

Semicontinuous
**2 Sam. 18:5–9, 15,
31–33**
Ps. 130

Complementary
1 Kgs. 19:4–8
Ps. 34:1–8
Eph. 4:25–5:2
John 6:35, 41–51

Learning a Life of Love

Goal for the Session Youth will investigate ways to live faithfully following the example of Jesus Christ.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on Ephesians 4:25–5:2

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Jaime Clark-Soles

The author insists that we need to speak truth because we actually are all part of one another. Not speaking truth to each other is tantamount to not speaking truth to ourselves, and vice versa. We could dispense with this verse as some sort of temporary insanity on the part of the author, were it not the case that he repeatedly returns to the themes of speaking truth (vv. 15–16, 21) and our connection with our Christian brothers and sisters. Without truth, authentic community fails.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” G. Porter Taylor

Christianity has yet to grasp the full implication of the incarnation: the Word has become flesh and dwells all around us. Paul is calling for these early Christians not merely to worship God in Christ, but through the Holy Spirit to imitate Christ in their own behavior, for the sake of the Christ’s church and the sake of the world. They are to forgive as they have been forgiven. They must turn from wrangling and slander and turn instead toward kindness and forgiveness for Christ’s sake. We imitate Christ in hopes that through the Holy Spirit we will grow into the likeness of Christ and that God will use us as instruments to bring in God’s realm of peace, justice, and mercy.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Paul V. Marshall

A final motivation for inhabiting the virtues that protect and deepen community is the writer’s understanding of Christ’s work as sacrifice. The ancient world believed that offerings had an olfactory quality that pleased the deity. Christ’s surrender to God was motivated by love, and Christians are here invited to follow suit, understanding their own lives as pleasingly sacrificial. There has been much quarreling in Christian circles over whether we have anything to offer God, whether Christians should ever speak of any sacrifice except that of Christ. One may wish to fence the word in such a way as to exclude the idea of sacrifice as motivating God to act or to be well disposed toward those who offer, but the idea of offering one’s attitude and behavior from a desire to respond pleasingly to love of God seems inescapable.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Richard F. Ward

The writer chooses “forgiveness” as a theme. This is a word for the church, not just for individuals in it. For this writer, to be “forgiven” is to be “pardoned.” God has done something “in Christ” that forgives or pardons all those who take this letter to heart, and in recognition of that action, recipients of God’s forgiveness and pardon freely offer it to others in kind.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE
Ephesians 4:25—5:2

Focus on Your Teaching

Young people are aware of many of the rules that govern daily life. Because teenagers are also trying to establish their independence, they sometimes view these rules as restrictive rather than helpful. They are old enough to understand that rules and guidelines are important for the life of any group. In the reading from Ephesians, they will find practical advice about ways of living that enhance community life. They will have an opportunity to explore how they, too, can live in ways that are faithful and build up the body of Christ.

O God, may our time together help youth gain a deeper understanding about what it means to be a faithful follower of Christ. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- symbols that represent teams and groups
- Bibles
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- copies of Resource Sheet 2
- large fireproof dish
- tealight
- matches
- slips of paper (two per person)

For Responding

- option 2: pieces of card stock, calligraphy pens, gel pens, art supplies, magazines, glue
- option 3: Amnesty International information, writing paper, pens, envelopes, stamps

For Music Connection

- Internet access

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, gather symbols representing different kinds of teams or groups youth might belong to (such as soccer ball, music score, robotics material, chess board). If you choose option 3 in Responding, gather information about the “Monthly Lifesaver Action” project of Amnesty International (www.amnesty.ca/get-involved/youth-activism/lifesaver).

Greet youth as they arrive and gather around the items symbolizing different groups. Have youth take turns choosing one of the items and naming some rules or guidelines that help people work together on that activity. Encourage them to name other kinds of groups or teams that they participate in and some rules that govern those activities. Discuss:

- ✪ Why is it important to have rules or guidelines?
- ✪ What would happen if there were no rules for a team activity?

Explain that this week’s Scripture reading comes from a letter written to one of the first Christian communities and names some guidelines that help people live well together.

