

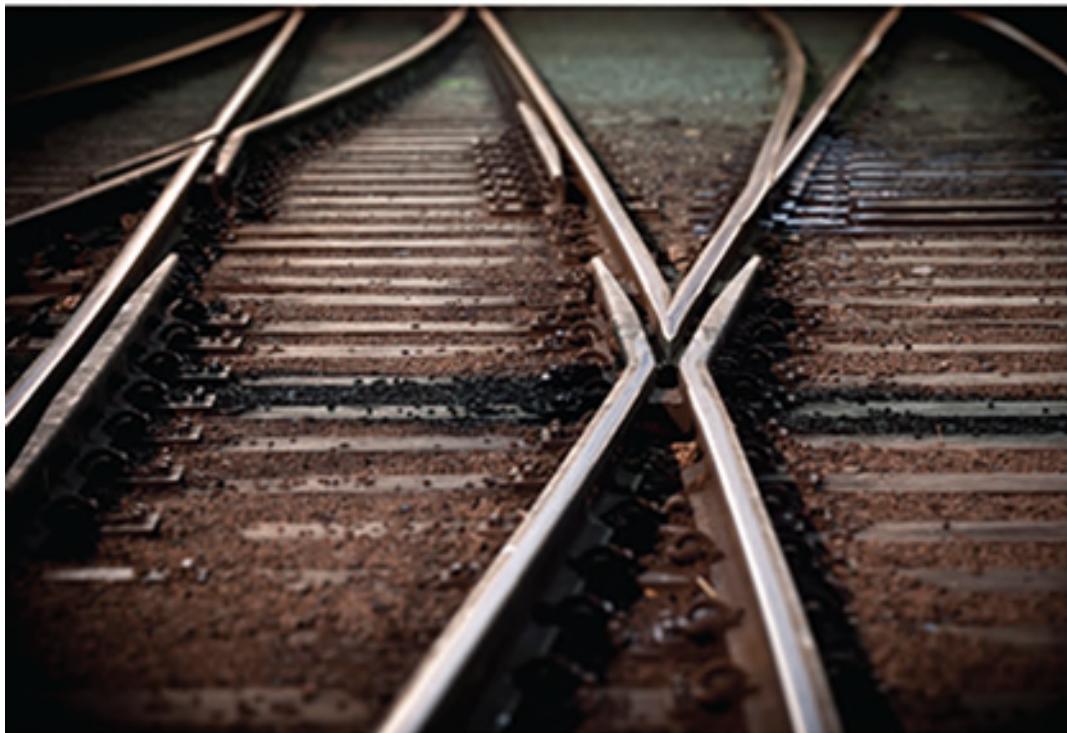
SESSION 5: CONNECTED IN SERVICE

SMALL GROUP MEMBER BOOK



CONNECTED

MY LIFE IN THE CHURCH



THOM S. RAINER



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

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.

What Does the Bible Say?

Ephesians 4:25-32

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

¹⁹ speaking to one another

in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,

singing and making music

from your heart to the Lord,

²⁰ giving thanks always for everything

to God the Father

in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

²¹ submitting to one another

in the fear of Christ.

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.

Ephesians 5:15-17

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

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.

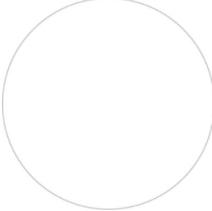
These patterns are foolish because they work against our mission as church members and followers of Christ. We need to live wisely, which means serving others in a way that's motivated by God's priorities, not our personal wants and comfort.

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

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?

Type your response here





link:

Ephesians 5:18

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?

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?

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.