

Help Not Hinder

The people of the early church are beginning to understand they are bound together in unity through baptism. The question is, how will they treat one another? Living and loving like Jesus is hard, and many of us struggle to live in ways that are worthy of God's call. This week's readings show that faithful living is complicated because we live in a broken world. How do we live in community?

Focus scripture: Ephesians 4:25—5:2

Ephesians 4:25—5:2 asserts that Christians are called to behave differently from the status quo; old ways of being in the world are to be put away. The people have a new life and called to imitate God and live in love. What a thing – to think one could imitate God would have, in the past, been considered the height of arrogance. However, Christ changed all this; he embodied the way of God and revealed what God and the love of God look like.

The specific reference to the topic of anger is worth noting – anger is not seen as a sin, rather as a legitimate response to certain circumstances. Pain and injustice exist, and people live with and are caught up in these things. Sometimes, the right response to a situation may well be anger that motivates acts of justice and reconciliation, but anger should not be motivation for further injustice.

We might look at the list given here as a list of rules, but through Christ, the whole notion of rules is done away. What is offered is a process of transformation. The people of God are changed because of a relationship with God, a relationship sealed in baptism. It is, therefore, God's love and reconciliation brought about through Christ that becomes the formative building block of Christian life.

2 Samuel 18:5–9, 15, 31–33 depicts struggles against one another, rather than with one another for their common well-being. Different groups vie for prominence in leading Israel. The conflict leads to personal loss for David. His son Absalom is killed. David's lament is so heartfelt that all those around him respond to the depth of his feeling.

The lament in **Psalm 130** reminds us of God's presence with us in all the circumstances of our lives – even in times of despair and uncertainty when we might think the link is broken or tenuous.

In a continuing discourse about Jesus' identity as the Bread of Life, **John 6:35, 41–51** offers an assurance that we are nourished and sustained as we live in the way of God.

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Martin Luther seems to have had a handle on today's readings. He wrote, "This life therefore is not righteousness, but growth in righteousness, not health, but healing, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it, the process is not yet finished, but it is going on, this is not the end, but it is the road. All does not yet gleam in glory, but all is being purified."



Focus scripture Ephesians

4:25—5:2

Additional scriptures

2 Samuel 18:5–9, 15,

31–33

Psalm 130

John 6:35, 41–51



Seasons of the Spirit

is based on semi-continuous readings of the *Revised Common Lectionary*.

When we look into the heart of you, God, we see kindness and compassion. As your Spirit dwells in us may these be the fruits that grow in us.

Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 5–12

Most of the children in this age group have discovered the power of their words in exchanges with family members and peers. As they mature, children realize that disagreements are a part of learning how to be friends, and how to negotiate differences of opinion and will. The younger members of your group may still find it hard to consider situations and experiences from another's point of view, but they are growing in their ability to reason, and to see that there are different ways to respond to situations of conflict.

In this week's reading from the letter to the Ephesians they will hear familiar admonitions: Be kind. Don't fight. Forgive. They hear

these kinds of instructions at home, at school, in the playground, and even at church. This week's session will help children explore the concept that we are called to follow these guidelines not just to stay out of trouble but because living this way can improve the life of the community. Children learn what they live and witness in the world around them. Their church community can offer a way of living that differs from the negative impact of anger and violence that children often see on television or in the playground. Pray that the children will be affirmed in their loving actions and encouraged to respond to others in loving ways.

Prepare

Before the session

- Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Ephesians 4:25—5:2, and [biblical background material](#) (p. 83).
- Set up the "house church space" (see resource sheet "[About the Early Church](#)," p. 119).
- Bring offering basket, [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), matches, candle snuffer, and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), and CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- Bring a small bell or "singing bowl."
- Bring, if possible, "Come Build a Church" (p. 14 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #16 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).
- Bring a deck of playing cards.

Engage

- Make a copy of this week's resource sheet "[Belonging to God](#)"; roll it like a scroll and tie with ribbon or yarn; place in the house church space.
- Discussion group:** copies of the section "[Rules for life](#)" (p. 87)
- Game group:** no materials needed

Respond

Choose one or more of the following activities and bring materials to set up the chosen zones.

