

Ephesians 5:18–21 | “Spirit-Filled Community”
Preached on October 26, 2025 by Pastor Matt Brown

Please turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 5:18–21 this morning, as we will be back in our study of Ephesians. *[pauseeee]*

What has been your experience in the different communities that you have been a part of? *[pausee]*

Now “community” defined broadly is simply a group of people linked together because of something in common.

So you could say that Clearfield is a community because we are linked by living in the same place. *[pause]*

Having your son or daughter in a school means that you are a part of the ‘school community’ in some ways.

Or maybe you have been a part of some other group, like a mom’s group, which is a community. *[pauseeee]*

What has been your experience in these “communities”?

Has it been pleasant or unpleasant? Good or bad? *[pauseeee]*

Sadly, a lot of people have had bad experiences in communities that were supposed to *feel* like a community, but felt like the farthest thing from it. *[pause]*

Though they were a part of it, they felt deep loneliness. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe that has been *your* experience—though you were a part of some community, you felt like you were always kept at arm’s length.

And being kept at arm’s length or being ignored causes deep pain. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you weren’t rejected or ignored, but maybe you didn’t find the deep and lasting relationships you hoped to find. *[pause]*

Have you been a part of a community that was superficial or shallow?

Everything was kept on the surface, making it difficult to get to know others beyond the mundane. *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you’ve experienced a community where everyone is bitter or complaining, and everything was just so *negative*. *[pause]*

You don’t leave the community uplifted, encouraged, or more joyous, but the opposite. *[pauseeee]*

Some of you have had horrific experiences with communities that you have been involved in that are filled with competition, back-stabbing, malice, gossip, and fighting.

The kind of community where tension is always thick, and others are sowing seeds of division. [pause]

Maybe even though time has passed you *still* experience hurt by what happened in certain communities that you have been a part of. [pause]

I feel for you, I really do!

I have been a part of some of these types of communities, and it's not pleasant.

And sadly, churches can be those types of places that I just listed, but that's not the way it *ought* to be. [pause]

Instead, in this passage, God instructs us on how a church can be a pleasant, close, God-glorifying community. [pause]

Don't you want that?

Don't you want to see and know what a beautiful, Christ-exalting community looks like?

Well then, let's listen to God's Word this morning. [READ 18-21]

Paul has been telling us how we ought to live in this world.

And now as he gets to verse 18, he shows us a vital part of living well for the Lord, and it's for us to "be filled with the Spirit." [pauseeee]

As we learned last week, being filled with the Spirit means depending on God for everything. [pause]

We keep turning to the Lord to live for the Lord, looking to His Word, and saying, "Lord, show us the way, we want to follow You." [pauseeee]

Now 'being filled with the Spirit' isn't only for us as individuals, but as we see here, it's the way the church as a whole is to be. [pause]

It can't be one person filled with the Spirit, and the rest living for themselves, or it's not going to work...

It must be all of us, collectively, relying on and being led by the Spirit. [pauseeee]

As a church, we can't muster joy and closeness, we can't manufacture thankfulness, we can't make this a loving place on our own. [pause]

That’s the way that the world tries to produce community, but it fails time and time again because you can’t artificially make a community that will flourish the way God wants, without God’s Spirit. *[pauseeee]*

We must understand this—if we as a church are going to function as God wants us to function, we need the Spirit. *[pauseeee]*

So we saw *how* we can be this kind of community, but next, Paul describes what a Spirit-filled community looks like in practice, and what do we see?...

A spirit-filled community is a...

I. Singing community.

Paul says in verse 19, “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” *[pauseeee]*

Have you ever wondered why we as a church sing songs? *[pauseee]*

If you think about it, singing together is not a typical thing that most groups or communities do. *[pause]*

A local choir might sing for an audience, but not everyone in attendance is singing together. *[pause]*

We might sing “Happy Birthday” at a birthday party, but that’s just a fun, short thing. *[pause]*

There might be the singing of the national anthem at a sporting event, but typically there’s one vocalist doing most of the singing. *[pauseee]*

How often is there a time where everyone in attendance is singing?