O God, we give thanks for the people in this group. We give thanks that we belong to you and that you will always be with us, guiding our words and actions. Amen.

EXPLORING

Distribute Bibles and ask youth to find the section of letters in the New Testament. Have them call out the names of the 21 different letters included in this part of the Bible. Explain that followers of Jesus Christ wrote these letters to the first Christians living in many different cities far away from Jerusalem. Have them notice that some letters are named for the cities they were sent to (such as Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus) and some are named for the author of the letters (such as Peter and James).

Explain that these first groups of Christians often lived in community, sharing all of their belongings, making meals together, worshiping together, and sometimes working together. Talk together about some examples today where people choose to live together in intentional communities (such as co-op housing, retreat centers, and monasteries).

Ask youth to think about times they have spent time with a group of people, such as summer camp or a school trip. Discuss:

- ✧ What was fun about spending time with the group?
- ✧ What would be some good things about living together with a group of people?
- ✧ What do you think would be some of the hard things about living like this?

Ephesian Notes

- Ephesus was an important town in Asia.
- The apostle Paul lived and worked in Ephesus for about three years.
- The letter may not have been written by Paul, but it is similar to his writings.
- It summarizes many of Paul's important teachings.
- It might not have been a letter to one group of people, but instead meant to be passed among a number of churches in Asia Minor.

Help youth to find the Letter to the Ephesians in their Bibles and review information in the sidebar. Explain that they will be exploring sections from the last chapters of this letter that describe important things about living together as followers of Jesus Christ.

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Ephesians 4:25–5:2), a paraphrase (or a rewording) of the Bible reading. Take turns reading the text one line at a time. Ask:

- ✧ What does the writer say that people should stop doing?
- ✧ What does the writer say that people should do?
- ✧ The writer says it is OK to be angry. When do you think it is good to be angry?
- ✧ What happens when people can't let go of their anger?

Look again together at the advice in the Scripture reading.

- ✧ Which advice would be the hardest to follow? Why?
- ✧ Which would be easy for Christians to follow? Why?

This part of the Letter to the Ephesians tells us that we should practice ways of living that reflect Jesus Christ's teaching. Review these guidelines by inviting youth to:

- ✧ Think of times when they have spoken the truth. What happened?
- ✧ Think of an example of getting angry for the right reasons.
- ✧ Name a way of speaking kindly, saying something that builds another person up.
- ✧ Describe an experience of learning how to forgive. What happened?

Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (How to Build Peace, One Teenager at a Time) and read the story together. Ask:

- ✧ What does this story say about "living in love"?

RESPONDING

Choose one or more of the following learning activities:

1. **Group Drama** Youth will investigate ways to live faithfully as a follower of Jesus Christ by using their imaginations. Ask youth to work individually or in small groups to create a mime- or role-play-based phrases or verses from the Scripture reading. Encourage them to imagine what these words would look like lived out in everyday situations at



home or at school. For example, they might choose to illustrate what “let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up” (v. 29) might look like at a school sports event. Perform the dramas for the whole group, taking time to discuss each dramatized situation together.

Option: Instead of creating a postcard, youth could make a wooden plaque, using wooden plaque forms, permanent markers, and acrylic paints.

Go to: www.amnesty.ca/get-involved/youth-activism/lifesaver.

2. **Postcards** Youth will create personal reminders to live faithfully following Jesus’ example. Distribute card stock and invite youth to write on their cards words or phrases from Ephesians 4:25—5:2 that will remind them of ways of living as a follower of Jesus. Provide calligraphy pens and gel pens for youth to add designs, symbols, illustrations, and borders to their cards. They could also collage small images cut from magazines to illustrate the chosen words from Scripture.
3. **Letters** Youth will investigate ways to live faithfully as a follower of Jesus Christ by writing letters on behalf of those whose human rights are in danger. Describe the “Monthly Lifesaver Action” program for 9- to 15-year-olds, based on Amnesty International cases. Review the current action and talk about the situation together. Help youth to write letters or write one letter from the whole group. Encourage youth to consider signing up individually to continue responding to the monthly actions.