- Drama zone:** option: recording of song "Teach Me Wisdom" (#24 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7)
- Prayer zone:** newsprint
- Game zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Live Love](#)"
- Craft zone:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Foam Board Plaque](#)," craft foam, art and craft materials, picture hangers
- Community zone:** resource sheet "[Poster Board Banner](#)" (p. 120), art and craft materials, poster board banner from previous weeks or sheets of construction paper

Bless

- Bring, if possible, "Somlandela/We Will Follow" (p. 34 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).



Help Not Hinder

Scripture

Ephesians

4:25—5:2

FOCUS To encourage one another in loving actions

Gather

Welcome the children as they arrive. Introduce newcomers to the group.

Call to gather Ring the bell or “singing bowl” as a signal to gather in the “house church space.” Invite a child to light the candle.

Pray the following prayer.

O God, open us to your Spirit today.
We ask you to hear our prayers...
(*Invite children to name some joys and sadness.*)
Amen.

Sing, if possible, the song, “Come Build a Church” (p. 14 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #16 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Receive the offering. Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended

Connecting with the focus

Display the playing cards and ask several children to describe the rules for playing a card game that they know.

- **Why do we have rules about how to play games?**
- **What would happen if we didn’t have rules? What would happen if the rules kept changing?**

Explain that in this week’s scripture reading we hear about some of God’s rules for living.

Engage

Preparing for the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the letter to the Ephesians. Recall that we have been reading letters written for the first Christians, and imagining what church was like in those days. Explain that this week’s reading is the second part of the letter that was read last week.

The Bible story

Invite a child to take this week’s scroll (from the resource sheet “[Belonging to God](#)”) based on **Ephesians 4:25—5:2**, unroll it, and read it aloud. When the letter is finished, invite a child to help glue it onto a sheet of poster board.

- **What rules for living does this letter give to the groups of Christians who read it?**

Read Ephesians 5:1 and invite children to comment on what they think it means to be “imitators of God.”

Exploring the story further

(*To enable the children to explore the scripture reading further, according to their own interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.*)

Discussion group (for older children) The children in this group will have an opportunity to explore further the “rules for life” in this week’s reading. Distribute copies of the section “[Rules for life](#)” (p. 87) and invite children to share responses with a partner.

Game group Children in this group will have an opportunity to explore further what it means to imitate God. Following Jesus means that we can imitate Jesus’ loving actions. Invite children to form pairs and face each other. Have one partner do a movement (such as raise a hand) and the other imitate (like a mirror image). Then reverse roles. Encourage children to practice mirroring loving actions.

Reporting Ring the bell or “singing bowl” as a signal to gather as a whole group again. Invite the discussion group to share what they have

discovered about God's rules; invite game group to demonstrate loving actions.

The Bible story and us

In this week's reading, we heard about God's way of living. Encourage the children to think of some

times of disagreement or anger with a friend or family member.

- **What did you learn from the Bible reading about how to deal with those situations?**

Respond

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Drama zone: Role play** Invite children to role play ways they could solve disagreements with friends without doing something that would hurt. As a whole group, make a list of some possible scenarios. Have children form pairs and choose a scenario to role play, first with an unkind response and then with a response that reflects Jesus' way of love. Encourage the whole group to imagine other ways the situations might be resolved. Option: listen to the recording "Teach Me Wisdom" in between each scene as the role plays are presented.



- **Prayer zone: Church prayer** *(for older children)* This week's reading encouraged people in the early church to follow God's way of living. Invite children to work together to write a prayer for your congregation. What "rules for living together" would they like to offer to their church? Consider sharing this prayer during a worship service or including it in a church newsletter.
- **Game zone: Choice game** *(for younger children)* Christians can remind one another about loving ways that help us to live in God's way. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Live



Love" and help children follow the instructions for cutting out the pattern and folding. Under each numbered flap, have them print a message from the section "Rules for living in loving ways." Form pairs to play the game, with one person manipulating the folded paper and the other person choosing a number three times to discover the hidden message. Have them take turns with other pairs.

