

Discussion Guide

Date: 10/25/2026

Sermon Title: Can prayer help me be a better person?

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-5:2

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, thank you for gathering us together. As we reflect on your Word, give us open hearts, honest minds, and a willingness to be changed. Show us where our words have wounded, where our anger has taken control, and where we have withheld the kindness and forgiveness you have offered us. Teach us to move beyond simply knowing what is right toward practicing the love of Jesus in our everyday lives. May your Spirit guide our conversation and shape us into people who reflect your grace. In Christ's name, Amen.

OPENING: FROM HEARING GOD'S WORD TO PRACTICING GOD'S LOVE

Throughout Lead with Love, we have been exploring what it means to love our neighbors in a divided world; even when we disagree, feel frustrated, or struggle to understand someone else's perspective. As we close this series, we turn inward, not to focus on becoming a better person through willpower alone, but to consider how prayer opens us to God's transforming grace.

Paul's instructions in Ephesians are remarkably practical. Tell the truth. Deal honestly with anger. Use words that build others up. Practice kindness and forgiveness. Walk in love as Christ loves us. These are more than ideals to admire; they are ways of life to practice.

But how do we move from reading these instructions to living them? Prayer can help bridge that gap. In prayer, we invite God to reveal our hearts, reshape our desires, strengthen our love, and guide our next faithful step. From a Wesleyan perspective, we do not pray to earn God's love; we pray because God's grace is already at work in us, making us more like Christ. Prayer is one of the ways we participate in that transforming grace

GETTING STARTED: PRAYER AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Begin with a few questions to help everyone enter the conversation. Participants can share as much or as little as they feel comfortable sharing.

1. When you hear the question, “Can prayer help me be a better person?” What is your first reaction? Why?
2. Have you ever noticed prayer changing not just what you believe, but how you end up responding to another person?

3. Which is harder for you: knowing what the loving thing to do is, or doing it when you are frustrated, hurt, or angry?

DIGGING INTO SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 4:25–5:2

Background to the passage

The letter to the Ephesians moves from describing God's work in Christ and the new community God is creating to explaining how followers of Jesus are to live. Earlier in chapter 4, Paul calls the church to unity and to grow into maturity in Christ. The passage for this week makes that calling concrete. Paul describes a community whose life together is shaped by truth, reconciliation, generosity, helpful speech, kindness, forgiveness, and love. These instructions are not simply a list of rules for individual improvement. They describe what life together looks like when a community is being formed by Christ.

Notice three important movements in the passage:

- A new way of living (4:25–32): Followers of Jesus put away destructive habits and practice behaviors that build up the community.
- A new identity (5:1): They are beloved children of God and are called to imitate God's character.
- A new pattern of love (5:2): Christ becomes the model for their lives, loving others through self-giving love.

One particularly important detail is Ephesians 4:30: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Paul connects everyday behavior with our relationship with God. Our words, anger, and treatment of others matter spiritually because they affect the community God is forming.

Read the passage together

Read Ephesians 4:25–5:2 aloud, preferably from the NRSV. Invite participants to listen for one instruction that challenges them and one phrase that gives them hope. Notice in the text before moving to interpretation or application.

1. What does Paul tell us to put away? (Habits, Attitudes, and actions...)
2. What does Paul tell us to practice instead? (Actions that reflect love...)
3. What reasons does Paul give for living this way? (Our identity in Christ, the Spirit, Christ example...)

Working through the text

A. Truthfulness and community — Ephesians 4:25

1. Why does Paul connect telling the truth with being members of one another? What does honesty make possible in a Christian community?
2. Is there a difference between telling the truth and telling the truth in a loving way? What might that difference look like?
3. How might prayer help us recognize when we are being less than honest with ourselves or someone else?

B. Anger and reconciliation — Ephesians 4:26–27, 31

1. Paul says, "Be angry but do not sin." What does this suggest about the difference between experiencing anger and allowing anger to control our behavior?
2. Why might Paul warn against letting the sun go down on our anger? Is this a literal deadline for resolving every conflict, or a warning against allowing resentment to take root?

3. What does it mean to “make room for the devil” in verse 27? How can unresolved anger become destructive in our relationships?
4. Think about a difficult relationship. How might prayer help you respond to anger without denying it, excusing harmful behavior, or retaliating?
5. What could reconciliation look like when a conversation needs to wait, boundaries are necessary, or the other person is not ready to engage?

