

Youth Teaching Resources

December 13, 2020



Christmas Letters

2 Peter 3:1-15a (RCL 3:8-15)—“Patience and Peace”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24—“A Sanctified Season”

Romans 16:25-27—“A Christmas Benediction”

Galatians 4:4-7—“Children of the Child”

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Find links and videos related to this lesson.

“A Sanctified Season”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

YOUTH Teaching Guide

by Jeremy Colliver

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

SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

Throughout the season of Advent, the social media challenge will be centered around the weekly themes of Advent.

On Sunday, post a picture of two purple candles and one pink candle that are lit. On Monday, post the word “Joy.” On Tuesday through Saturday, post images or phrases that give you joy.

TEACHING THE LESSON

Fellowship

Begin your session by showing the clip “Get to Know Your Emotions” from *Inside Out*. If you are unable to show the clip, summarize it to the best of your ability, and then facilitate a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) How is joy described?
- 2) Do you agree with how joy is described?
- 3) How would you describe joy?
- 4) Why is joy important?
- 5) Does your faith provide you with joy?

Information

Transition to the next section of the session by reading 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24. Allow the students to ask any initial questions they have about the text. As you answer their questions, you may want to provide some of the information found in Tony’s commentary to answer their questions. When the students have had an opportunity to share their initial thoughts, continue the discussion by facilitating a discussion using questions like the following:

- 1) Can you truly always be joyful? If not, what does Paul mean?
- 2) How does “pray without ceasing” relate to joy?
- 3) How can you “pray without ceasing”?
- 4) How do the first two verses lead to the third verse?
- 5) Where does this life with the Holy Spirit come from?

Information *continued*

If your group would like to dig deeper in their discussion, share some of the insights that Tony provides in the “Digging Deeper” portion of his commentary. You may want to use some questions like the following to facilitate your discussion:

- 1) What are we to rejoice in?
- 2) How can joy be an approach to life instead of a state of life?

You may also want your group to discuss “The Hardest Question” if they would like to continue their discussion on this passage. Tony poses the following question to consider as “The Hardest Question”: How does one “test everything”?

Transformation

Conclude your time together by introducing the social media challenge for the week:

On Sunday, post a picture of two purple candles and one pink candle that are lit. On Monday, post the word “Joy.” On Tuesday through Saturday, post images or phrases that give you joy.

Allow the students time to share things that give them joy.

Close with a “popcorn” prayer of the things that bring them joy.

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.

An Advent text?—Why was Paul’s advice to the church in Thessalonica chosen as an appropriate text for the Advent season? The third Sunday of Advent – typically marked by a pink or red candle among the purple ones in the Advent wreath, was traditionally a day when ministers were ordained (the color red is associated with the clergy). Paul’s cogent advice, expressed in a string of imperatives, would serve as a good text for an ordination sermon.

Also, a popular Advent tradition highlights a theme on each Sunday of Advent: hope on the first, peace on the second, joy on the third, and love (or salvation) on the fourth. Paul’s advice to “be joyful always” is an appropriate text for the third Sunday, which celebrates joy.

Context—Today’s text comes from a larger unit beginning at 5:12 and extending through 5:22, a section that reads like a closing code of ethics for Christian believers. Paul had begun his letter by praising the Thessalonians for the faith, love, and hope that had made them such sterling witnesses throughout the area. Still, he could not close without parting words of advice on the subject of living faithfully toward God and with each other as they awaited the return of Christ.

The section is marked by three bursts of related imperatives, each consisting of an imperative verb followed by an object or adjectival amplifier. Four pastoral injunctions are found in the first group (v. 14), three directions for manifesting the Spirit of God are found in the second (vv. 16-18a), and five exhortations related to prophecy are in the third (vv. 19-22; for more see F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45 [Word Books, 1982], 122]).

The first few verses of the unit urge believers “to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord, and admonish you” (v. 12). He seems to be describing fellow believers who work alongside other church members but have leadership roles. Linda McKinnish Bridges has argued that the church in Thessalonica was an “artisan church” that may have lived communally and met in a workshop rather than a house (*1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Smyth & Helwys, 2008], 148-156). Their work should earn them the esteem and love of their fellow workers (v. 13).

The reference to those who worked in behalf of the congregation led to an injunction to admonish those who were too lazy to work and to encourage those who were too faint-hearted or discouraged to contribute, and to help the weak, being patient with everyone (v. 14).