- **Craft zone: Plaques** The rules for living well together in today's reading are important ones to remember. Distribute copies of the resource sheet "Foam Board Plaque" and review the instructions with the group. Have them use the supplies provided to create plaques as reminders of the reading.
- **Community zone: Banner** *(stand alone or ongoing activity)* Invite children to create their own poster using symbols and phrases to remind them of the messages from this week's reading from the letter to the Ephesians or continue working on the banner begun on July 15. Review information on the resource sheet "Poster Board Banner" (p. 120) and invite children to create symbols and choose words and phrases based on this week's reading.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and relight the candle.

Pray (*inviting children to repeat each line after you*)

Loving God,
thank you for Jesus, who showed us
how to live in your way. Amen.

Sing, if possible, the song, "Somlandela/We Will Follow" (p. 34 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Blessing Send the children out with these words, "When you follow Jesus' way you are living in love."

Reflect

In what ways were you able to affirm and encourage the children as part of the Christian community? How have the children contributed to new life in your faith community?

Rules for life

Rules help us get along but they also tell us how to belong. Make a list of some of the groups that you belong to. Beside each group write down some of the things you have to do to belong.

- **Are there any unspoken or unofficial rules that everyone in the group follows?**
- **What happens if someone breaks a rule?**
- **How are these rules different from the "rules for life" in today's Bible reading?**





BELONGING TO GOD

(based on Ephesians 4:25—5:2)

To the faithful followers of Jesus Christ:

So then, don't tell lies.
Speak the truth to one another.
We all belong to God's family.

Be kind to one another.
Share what you have with one another.
When you speak, speak to build up one another.
Use kind and helpful words.

Remember, God's Holy Spirit has marked you as
belonging to God.

So then, get rid of anger and bitter feelings.

Stop any fighting and arguing.
Be kind to one another.
Be tender and forgiving to one another,
just as God in Jesus Christ has been to you.

So then, imitate God and live in love,
as Christ loved us and showed us how to love with
God's love.



LIVE LOVE

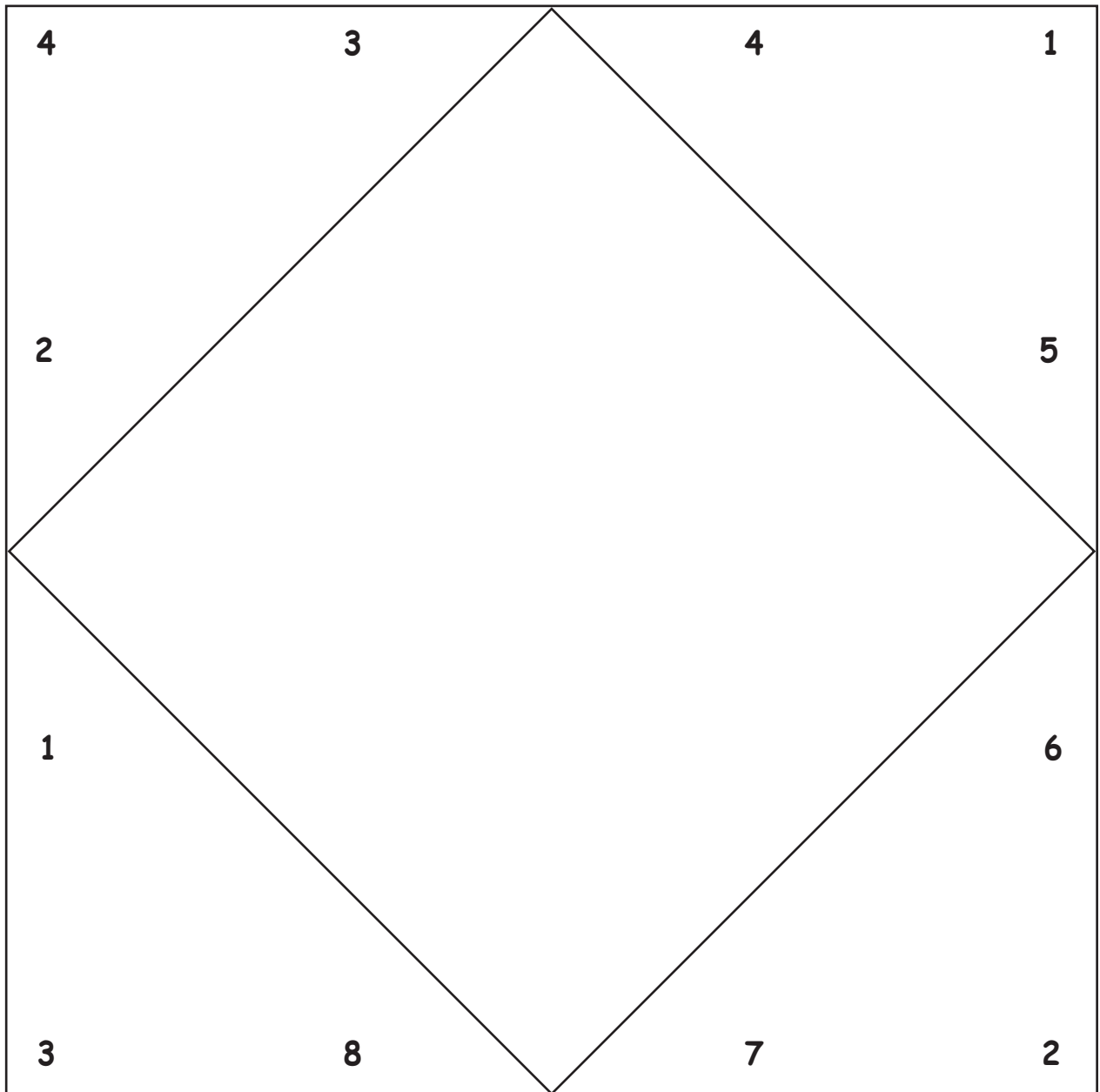
Instructions for folding:

