Christians are to practice submission. Now, it’s easy for us to say “I’ll submit when she submits” or “I’ll sacrifice after he sacrifices.” But we’re not responsible for the way others behave—even other Christians in the church. We’re responsible for the way we behave. Therefore, we don’t have to wait for others in the church to submit, serve, or offer genuine praises to God. We can take the first steps in obedience to Christ and through the influence of His Spirit.

#### **Question #5: What does it mean to submit to one another in the context of a local church?**

This question reinforces the point that as church members we must put aside personal stake and gain and submit to one another. You may ask the group to explore the application of “submitting” in their relationships with one another within the body.

Optional follow-up: What actions or attitudes empower us to submit in this way?

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Optional follow-up: What actions or attitudes hinder our ability to demonstrate mutual submission?

Note: The following question does not appear in the group member book. Use it in your group discussion as time allows.

QUESTION 6: What benefits have you received from serving in your local church?

This is an opportunity for group members to share experiences. These experiences are both testimony and teaching moments.

Optional activity: Direct group members to the activity labeled “Spending Time.” Encourage participants to share practical tips for serving others throughout the day.

# Live It Out

## Live It Out

Are you a giver or a taker in the body of Christ? Here are some practical ideas for engaging your church the right way:

- **Assess yourself.** Look again at the patterns of self-centered churches (listed on pp. 48-49). Take a moment to consider whether you contribute to any of these patterns in your church.
- **Accentuate the positive.** Make a list of everything you like best about your local church.

(make your list)

- **Jump in.** Work with leaders at your church to identify a ministry in which your service will meet a need. Then take the plunge and serve with wisdom.

Submission is countercultural in the world today, which means it can be tough to bend our will to God's Spirit—and especially to other members in the body of Christ. But it's worth it. Because the church is not about us.

Challenge: Submission is countercultural in the world today. It can be tough to bend our will to God's Spirit—and especially to other members in the body of Christ. But it's worth it. Consciously practice submission this week. Each morning, ask the Lord to guide your thoughts, attitudes, words, and actions. At the end of the week, evaluate how being sensitive to His leading and choosing to submit made a difference in the way you lived.

Pray: Ask for prayer requests and ask group members to pray for the different requests as intercessors. As the leader, close this time by asking the Lord to show each of you how you can more selflessly serve your church.