It’s not too often, but it just goes to show that the church is *unique*. *[pause]*

The church is a singing community—we do it every week! *[pauseeee]*

Singing is a part of what we do, and the reason is for passages like this one...

Verse 19 is instructing us in how we are to function as a Spirit-filled church—we are to sing! *[pauseeee]*

This means that singing is not an *option* for a church.

The church can’t say, “We don’t sing here, though the church down the street does.” *[pause]*

We sing here because we are instructed to do so.

But also, when you look at what Paul is saying, he's showing us that singing is an *outworking* of what it means to be a Spirit-filled community. *[pause]*

To put it another way: A Spirit-filled church can't help *but sing!* *[pauseeee]*

We serve a great and mighty God—a God, who graciously and powerfully saved us from sin and death through Jesus Christ. *[pause]*

Like the Israelites, who couldn't help but sing after they crossed the Red Sea,¹ so we can't help but sing to our great God, who has done so much for us!

And to take away our singing would be to take away something that brings us joy and one of our utmost privileges. *[pauseeee]*

Do you see it as a joy and honor to sing to the Lord? *[pause]*

We don't merely sing because we *have* to, but we should sing because we *want* to, and can't help but proclaim the greatness of God together. *[pause]*

May God jolt us out of simply 'going through the motions' when it comes to this, for God wants our singing to not just be done out of mere routine, but done *joyously*. *[pauseeee]*

Paul says, "singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." *[pause]*

I think we have all been guilty of singing without the heart behind it...

The words may be coming out, but our hearts are distracted and apathetic, and often we will catch ourselves doing it. *[pauseeee]*

Our singing is not to be fake, but to be genuine, heart-felt, and joyously sung to God. *[pauseeee]*

Some of you may be thinking, "But have you heard me sing? I'm a horrible singer!" But Paul didn't say you have to sing well. *[pause]*

Realize, too, that we all have different personalities, so my joy looks somewhat different in my facial expressions from someone like Kate, but we can both have genuine joy in our hearts, as we sing. *[pauseeee]*

We must also understand that singing is to be directed to the Lord.

We don't sing to show off, impress, or perform—when we gather, we are singing *to God*. *[pause]*

This is not a show, this is not a performance, this is not a production, this is not entertainment—*this is worship*. *[pause]*

¹ A reference to Exodus 15:1–21.

That means that how we sing and the atmosphere that we cultivate here ought to reflect that.

[pause]

The song leaders and the instruments should never drown out the voices of the people or distract them, but help *guide* and *accompany* their worship. *[pauseeeee]*

What's interesting is that most of us know that our singing is to be directed towards God, but we don't always realize that it should also be directed towards others.

Yet look at what Paul says, "addressing *one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."

[pause]

So singing is directed towards God, but also towards others. *[pauseeee]*

God is the One we are worshiping and praising, but other people are the ones we are encouraging and teaching with the truth of the songs we sing.

Because songs convey a message with emotion. *[pause]*

As I look over and hear you sing, "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!"²

I am taught how amazing God's grace is once again, and encouraged to cherish God's grace for me once more. *[pause]*

It uplifts my heart, and leads me to joyously sing all the more. *[pauseeeee]*

Next time you sing, think about how you are singing to others, along with singing to God.

[pause]

There is truly more going on during our singing time than first meets the eye (or the ear).

[pauseeeeeee]

God delights in beautifully and artistically-crafted truth, packaged as song. *[pause]*

He delights in our singing, as His people genuinely and joyously lift their voices together.

And this kind of singing is a part of what a Spirit-filled community looks like—it's a place of genuine, joy-filled praise. *[pauseeeee]*

Is our church characterized by that? *[pause]*

As we look and depend on the Lord more, it will show up in *how* we sing. *[pauseeeeeee]*

Another aspect of a Spirit-filled community is that it's a...

² "Amazing Grace" by John Newton, 1779.

II. Thankful community.

“In 1860, a ship was hit by another ship and sank in Lake Michigan near Evanston, Illinois.
[pause]

A ministerial student named, Edward Spencer, waded again and again into the frigid waters to rescue passengers. [pause]

In the process, his health was permanently damaged.