- Cut out the pattern (outer edge of largest square). Turn face down. (Numbers will not be visible.)
- Make four folds, folding corners to the middle. Do not unfold. (Numbers will now be visible.)
- Turn square face down so no numbers are visible. Make four more folds, folding corners to the middle. Do not unfold. (Numbers will now be visible.)
- Fold square in half one way. Unfold.
- Fold square in half the other way. Unfold.
- Put thumb and index finger into flaps on the underside.



Rules for living in loving ways:

- Be kind to each other
- Tell each other the truth
- Be honest
- Use helpful words
- Forgive as God forgives
- Don't stay angry
- Use words that build up
- Follow Jesus.





FOAM BOARD PLAQUE

Directions:

1. Choose a verse or phrase from p. 88 (based on Ephesians 4:25—5:2).
2. Print it in the middle of a diamond-shaped piece of foam board.
3. Use the art and craft materials to add a border and other decorations.
4. Attach a picture hanger to the back.



About the Early Church

The early church

Most of the first Christians were probably Jewish and went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. But as Christians they also met on Sunday, the day that celebrated Jesus' resurrection. They would meet in one another's homes, rather than in the synagogue, for worship and fellowship. Both men and women shared leadership in these "house churches," where Christians would pray and sing together, read from the Hebrew Scriptures, tell stories about Jesus, and exchange news of other Christian communities. This news often came in the form of letters. The apostle Paul was instrumental in the formation of many house churches. Letters in his name were often addressed to such groups. People might also receive letters from other Christian communities as a way of encouraging and supporting each other.

Sharing food

Those who gathered together in the early house churches would usually share meals together. Often they would remember Jesus' last meal in a ritual of sharing bread and wine. The leftover food from their communal meals would be gathered by the deacons to share with widows and orphans in the community and those who were infirm and elderly.

Weekly ritual

July 15 and July 22, and August 5 to August 26 the children will gather in the "house church space" for their opening worship time and to explore that week's reading from the letter to the Ephesians.

- Gather in the house church space, sitting on the mats, and putting on biblical costumes if desired.
- Participate in the gathering worship and activity together.
- Invite a child to get that week's letter from the basket, open it and read it aloud.
- The children will share a snack together as they listen and discuss the questions.
- After each letter has been read it will be glued onto a sheet of poster board to create a display.

