

“Taking Off, Putting On”

Session 5: Ephesians 4:17–5:21

Movement: Grown

Theme: Transformation isn’t a feeling that comes over you. It’s a daily decision you make — one thing taken off, one thing put on, over and over again.



Leader’s Notes:

Goal: 100% participation – everyone talks.

Prioritize ★ questions. These make up the central theological themes. In time constraints unstarred questions can be skipped. A great conversation on two or three questions is better than a rushed one on five.

Sessions 1–3 built the foundation of identity. Session 4 opened the door to calling and community. Session 5 is where Paul gets specific about what transformation actually looks like on the ground. This is not a vague call to “be better.” It’s a list of concrete, daily decisions: take this off, put that on. Stop lying, start telling the truth. Stop stealing, start giving. Stop tearing people down with your words, start building them up. Paul’s vision of transformation isn’t mystical — it’s practical. And it’s always relational.

This is also the passage where Paul makes the clearest connection between who you are in Christ and how you live. The old self was “corrupted by deceitful desires.” The new self was “created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” You don’t put on the new self to become someone. You put it on because of who you already are. That thread — identity driving behavior, not behavior producing identity — runs through the whole series and is worth naming explicitly in this session.

The goal is to lead your group to a habit of taking off and putting on as a daily, practiced decision — and then let them apply it to their own lives.

Check-In | DO IT follow-up from Session 4 • ~3 minutes

Leader note: Keep this brief. If anyone chose “Name It” last week and asked people what they bring to those around them, this is a rich moment — what did they hear? If anyone chose “Show Up Somewhere,” a sentence about where they showed up is worth the group hearing. Two responses maximum, then move on.

1. Last week you chose a Do It option. Did anyone try theirs? What happened . . . or what got in the way?

OPEN IT | Icebreaker • ~5 minutes

Leader note: This question is almost always good for a laugh. Keep it light and move on after two or three responses. What you’re listening for is the instinct that some things just don’t fit who you are anymore — which is the exact image Paul uses in 4:22-24.

2. Is there something you used to wear, say, or do regularly that you look back on now and think . . . what was I thinking? What changed?

People love this question — fashion choices, phrases they used to say, habits they’ve outgrown. Keep it fun. The point isn’t the specific thing they’ve left behind. It’s the fact that growth naturally involves leaving some things behind and picking up new ones. That instinct connects directly to Paul’s “take off / put on” language without you having to make the connection explicit yet.

READ IT | Scripture • ~4 minutes

Say it:

Paul is about to get specific. He’s going to name things that need to come off and things that need to go on — and he’s going to be blunt about it.

Leaders Note: Ask a volunteer to read. Encourage them to read slowly through the list in verses 25-32. These aren’t abstract principles — they’re behaviors Paul names directly, and they deserve to land.

Context Note: Verse 17 says Paul insists his readers “no longer live as the Gentiles do.” This is significant because many of his readers were Gentiles. He’s not talking about

ethnicity — he’s talking about a way of living characterized by darkened understanding, hardened hearts, and sensuality. The contrast in verses 22-24 between the “old self” and the “new self” isn’t a call to try harder. It’s a call to act in accordance with what is already true. The new self has already been created. The daily work is learning to live inside it.

- Ephesians 4:17-32

EXPLORE IT | Discussion • ~10 minutes

★3. Verses 22-24 give us the core command: take off the old self, be made new in the attitude of your minds, put on the new self. Paul isn’t describing a one-time event. He’s describing a daily practice. What’s the difference between transformation as something that happens to you and transformation as something you participate in every day?

This question is the theological anchor for the whole session. Many Christ followers have a passive view of transformation — they’re waiting for God to change them, and in the meantime they feel stuck. Paul’s language here is active and volitional. Take off. Put on. These are decisions. At the same time, verse 23 says “be made new in the attitude of your minds” — that’s passive. The renewal of the mind is something God does. So Paul holds both: God renews the mind, and we make daily decisions that align with that renewal. Neither passive waiting nor white-knuckled effort on its own. Help your group feel that tension and find the both/and.

Sticky phrase: (Use these to help your group remember what they learn)

“Transformation isn’t something that comes over you. It’s something you put on.”

★4. Verses 25-32 get very specific: lying, uncontrolled anger, stealing, unwholesome words, bitterness, rage, slander. Paul isn’t writing to obviously wicked people. He’s writing to church members. Which of these is the one your group . . . or if you’re honest, you personally . . . would most benefit from taking more seriously?