C. Words that build up — Ephesians 4:29–30

1. Paul contrasts harmful talk with words that build others up. What are some examples of speech that damages relationships even when the speaker thinks it is justified?
2. What does it mean to speak in a way that gives grace to those who hear?
3. How might the instruction not to grieve the Holy Spirit change the way we think about gossip, sarcasm, online arguments, or conversations about people who are not present?
4. Before responding to a difficult email, text, or conversation, what might change if we paused to pray: “God, let my words give grace to the person who receives them”?

D. Kindness and forgiveness — Ephesians 4:32

1. Paul calls us to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving “as God in Christ has forgiven you.” Why does he ground our treatment of others in the forgiveness we have received?
2. How is Christian forgiveness different from pretending that nothing happened or saying that harmful behavior does not matter?
3. When is forgiveness especially difficult? What role might prayer play when our feelings have not caught up with our desire to forgive?
4. How can we practice forgiveness while still pursuing accountability, safety, and healthy boundaries?

E. Imitating God and walking in love — Ephesians 5:1–2

1. What do you think Paul means when he calls us to be “imitators of God, as beloved children”? How does knowing we are beloved change the way we hear this instruction?
2. Why does Paul point to Christ's self-giving love as the pattern for our lives?
3. How does “walking in love” differ from simply being nice, avoiding conflict, or trying to keep everyone happy?
4. If someone watched your ordinary interactions this week, where might they see Christ's love? Where might they see an opportunity for growth?

Bringing the passage together:

1. Which instruction in this passage feels most challenging for you right now? Which one offers you the greatest hope?

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. The sermon draws a connection between prayer and aligning our heartbeat with God's heartbeat. How has prayer, or the absence of it, shaped the direction of your life in a season you can look back on now?
2. Clayton uses the image of two teammates grabbing the same rebound and saying 'same team' as a picture of how we should see one another. Who in your life is hardest for you to see as being on the same team, and what might change if you genuinely did?

3. The baseball pitcher in Terry Parsons' story developed a simple prayer to anchor himself before a moment of known temptation. What recurring situation in your life might benefit from a similar intentional, prayerful anchor?

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION:

1. Paul writes that we are members of one another. What would change in your neighborhood, workplace, or community if you genuinely approached every person with that belief?
2. Paul does not say do not get angry. He says manage your anger and do not let the sun go down on it. What is the difference between feeling anger and letting it run away with you? How does prayer factor into that difference for you?
3. Clayton referenced the old song lyric "where seldom is heard a discouraging word" and noted that we live in a world where the opposite is often true. Where do you most often encounter discouraging words, and how does that affect you?
4. Of the three areas covered in this sermon, which one do you sense God is most directly calling you to work on right now: being a better neighbor, managing your anger, or watching your words? Why?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Loving God, thank you for your patience with us. You know our hearts, our struggles, our assumptions, and the times we have judged others without understanding their stories. Forgive us when pride keeps us from listening and when fear causes us to see others as opponents instead of neighbors. Through your grace, help us become people who are quick to listen, slow to speak, and generous in our love. Give us the courage to examine our own hearts before trying to correct someone else's. May we lead with love in our homes, our workplaces, our church, and our community. Continue shaping us into the likeness of Christ, that others might experience your grace through the way we see, hear, and treat them. In the name of Jesus, who meets us with both truth and grace, we pray. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. **Prayer Before Reaction:** Identify one recurring situation in your life that tends to provoke a negative response. Write a short, simple prayer you can say before entering that situation, similar to the pitcher's prayer in the sermon. Commit to using it this week.
2. **Neighbor Inventory**: Think about the people in your immediate circles, neighbors, coworkers, family members, or fellow commuters, whom you tend to see as "other" or even as opponents. Choose one person and pray for them by name each day this week.
3. **Anger Audit:** Reflect honestly on whether there is unresolved anger in your life that has been allowed to settle in. Consider journaling about it, bringing it to God in prayer, or speaking with a trusted friend, pastor, or counselor.

THE PAUSE PRACTICE:

A simple way to connect prayer with everyday decisions.

P — Pause

Stop before reacting. Take a breath and become aware of what you are feeling.

A — Ask God to search your heart

Pray honestly about your anger, assumptions, fears, or desire to be right. Ask what you might be missing.

U — Use Scripture as your guide
Recall the words of Ephesians: speak truth, build others up, be kind, forgive, and walk in love.

S — Seek one faithful response
Ask what love requires in this moment. It might mean listening, apologizing, setting a boundary, or choosing not to retaliate.

E — Examine and return to God
At the end of the day, reflect on what happened. Where did you respond with love? Where do you need forgiveness or another opportunity to practice?