And some years later at his funeral, it was noted that not one of the people he rescued ever thanked him.”³ [pause]

Isn’t that so sad? Not one word of thanks to someone who risked his life to save others. [pause]

That’s definitely not what our church community should be like.

Rather, we should be the opposite, we should be people filled with and overflowing with thankfulness. [pause]

This means that a prime character trait of our church should be a constant gratitude to God.

Listen to Paul once more, “Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” [pause]

This thankfulness is really the outworking of being filled with the Spirit.

So when someone comes among us, they should think, “They are a grateful group of people.” [pause]

Sadly, many times this is not the case for churches, rather, grumbling characterizes churches more than gratitude.

Yet notice what Paul says, “giving thanks *always and for everything.*” [pause]

That’s pretty all-encompassing, isn’t it?

It means you ought to give thanks for all things at all times—that’s hard to do! [pause]

We can be thankful around Thanksgiving, but then in a couple weeks, we default back to grumbling and complaining. [pause]

We can be thankful when our day is good, but when it’s bad, we aren’t very thankful at all.
[pause]

³ Original source: *Disasters, Accidents, and Crises in American History*, Ballard C. Campbell. Found at: <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustrations/gratefulness>. (Slightly edited by me.)

We are also thankful for the big things in life, but it's hard to be thankful for the simple things in life. *[pause]*

As Christians and as a church, we should be the type of people, who can find things to be thankful for, even in the darkest, most bleak-looking times. *[pauseeee]*

Now to be thankful 'always and for everything' doesn't mean that we have to thank a person for sinning against us in some way.

Rather, it means even in bad or hard times, we are to be thankful to God, for we know that "all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."⁴ *[pause]*

We don't always see how things will work for good, but we know that they will.

There's always something to be thankful for because of who our God is, and how He is truly *for us*.⁵ *[pauseeee]*

Also, the church can (and should) be a thankful community because we know that we are an *undeserving community*. *[pause]*

We know that we are all sinners, who don't deserve anything but the wrath of God.

Yet in grace, God reached down in love and saved us by sending Jesus Christ to die for our sins and in our place. *[pause]*

He then rose again, so that we could have hope and life.

Everything good in our life is a gift of grace, so then how could we NOT be thankful people? *[pauseeeee]*

Are we as a church a "thankful community?" *[pause]*

Are there ways that we could do this more, like sharing our thankfulness during the time when we ask for prayer requests and praises? *[pause]*

Could we express our thankfulness to one another more as we interact with them? *[pause]*

Could we show gratitude to God publicly more often for people or for answered prayers or for God's daily provision? *[pause]*

Let's be thinking about how we could implement more thankfulness into our time together. *[pauseeeee]*

Another quality of a Spirit-filled community is that it is a...

⁴ Romans 8:28.

⁵ See Romans 8:31.

III. Submissive community.

Now when you just heard that point, I'm sure some of you were thinking, "Is 'submissive' really a word that should characterize a church?" *[pause]*

This is because the word 'submissive' has negative connotations in our day. *[pause]*

When people hear the word 'submissive' they think of someone totally passive and a pushover.

They think of someone who blindly obeys, is dominated, or who is manipulated. *[pause]*

That is not what the Bible means when it uses 'submitting' here, and so that's not how I'm using the word, either.

The Bible uses 'submitting' in a good, positive way here, and so we need to conform our thinking in line with Scripture, and not view Scripture from our culture's definition of the word. *[pauseeee]*

Paul says in verse 21, "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ," so, what does this mean? *[pausee]*

The word 'submit' used here is to arrange yourself under someone else.

It's a voluntary yielding to another, so that you are showing deference to them. *[pause]*

So God is calling each believer to a lifestyle of service to one another. *[pause]*

As Paul says in Philippians, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves."⁶ *[pauseeee]*

This submitting takes humility—you can't put yourself first and submit to another person.

