

Adult Teaching Resources

November 17, 2019



Season After Pentecost (June 16-November 24)

All Saints Day

Ephesians 1:11-23 – “At Home with the Saints”

Random Readings

Luke 20:27-38 – “Trick Questions”

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 – “Right Things”

Colossians 1:11-20 – “Blown Minds”

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Right Things

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.” 2 Thessalonians 3:13

One of the many gifts we’ve been given is the gift of choice. We choose to do right or wrong. Sometimes, the easier path is choosing right. Sometimes the easier path is choosing wrong. Regardless, we have to live with our choices.

For Paul, the right thing was obvious, and it involved work. Today, we explore Paul’s idea of doing the right thing.

Opening

After everyone arrives, focus their attention toward the front of the room and the board. Ask them to give you examples of doing the “right thing.”

Let them decide in which arena that answer applies. They might come up with “voting your heart;” or “taking care of elderly parents;” or “working for a living.” No answer is wrong. Let your class think and answer freely.

As they answer, write their answers on one side of the board. When you have one long column, stop them and ask them to think of a “wrong thing” for each “right thing.” For example, a “wrong thing” for “voting your heart” could be “voting with the crowd.” “Ignoring elderly parents” could pair with “taking care of elderly parents.” Ideally, get your group to think of a wrong response to the situations they presented.

After pairing rights and wrongs, have a short discussion about the differences.

How do you know what is “right?”

How often do you intentionally do “wrong?”

What consequences do you face when you do “right?”

What consequences do you face when you do “wrong?”

Can one person’s “wrong” be another person’s “right?”

Is there one “right” way to live a life of discipleship?

Reading the Bible

What is the command? (to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us)

How do the Thessalonians know how to imitate Paul? (they were not idle when Paul was with them, and they did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor they worked night and day, so that they might not burden any of them)

Why did Paul live this way with them? (in order to give you an example to imitate)

What command did Paul give when he was with them? (Anyone unwilling to work should not eat)

How are some of the Thessalonians living? (in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work)

What does Paul command to those? (to do their work quietly and to earn their own living)

What should they do? (do not be weary in doing what is right)

Making Connections

What does "idleness" mean to you? When is being idle a good and productive thing? When is being idle a bad thing?

Do you know any organizations that are undisciplined and disorderly? What does their activity, or lack thereof, look like? What specific words would you like to share with them to get them back on track?

Do you know any individuals that are undisciplined and disorderly? What does their activity, or lack thereof, look like? What specific words would you like to share with them to get them back on track?

In your experience, what ultimately happens to lazy individuals? What happens to lazy organizations?

When have you seen the transformation of a lazy individual or organization turn into an active, thriving individual or organization? What caused the turn-around?

What do you think is an appropriate expectation for church members contributing to the life and ministry of the church? Where do you draw the line from an active member to an idle member? How would you encourage an idle member to be more active?

Who in your life has modeled a vibrant, active faith for you? What did you learn from that person? How has your life been changed because of it?

Who holds you accountable with your faith life? Who tells you when you're idle and helps you get back on track? Who looks to you for that kind of faithful leadership?

Making Connections *continued*

Our Lesson Writer says this about those living in idleness, “The problem was compounded in that the layabouts were not only lazy, but were minding everyone’s business but their own. This led to disorder and dissension in the church family. A slacker lifestyle does not affect the slacker alone.” What do you do with those people? How can you model Christ in a way that will change them? Or can you?

So What?

Move to the front of the room to the board. Share with your group these words from our Lesson Writer:

“Paul did not mince words: “Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” (v. 12). Such quiet work is the opposite of noisy loafing, and its value is manifest. The roots of the “Protestant work ethic” are deep. Contemporary church traditions that promote honest labor as a cardinal virtue (such as Amish and Mennonite communities) certainly have a friend in Paul.

“Do not be weary,” Paul said, “in doing what is right” (v. 13). Or, “do not give up doing good.” Here Paul has combined the ethic of diligent work with the responsibility to do good. He wasn’t interested in members working to earn a living alone: he wanted them to work for good.”

Ask your group to think about the good work we should be doing as people of faith. Make a list of everything they say. When you’ve filled one column, ask them to think about how to make each good work on that list come to life. Write down the action step(s) that correspond with each good work.

Open the floor for conversation about the opportunities and challenges we face by doing to the good works listed on the board. Which ones are easier to do? Which ones are more difficult? Are some asking too much of us? Are some too easy? As people of faith, what should be our stance in doing right?

The Challenge

This week, choose one good work from the list and commit to working on it everyday.

Prayer

Loving God, doing what is good and right is difficult sometimes. It’s easier to sit and be idle and let someone else carry the load. But, you call us to get busy. Help us to take Paul’s challenge to heart and do the right things. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Time out—There is some evidence that Paul knew how to care for himself, including getting away. When he first came to know Christ after years of rabbinic Judaism and a period of intense campaigning against Christianity, he claimed to have taken a three-year sabbatical in Arabia to get his thoughts and life in order (Gal. 1:17-18). We would be safe in assuming that Paul surely enjoyed times of fellowship and good meals with his new friends around the world. The times he spent in traveling by foot and by sea would also have provided opportunities for refreshment and reflection.