CLOSING

The reading from the Letter to the Ephesians includes some “don’t” guidelines as well as some “dos.” Give everyone two slips of paper and ask them to write on one slip something they would like to stop doing because it gets in the way of being a faithful Christian. Gather around a dish with a lit tealight and take turns burning these slips as an act of letting go of these behaviors. Make sure each person drops his or her slip into the dish beside the candle just as it catches fire. On the other slip have youth each write a way they can live faithfully as a follower of Jesus Christ, and tuck this slip into their pockets.

Spend a few moments in silence, thinking about what has been written. Pray the Lord’s Prayer together as a closing blessing.

■ ENHANCEMENT

MUSIC CONNECTION

As Christians, we are called to practice ways of living that reflect God’s love in the world. The song “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” is a traditional African American song that speaks of living, working, praying, and singing “so God can use me anywhere . . . anytime.” Listen as a group to one or more recordings of this song. Discuss:

- ✪ What do you think it means to “live so God can use you”?
- ✪ How does this kind of living look different from living that isn’t guided by Jesus’ example?

A variety of recordings of the song:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EIVuG5yH-U
www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdZEXqY39JY
www.youtube.com/watch?v=LGwqdiusMbs
www.youtube.com/watch?v=itMDQhyBsvA

Ephesians 4:25–5:2

Rules for New Life

What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense.

Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ's body, we're all connected to each other, after all.

When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself.

Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don't use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don't stay angry. Don't go to bed angry. Don't give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life.

Did you use to make ends meet by stealing? Well, no more! Get an honest job so that you can help others who can't work.

Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift.

Don't grieve God. Don't break his heart.

His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for himself. Don't take such a gift for granted.

Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk.

Be gentle with one another, sensitive.

Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you.

Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents.

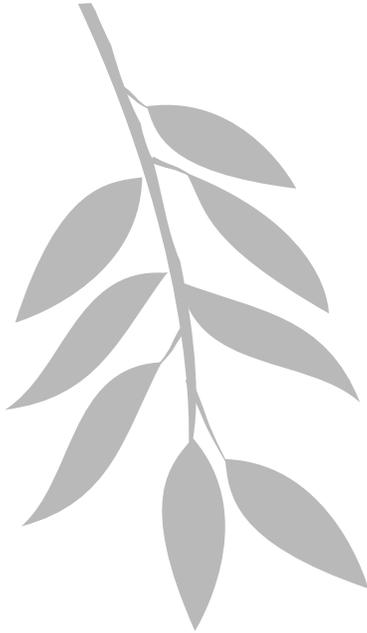
Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love.

Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us.

Love like that.

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How to Build Peace, One Teenager at a Time



For the past 14 years, I have been part of Seeds of Peace, an international organization that brings together young leaders from conflict regions to inspire and equip them with the relationships, understanding, and skills to advance peace.

During my first Seeds of Peace program, an Israeli teenager in my cabin told me she didn't think Palestinians "deserved" a state. She decided it was too hard to pronounce her Palestinian bunkmate's name and called her "girl," and later, Kelly. She had never encountered Palestinians her own age; she believed they all wished her dead or gone.

Yet as the program progressed, she quickly developed relationships with her Palestinian peers, including a boy whose cousin had been wounded by an Israeli soldier several months earlier. His cousin died nearly a week into the program. When she heard the news, she came to me, crying hysterically. "You don't understand," she sobbed. "This isn't 'another Palestinian reported dead in the West Bank.' This is my friend's cousin. This is his family."

She went on to work for an Israeli organization monitoring human rights in the Palestinian territories and completed graduate degrees in conflict transformation. She recently wrote to tell me that she and Kelly were having coffee in Jerusalem and overheard a young girl telling a friend that she was about to attend a program called Seeds of Peace. "I told her it was the most incredible summer of my life, and that I was there with my friend of 13 years," she wrote.

Eva Armour is Seeds of Peace director of Global Strategy and Programs. She joined the organization in 2000 as a counselor at its summer program in Maine for youth from conflict regions.

"How to Build Peace, One Teenager at a Time," Eva Armour. The article first appeared in *The Christian Science Monitor* (www.csmonitor.com). Used with permission.