

August 4, 2024

Hope In Christian Fellowship or The Fellowship of Encouragement
1 Thessalonians 2:13–3:5

Unifying Principle (Focus)

People may become discouraged when long distances separate them from friends or family. What can relieve loneliness during long seasons of separation? When Paul cannot visit the Thessalonians, he sends Timothy to visit them and to encourage their steadfastness as they await Christ's return.

Goals for the Learner

1. To examine relationships and conditions within our Christian fellowship during times of separation.
2. To value the bonds of love, care, and togetherness we share in the Christian communion.
3. To strengthen, renew, and encourage one another in the faith community.

Challenges for the Week

1. Spend time in fellowship. Share a meal with a friend.
2. Brainstorm characteristics of an ideal friendship.
3. Visit the homebound or those in nursing homes.
4. What are the challenges and benefits of social media. How does social media impact our relationships for better or for worse?
5. Share prayer concerns with another person. Pray together.
6. Study the persecutions of the early church. What were the Thessalonians struggling with? How can friendship help us get through our own challenges?

August 11, 2024

Children of God or Christ's Rule as the Rule

1 John 3:1-10

Unifying Principle (focus)

People can behave cruelly without regard for "right" and "wrong." How does love become the rule for our thoughts and behaviors? First John says all who look forward to Christ's coming have Christ's love and purity as a model for their own lives.

Goals for the Learner

1. To consider how our behaviors change as we grow as Christians.
2. To be grateful for Jesus' model of love.
3. To engage in acts of kindness and compassion as a witness to God's love.

Challenges for the Week

1. Learn about the civil rights movement. Write in your own words the concept of civil disobedience. Is there a time when morality and following the law are in conflict?
2. Create a time line of your life. Did you notice any changes in your behavior after you became a Christian or after you started taking your faith more seriously?
3. Recall a time when you made a poor choice as a child. What was your punishment? What did you learn from the experience? How did your authority figure react?
4. Make a collage of all the ways God's love manifests itself in your life.
5. Think about what specific ways Jesus showed his love for us. Make a list of Bible verses that show Christ's love.
6. Volunteer at a food pantry or homeless shelter. Journal about the ways we can share God's love with others without using words.

August 18, 2024

Zealous For Good Works or Upright and Godly

Titus 1:1-13; 2:11-15

Unifying Principle (Focus of lesson)

Some people enjoy living recklessly, without regard for consequences. How does a thoughtful consideration of the future inform our actions in the present? Paul instructs Titus to lead others toward lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly with a view toward the blessed hope of Christ's return.

Goals for the Learner

1. To discuss strategies for exercising self-control and godliness in difficult situations.
2. To nurture hope in Christian living while awaiting Jesus' return.
3. To grow spiritually mature as Christ's disciples and witnesses.

Challenges for the Week

1. Using a timer or a stopwatch, sit in silence for five minutes. How did you feel having to sit patiently and wait.
2. List ways you have had to exhibit self-control in everyday life.
3. Reflect upon a time when you had to make a difficult moral decision.
4. Create a timeline of your life. Where has God's grace appeared? How did you respond to that grace?
5. What is the concept of perfectionism. How does perfectionism differ from the expectations in this passage?
6. Define the terms *self-control* and *godliness*. What do they mean for you?

August 25, 2024

Grace and Good Works or Hope for the Eternal In the Present

Titus 3:3-11

Unifying Principle (Focus)

Some people insist on picking fights and creating controversy. What is the best way to avoid a quarrel with a contentious person? Paul advises Titus to lead people away from pointless controversies by directing their attention to the saving work of God in Christ and the hope of eternal life.

Goals for the Learners

1. To recognize conversations that are profitable and unprofitable.
2. To appreciate the gracious and renewing work of God's Spirit.
3. To develop a model for approaching and handling conflict.

Challenges for the Week

1. Create a list of rules to follow when having conversations about controversial ideas.
2. Think about stories of times when you have disagreed with someone in a civil way.
3. Spend ten minutes not doing anything. What was it like to enjoy the grace of not having to do anything? Was it a struggle? Why or why not?
4. Renew your baptism. Contemplate what impact this had on you.
5. What is the difference between infant vs. believer baptism. What are the positives and negatives of both perspectives?
6. Perform a "random act of kindness" for someone. How did it make you feel to offer something to someone who didn't "earn" it?

1.