Therefore, submitting looks a lot like saying, "You first." *[pause]*

It looks a lot like, "Let's go with your idea," or, "I'd love to hear your opinion first before I share mine." *[pause]*

It looks like letting someone else take a prime opportunity to do something. *[pauseeee]*

When there's recognition to be given, making sure someone else gets recognized and not shining the light on yourself. *[pause]*

It looks a lot like saying, "How can I help *you*?" instead of considering only yourself. *[pauseeee]*

What a beautiful community this would create...

Competition and rivalry would diminish—selfishness would fade away. *[pause]*

⁶ Philippians 2:3.

There would be an atmosphere of humble service for one another, instead of everyone trying to grapple for dominance. *[pauseeee]*

Some of you are thinking, “Oh, how wonderful it would be to be in a situation like that,” for all you know is others putting themselves first and constant competition and power struggles.

But look at what the church community can be—it can be a wonderful place of harmony, service, love, and humility! *[pauseeee]*

This means that in the church there is no place for selfishness, authoritarianism, or competition.

Instead, we are all in this together, and we are all to be putting each other before ourselves. *[pauseeee]*

You see, submission is not a negative thing—it’s a positive, beautiful, God-glorifying, community-enhancing thing!

So let’s put ‘submission’ back in its rightful, glorious place, for it reflects Christ’s humble service for us. *[pause]*

Though He is the Lord, though He is God, He humbly came to earth, washed His disciples feet, and even went to the cross for us, so that we could be saved.

Therefore, when you submit to one another, you are reflecting the gracious and glorious Christ! *[pauseeeee]*

So submit to one another—not just people who you deem “higher” than you, but even those who the world views as the “lowly.”

Submit to them, too—serve them, put *them* first. *[pauseeee]*

Paul says that we are to do this, “out of reverence for Christ.” *[pause]*

You could put it this way—you are to submit to one another because you are doing it in ultimate submission to Jesus Christ. *[pause]*

This is the way Christ lived and the way that He wants us to treat one another, so in reverence for Him, we seek to live this way. *[pauseeee]*

If you do not submit to others, then you are demonstrating that you do not truly revere Christ and His commands. *[pause]*

It’s your relationship to Him that drives how you treat others, so submitting to one another is not optional, Christian.

It’s not ‘if you feel like it.’

It's not for those super, spiritual people, but it's for *you* to do, out of reverence for the Lord.
[pauseeee]

Paul is showing us here that submitting to one another is an outworking of being filled with the Spirit.

And that means that a church filled with rivalry, competition, and selfishness is not filled with the Spirit, but living according to the flesh.

But a humble church that serves one another in love is a prime display of a Spirit-filled people.
[pause]

May we be like that! *[pauseeee]*

All of what we learned together this morning shows us that...

A Spirit-filled community is a beautiful, Christ-exalting community!

Church, we need to rely on the Spirit if we are going to function in a way that glorifies and exalts our Lord.

So let's be receptive to God's Word, ready to confess our sin, and reliant on His working.
[pause]

When we do so, look at what is possible...

We could be a *joyfully singing* church, encouraging each other through song, instead of a church going through the motions. *[pause]*

We could be a *thankful* church, living in constant gratitude to God, and not a church that finds things to grumble about. *[pause]*

And we could be a church that *submits* to one another in love, and not a place of self-service.
[pauseeee]

I'm not saying that our church is characterized by apathy, ungratefulness, and selfishness, but there's always room for growth among us. *[pause]*

While no church is perfect—God can work in us to be (more and more) a place that has beautiful, Christ-exalting community. *[pauseeeee]*

In our world, people are *longing* for community—real community. *[pause]*

Not a place of distance or superficiality.

Not a place of grumbling, quarreling, or tension.

But a place of joy, gratitude, and love—and it's in God's church that people can find it, but we must be looking to and relying upon the Lord. *[pauseee]*

Now we want people to find true community among us, but that's not the only reason we seek to do this...

We seek to live for the Lord, and a beautiful outworking of living for Him is this beautiful, Christ-exalting community. *[pause]*

So will you join me in continually looking to and relying upon the Lord together?