Creating a "house church space"

- ❑ Place a low table or box in the middle of an area and cover with brightly coloured fabric.
- ❑ Place on the table a Bible with a bookmark placed in the letter to the Ephesians, a candle in a holder or small oil lamp, a plate and goblet (clay if possible), and a jug.
- ❑ Beside the table place a basket (to hold the weekly scroll letters).
- ❑ Around the table provide small mats (or folded towels) for children to sit on.
- ❑ Shawls, cloaks, and/or headdresses could also be provided as simple costumes.
- ❑ Prepare the letters by making a copy of each week's resource sheet, cutting out the letter, rolling it like a scroll, and tying with a ribbon; place in the basket.
- ❑ Place a snack on the plate each week; bring juice to place in the jug and small glasses.



Church chant

One by one, two by two (*two people join hands, then two more*)

the early church grew and grew.

Three by three, four by four (*more join, then all join hands*)

love was shared, more and more.

No matter how big (*spread hands wide apart*), no matter how small (*bring hands close together*), we can all share God's love, we can share it with all. (*Put arms around each other's shoulders.*)

One community all are we (*hold hands in a circle*) bringing peace and harmony! (*Raise joined hands high.*)

We Are the Church

(*tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat"*)

You and I, we are the church.

We are the church together.

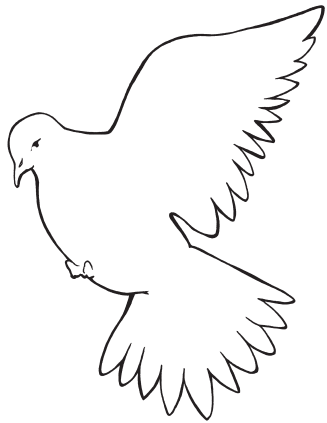
Sharing love and sharing joy,
we are the church together.



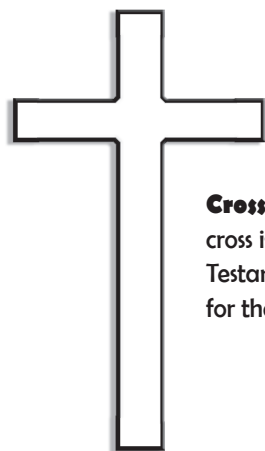
Poster Board Banner

Symbols Different symbols can remind us of the messages in each week's readings from the letter to the Ephesians. Here are some common Christian symbols and their meanings.

Dove — the most common symbol for the Holy Spirit

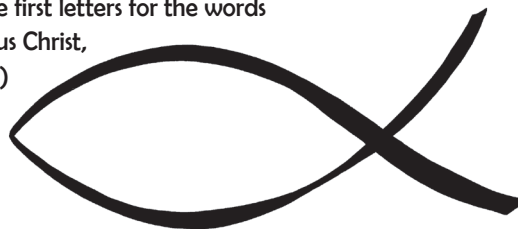


Flame — symbol of the Holy Spirit



Cross — an empty cross is a New Testament symbol for the risen Christ

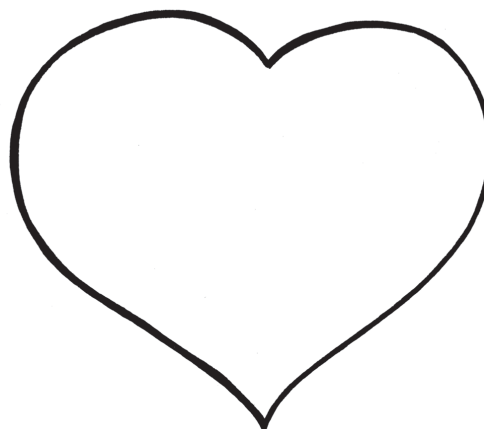
Fish — early Christians often used the fish as a symbol of Christ (the letters of the Greek word for fish are the first letters for the words in the sentence "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour")



Butterfly — a symbol of Jesus' resurrection



Heart — symbol for love (of God, of Jesus, of people)



Making a banner

1. Make templates of the patterns of different symbols (*see note below*).
2. Use the patterns to cut symbols from craft foam or different kinds of paper such as construction paper, wallpaper samples, gift wrap, corrugated cardboard.
3. Arrange symbols on a sheet of poster board.
4. Add words and phrases from each week's reading from the letter to the Ephesians.

For pattern shapes such as fish, dove, cross, flame, footprint, heart, and butterfly go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on "Library," and then on "Virtual Resource Booklet."