Thessalonians—The city of Thessalonica is now known as Thessaloniki, and a modern city is built over the top of the ancient one. During the latter part of the first century, Thessalonica was the most populous and popular port city in the province of Macedonia, and is now a part of Greece. The city was first populated by the displaced inhabitants of 26 villages that were destroyed in 315 B.C. by the Macedonian king Cassander. Cassander built the new city and named it after his wife, who was the daughter of Philip of Macedonia and sister of Alexander the Great. Thessalonica became a provincial capital in 167 B.C. when Macedonia was annexed by Rome. The cosmopolitan nature of the port city was such that it included a sizable Jewish population.

Paul and the Thessalonians—Our first scriptural encounter with the city of Thessalonica comes in the book of Acts (17:1-10), when Paul, Silas, and Timothy came to the city after a tumultuous visit to Philippi.

They had a similar experience in Thessalonica: Paul preached in the synagogue for three Sabbaths in a row before they realized he was a different kind of Jew and ran him out. This was not, however, before Paul and Silas persuaded some of the Jews, along with “a great multitude of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women” (Acts 17:4) to follow Jesus.

A church began to meet in the house of a man named Jason, but the local Jewish leaders could not tolerate it. They dragged Jason and some other believers before the city authorities, accusing him of welcoming men “who have upset the world” (literally “turned the world upside down”) and who say that “there is another king, named Jesus” (Acts 17:6-7). Jason and the others were allowed to make bail, but that same night the local believers urged Paul and company to leave town under cover of darkness (Acts 17:10).

Paul had also spoken to the issue of hard work in his first letter to the Thessalonians. There he wrote: “You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his

Digging Deeper *continued*

children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:9-12).

The gospel can do that: when it makes such a difference in people’s lives, others may become uncomfortable or feel threatened.

An artisan church?—Linda McKinnish Bridges suggests an intriguing potential setting for the companions’ labors that could have influenced Paul’s later comments on work. She cites evidence suggesting that the church in Thessalonica may have been composed mainly of men who belonged to a tradesmen’s guild. She visualizes them working together in a common compound, open to the street, that would also have served as living space for the workers and their families. Preaching, teaching, or other worship activities would have occurred in the same communal setting. As a guild working together in the same trade as well as belonging to the same church, they depended on each other: everyone needed to do their part if the business venture was to be successful and the community was to be supported (*1-2 Thessalonians* [Smyth & Helwys, 2008], introduced in pp. 8-10 and referenced many times).

Busy at being busybodies—As noted in the lesson, Paul uses an intentional wordplay to point out those who were “not busy, but busybodies.” In Greek, they were not *ergazamenous*, but *periergazamenous*.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

How do we find balance?

Paul's instructions to the Thessalonians doesn't appear to leave much room for rest, relaxation, or vacation. Indeed, the concept of a vacation would have probably been an alien idea to Paul's readers. In their world, the working class labored incessantly while the wealthy lived in luxury. The poor couldn't take a vacation, and the rich lived a vacation.

But what about us? How much work is too much? How much leisure is appropriate? How do we find balance between work and rest, business and play?

Our culture honors periodic rest. We imagine an ideal week that has five work days and two days off, whether they occur on the weekend or not. We long for more extended time away, and we cherish jobs that offer two or more weeks of paid vacation. Time away gives us a chance to recharge our physical, emotional, and mental batteries so we can be more effective when we get back to work.

The Bible also supports the importance of periodic rest. At least one day a week was designated as a "Sabbath" rest when everyone was to take the day off, including servants. Even God, according to the author of Genesis 1, rested after six "days" of creation, setting a model for humans to follow.

Jesus also recognized the importance of taking time away. After his baptism, he spent 40 days on a spiritual retreat, though few of us would consider fasting in the desert to be a vacation. Gospel stories tell us how Jesus often took his disciples away from the crowds so they could rest and pray, and he had a habit of stealing away to be quiet and alone.

Though he emphasized the importance of everyone pulling their own weight when writing to the Thessalonians, Paul understood that rest is a part of the equation, too. He would not have expected them to sew tents or forge tools on the Sabbath, but when it was time for work, he wanted them to work and support each other.

Considering the first five verses of 2 Thessalonians 3 may offer a helpful way of looking at it. In vv. 1-5, Paul focused on prayer. He wanted them to pray for him and his companions, but also for themselves, trusting that God would give them strength to do what was right.

In vv. 6-13, he turns to the subject of work. Work and prayer are both important. So are work and rest. There is no magic formula for how much time off is appropriate: when work calls, we do what we need to do to get the job done. When the opportunity arises, we take needed breaks so we might look after our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being.

The Hardest Question *continued*

Those of us who have jobs and finances that allow for vacations are most fortunate. Many people among the working poor, people who may work several jobs, don't have the freedom or the money to take time off. Perhaps one of the best gifts we could give would be to find ways to help them find needed rest, even if we have to work a bit harder to do it.