The final verse leading into today’s text warns believers against repaying evil with evil, insisting that Christ-followers should “always seek to do good to one another and to all” (v. 15).

Digging Deeper *continued*

Rejoice ... in the Lord—1 Thessalonians 5:16 is reminiscent of Philippians 4:4, which enjoins believers to “Rejoice in the Lord at all times.” Paul’s admonition here to “Rejoice always” does not add the words “in the Lord,” but the context makes it clear that Paul’s advice assumes a life in fellowship with Christ: v. 16 is part of a sub-unit ending in v. 18 with the words “for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

An attitude—On Paul’s directive to be joyful, Linda McKinnish-Bridges has noted that “joy” is not a giddy state of happiness, but a chosen approach to life: “Rejoicing is an attitude, not a response to individual circumstances” (*1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary [Smyth & Helwys, 2008], 162).

Without ceasing—1 Thessalonians 5:17 calls to mind Eph. 6:18: “Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.” As with v. 16, the context makes it clear that Paul has in mind praying in the Spirit here as in Ephesians 6. The literary structure Paul adopted in 1 Thes. 5:12-22 calls for short and memorable phrases, hence the briefer statements.

The verse may also reflect Luke’s comment about a parable Jesus told his disciples “about their need to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1).

Quenching the Spirit—The following comment from F. F. Bruce sheds light on what Paul has in mind by “quenching the Spirit”:

The verb “quench” is related to the figure of fire used in various places (e.g. Matt. 3:11 par. Luke 3:16; Luke 12:49; Acts 2:3; Rom. 12:11) to denote the Holy Spirit or his activity. As the context goes on to make plain, the activity chiefly in view here is prophecy. In this respect the Spirit may be quenched when the prophet refuses to utter the message he has been given, or when others try to prevent him from uttering it. A good example of the former is Jeremiah’s attempt to speak no more in Yahweh’s name, when the word held back became, as he said, ‘a burning fire shut up in my bones’ (Jer. 20:9), which could not be quenched or controlled. An example of the latter is found in Amos 2:12, where the people of Israel are condemned because they ‘commanded the prophets, saying, “You shall not prophesy.”’ (*1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45 [Word Books, 1982], 124).

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 does one “test everything”?

Paul instructed the people of Thessalonica to pay attention to Spirit-led prophets among them, but also insisted that they “test everything” rather than assuming everyone who claimed to have a prophecy really had a word from the Lord.

How does one test whether a prophecy is valid? First, we keep in mind that “prophecy” does not apply to foretelling future events alone. More often, a word of prophecy applies to a current situation, declaring God’s judgment or God’s will in a particular matter.

Paul did not list any particular criteria for distinguishing between true and false prophecies, but we can point to several possibilities.

In Old Testament times, when prophecy often related to predictions of future events, persons were instructed not to believe prophets whose predictions did not come true (Deut. 18:21-22). Unless a person has a track record of predicting near-future events that have either been fulfilled or failed to materialize, however, this test is hard to apply.

But there are other tests. First, Paul certainly would have insisted that genuine prophecy should be consistent with previous revelation. If a prophet declared that God no longer wanted believers to care for the poor, for example, that prophecy should be regarded as false.

Second, a prophet’s words should consistently uphold the person and the message of Christ, acknowledging Jesus as Lord (cf. 1 Cor. 12:3).

Third, people who are in touch with the Spirit should be able to discern whether what someone else says is in line with the truth as they discuss it among themselves. In 1 Cor. 14:29, for example, Paul said “let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.”

Fourth, Paul believed that some believers had the spiritual gift of distinguishing between spirits (1 Cor. 12:10).

When believers gathered in the Spirit and combined their various gifts of reason, knowledge of previous revelation, and discernment of spirits, they stood a better chance of distinguishing teachings should be followed, and which should be discarded.

Modern believers still need to practice discernment, perhaps now more than ever. The airwaves and bookstores are populated by “prophets” who preach distortions of the gospel. Prosperity preachers promote the notion that God wants everyone to be rich or happy or healed of every infirmity. Periodic “end times” preachers predict that we are in the last days, so it doesn’t matter what natural resources we squander or what harm we do to the

The Hardest Question *continued*

environment. A few preachers still hold to harmful notions that the Bible endorses racial inequality and preach white supremacist attitudes.

Mature believers should be able to distinguish between teachings that pander to personal greed or prejudice and those that hold to Jesus' kingdom message of service to all.