This question requires courage from the leader. Model honesty before you ask for it. The list in 4:25-32 isn’t a list of dramatic sins — it’s a list of the mundane, daily patterns that quietly corrode relationships. Unwholesome talk. Bitterness. Anger that doesn’t resolve. These are things every person in your group recognizes in themselves if they’re honest. The question asks for personal honesty — not a group diagnosis. Let people answer for

themselves before anyone starts naming what others need. If the room goes quiet, share your own honest answer first.

Sticky phrase: **“The things Paul names aren’t dramatic. They’re the small daily patterns that quietly corrode everything.”**

5. Paul says "do not let the sun go down while you are still angry" (v.26). Most of us have let the sun go down . . . and then the next day . . . and then longer. Is there a relationship in your life right now where unresolved anger or bitterness has been sitting longer than it should?

What's kept you from dealing with it?

This question will land differently depending on the room. Some people will immediately think of a specific relationship and feel the weight of it. Others will deflect into generalities. If that happens, gently hold people to the specific with the follow-up question "Is there someone in particular you're thinking of?" What you're listening for isn't dramatic conflict stories. It's the quiet, unresolved stuff that people have learned to live around — the family member they're civil but not close with, the friend they drifted from after something that was never addressed, the coworker they've written off. Paul's instruction isn't to resolve everything perfectly. It's not to let it sit. The sun-going-down image is practical and almost humorous in its specificity — he's not giving a theological treatise on anger management. He's saying deal with it today. Before tonight is over. That kind of specificity is worth naming for your group. If someone shares something vulnerable here, receive it without trying to fix it or counsel them in the moment. A simple "thank you for being honest about that" and a move toward the next question is enough. The Do It option "Name Your One Thing" can be a natural place for someone carrying this to take a next step.

Sticky phrase: **"Paul didn't say don't be angry. He said don't let it sleep over."**

READ IT | Scripture • ~4 minutes

Say it:

Paul told us what to take off. Now he's going to tell us what to put on — and it's bigger than a list of behaviors.

Leaders Note: Ask a different volunteer to read the next passage. It shifts from specific prohibitions to a broader vision: walk in love, walk in light, walk in wisdom. It's the same take-off/put-on structure, but now zoomed out to a way of life.

Context Note: Depending on which version you read, verse 1 says “Follow (or imitate) God’s example . . . as dearly loved children.” This word is *mimetes* in Greek — where we get the word “mimic.” Paul is saying: copy God. That’s an audacious command. But notice the basis: you are dearly loved children. Mimicking a parent isn’t performance — it’s the most natural thing in the world for a child who has been loved well. The putting-on in chapter 5 flows from that relationship, not from moral obligation.

- Ephesians 5:1-21

EXPLORE IT | Discussion • ~14 minutes

★6. Verse 1 says to “follow God’s example . . . as dearly loved children.” The word means to mimic or imitate. Children mimic their parents naturally — not out of obligation, but because of relationship. What does it look like in your actual daily life to mimic God? And is that mostly something you do consciously . . . or something that just happens as you spend time with him?

This question reframes the whole ethical section of Ephesians in relational terms. Most people approach Christian behavior as a standard to meet. Paul frames it as a family resemblance — you look like your Father because you spend time with him and love him. The question of whether it’s conscious or just happens is important: most people will say it’s mostly not happening, which opens up an honest conversation about what it would take for it to become more natural. Don’t rush this question. It’s the emotional center of this passage.

Sticky phrase: “You mimic who you spend time with. The question is who that is.”

★7. Verse 29 says only say what is “helpful for building others up according to their needs.” Think about the people closest to you — your family, your small group, your coworkers. Do they experience you as someone whose words build them up? What would they say if you asked them?

This question is outward-facing in a way that questions 4 & 5 aren’t — those asked people to look inward at their own patterns. This one asks them to imagine how their patterns are landing on the people around them. That’s a different and slightly more uncomfortable angle. Most people consider themselves reasonably kind. Fewer have actually stopped to ask whether the people closest to them feel built up by the words

they receive. The second part of the question — "what would they say if you asked them?" — is where the honest discomfort usually lives. Some people will realize they genuinely don't know. Others will know, and the answer isn't flattering. Let people sit with that for a moment before anyone answers. If the room gets quiet, that silence is doing work. A useful follow-up if the conversation stalls: *"Is there one person in your life who you know could use more building up from you . . . and what's stopped you from doing it?"* This question also sets up the "Words That Build" Do It option directly — if someone names a specific relationship here, nudge them toward that application choice before you close.

Sticky phrase: **"The people closest to you are shaped by your words whether you intend it or not."**

SAY IT | Leader Teaching • ~3 minutes

Leaders Note: Read the following aloud or put it in your own words. Keep it brief. If you're running short on time, skip this section and move directly to Do It.

Here's what's easy to miss about this passage: Paul isn't describing a program for moral improvement. He's describing what it looks like when identity becomes behavior. You've been made new. The new self already exists. Taking off and putting on isn't how you get there — it's how you live from there.

And notice that every single thing Paul tells people to take off or put on has to do with other people. Stop lying — to each other. Resolve anger — before it damages the relationship. Build each other up with your words. Be kind and compassionate to one another. You can't practice any of this alone. Transformation in Ephesians is always communal.

So the question this session leaves us with is simple: What needs to come off . . . and what needs to go on? Not as a way to earn anything. Not as a performance for God or for this group. But as someone who has already been made new . . . and is choosing every day to live like it.

Do NOT skip this:

Leaders Note: Give your group members a copy of the "Mission Statement Framework" attached to the end of this document. (A digital copy is available on the small groups website and will also be emailed to you.) You will use this for sessions 5, 6 and 7. This is the first of two

informal conversations that build toward the Session 7 mission statement finalization. Think of Sessions 5, 6, and 7 as a three-week arc toward something your group will own together. Allow 3-4 minutes of open conversation before moving to the Do It section. This is informal. You're not facilitating a structured exercise, just opening questions 1 & 2 and letting people respond naturally. Two or three responses are plenty. If the conversation goes longer and you need to trim time, shorten the Do It section **DO NOT skip this.**

Say It: (read the following transition aloud.)

Before we move into our "Do It" choices tonight, we're going to take 3-4 minutes on something we'll be building toward across the next few weeks. We've been talking all quarter about what it looks like to be grounded and sent. Starting tonight, I want us to begin thinking together about what that looks like specifically for this group. The first two questions can be found on your handout.

1. Who are we?
2. What has God been doing this quarter?

Don't try to answer it fully right now. Just give a few answers out loud. We'll come back to this in Session 6 and land on something together in Session 7.

Once you have discussed these 2 questions, make sure someone has written down a few of your answers and then move on to the DO IT section. (or the PRAY IT section if you're under a time constraint.

DO IT | Application • ~6 minutes

Say it:

Verse 15 says "Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity." Choose one of the following or create your own "Do it" plan for this week and share it with the group.

Leaders Note: Trim this section if your "Mission Statement Framework" conversation went long. Ask everyone to pick one option and say it out loud before you close. Check in at the start of Session 6. If someone named something specific in question 4, nudge them toward the "Name Your One Thing" option.

Choose one of the following this week:

- **Name Your One Thing.** From the list in 4:25-32, identify the one behavior that most needs to come off in your life right now. Write it down. Then write down what you're going to put on in its place — Paul always pairs them. Tell one person in your group what you chose. Ask them to check in with you next week.
- **The Mimic Practice.** Each morning this week, before you engage with anyone, ask one question: "How would someone who is dearly loved by God treat the people I'm about to encounter today?" Then try to live the answer. At the end of each day, notice where you did and where you didn't.
- **Words That Build.** Verse 29 says let nothing unwholesome come out of your mouth — only what is helpful for building others up. For one day this week, pay attention to every word that comes out of your mouth. At the end of the day, ask: Did my words build anyone up today? Who . . . and how?
- **Deal With It Before the Sun Goes Down.** Consider the relationship where unresolved anger or bitterness has been sitting longer than it should (question 5). This week, do one thing to address it. Not necessarily a full conversation. Not a resolution of everything. Just one move: a text that opens a door, a phone call you've been putting off, or an honest prayer asking God to prepare you to deal with it. Name what you're going to do before you leave tonight.
- **Reflect On It.** Write two headings on a page: "Taking Off" and "Putting On." Under each one, write honestly about what that looks like in your life right now. Bring what you find to God as a prayer.

PRAY IT | *Closing Prayer • ~3 minutes*

Leaders Note: Read this prayer over your group, or use it as a closing after open prayer.

Father, you've already made us new. The old self has been crucified and we are empowered by Your Holy Spirit. Forgive us for the days we live in our old ways — reaching back for what we've already been freed from, holding onto patterns that belong to a version of ourselves you've already buried. Tonight we heard your invitation: take it off, put it on. Not to earn anything. Not to impress anyone. But because we are your dearly loved children . . . and we want to look like our Father. This week, give us the awareness to notice what needs to come off, and the courage to actually take it off. And may what we put on in its place be something that builds the people around us up rather than tearing them down. In Jesus' name, Amen.