## The Young People-Adult Quarterly

International Church School Lessons for Christian Teaching
(Ages 18 and up)

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## Studies In

Psalms, Lamentations, Acts Romans, 2 Corinthians, Colossians Hebrews, 1 Thessalonians, Titus 1 John

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#### THE LORD'S PRAYER

- "9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
  - <sup>10</sup> Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.
    - <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread.
    - <sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
- <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

Matthew 6:9-13 (KJV)

#### THE APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under the Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried: The third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; The holy, catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and life everlasting.

Amen.

\*catholic means universal



#### MUSICAL PRELUDE

**June**: "Jesus Is All the World to Me," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal #257, or "You Keep Hope Alive," by Church of the City (featuring Jon Reddick), <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROsdWfK\_G0E">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROsdWfK\_G0E</a>.

**July:** "Sweet Hour of Prayer," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal #446, or "Hear My Prayer," by Callie Day, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5luBEFXR6fs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5luBEFXR6fs</a>.

**August:** "My Heavenly Father Watches Over Me," AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal #84, or "We Have Hope," by Maverick City Music (featuring Joe L Barnes, Jonathan Traylor & Lizzie Morgan), <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kJ-VDhRewmo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kJ-VDhRewmo</a>.

#### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

**June:** Led by the VBS Director (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday); a child (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday); a father (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday); a youth (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday); and an adult (5<sup>th</sup> Sunday).

**Leader:** "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 40:28a NRSV)

All: "He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable."

(Isaiah 40:28b NRSV)

**July:** Led by a senior (1st Sunday); an adult (2nd Sunday); a young adult (3rd Sunday); and a youth (4th Sunday).

**Leader:** "Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these?" (Isaiah 40:26a NRSV)

All: "He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one missing."

(Isaiah 40:26b NRSV)

**August:** The Young People-Adult teacher (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday); the Intermediate-Senior teacher (2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday); the Junior teacher (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday); and the Primary or Beginner teacher (4<sup>th</sup> Sunday).

**Leader:** "[B]ut those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles ..." (Isaiah 40:31a)

All: "[T]hey shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

(Isaiah 40:31b)

#### **CHORAL INVOCATION**

(Sung corporately)

"Let It Breathe on Me" (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal #225)

#### **MORNING HYMN**

**June:** "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less," (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal #286)

**July:** "And Are We Yet Alive," (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal #361) **August:** "Bless Be the Tie That Binds," (AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal #493)

## RESPONSIVE READING Romans 8:28-31 NRSV

**Leader:** We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

**People:** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.

**Leader:** And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

All: What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us.

#### **RALLY SONG**

"Hope," Johnathan Traylor, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNetZv0mHhc.

#### STUDY PERIOD

Learners study the lessons in their classes.

#### **CLOSING ASSEMBLY**

Class members will commit and dedicate themselves to experiencing hope, expressing hope, and expecting hope eternally.

#### **SUNDAY SCHOOL BENEDICTION**

Sunday school is over for another day. Hear us, Heavenly Father, as to Thee we pray. Through the week be with us in our work and play; Make us kind and loving, help us to obey.

Amen.



#### **EXALT!**

Invocation - Teacher or Leaner

**Celebration –** "Hold to God's Unchanging Hand" - #45 AME Zion *Bicentennial Hymnal* 

**Declaration –** Colossians 1:24-2:3 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

#### Paul's Interest in the Colossians

<sup>24</sup> I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. <sup>25</sup> I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. <sup>28</sup> It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in

Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

<sup>1</sup> For I want you to know how much I am struggling for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for all who have not seen me face to face. <sup>2</sup> I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, <sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

**Affirmation** – We will internalize a vibrant hope in Christ that transforms our lives. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

**ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)

The summer cycle looks at expressions of Christian hope, both in this present age and in the glorious future God is preparing for us.

The five lessons of Unit I, "Experiencing Hope," consider Christian hope through the lens of those whose faith in Christ gave shape to the early church. Lessons draw on New Testament passages from Colossians, 2 Corinthians, Romans, Hebrews, and Acts. In Colossians 1:27 (Lesson 1), Paul tells the Colossians that the mysteries of God become known to them as their hope in Christ transforms their lives. In the Second Letter to the Corinthians (Lesson 2), hope in Christ leads to an even greater boldness than was possible for Moses because believers are able to see the glory of God with "unveiled faces" (3:18). Lesson 3, points to the hope that is inspired in those around us when they see the salvation that is being worked out in us by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:1-13). In Lesson 4, we find encouragement, as did the writer of Hebrews (Ch. 6), in the spiritual lifeline we have to come to God through Christ. The unit closes with a lesson from Acts 26:1-11 and a testimony of Christian hope from Paul's own lips as he defends himself before King Agrippa.

Physical or emotional suffering may cloud the heart and diminish hope for a brighter tomorrow. How might hope be restored? Paul rejoices in suffering for the faith as he shares the mystery of the gospel with Gentiles, which affirms Christ in them, the hope of glory.

In small groups, discuss the following issues and questions: 1) Consider the types of suffering, both physical and spiritual, that we experience and how it affects us. How are we able to endure such suffering? Do we learn from suffering? Do we find purpose in suffering? 2) Do we learn resilience through hardship? If so, how is it possible? 3) Is it difficult to maintain hope amidst a strug-

gling world? 4) Do we experience both loss and fulfillment of hope? Share your findings with the whole group.

**EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

Colossians 1:24-27: Whatever suffering Paul is enduring (perhaps his imprisonment mentioned in 4:3), he rejoices in it because he understands suffering as having a positive outcome for those to whom he writes. While Paul elsewhere speaks of believers participating in the suffering of Christ (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 1:5-7), here he speaks of his own suffering as "completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24). This has posed theological questions for many interpreters: Was not Christ's suffering complete? How could Paul's suffering complete it? One plausible explanation is that the phrase "the afflictions of Christ" does not refer to Jesus' suffering on the cross but is equivalent to the Jewish apocalyptic concept of "the woes of the Messiah," according to which great suffering would attend the last days in anticipation of the coming of the Messiah (see Matthew 24:8; Mark 13:8). It is highly possible Paul sees his present suffering within this framework. Or it may be seen that "the phrase in my flesh is the key to understanding here: that which is lacking completeness is not Christ's sufferings in and of themselves, but rather it is Christ's sufferings in Paul that are not yet complete. The church is the body of Christ, and Paul suffered for that body as he traveled around the Mediterranean world to preach the truth of the gospel. As more sufferings came his way, they filled up what the Lord had predicted in Acts 9:16" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2023-2024, Large Print Edition, p. 347). Another point is that for Paul, suffering is never endured without hope. In this case, it is an element of his servanthood, through which Christ, "the hope of glory," is revealed in those to whom he ministers.

Colossians 1:28-2:3: Paul's hope is universal. This is indicated in Colossians 1:28 where Paul uses the word *everyone* three times: "It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ." This hope is also communal. Paul indicates that his sufferings are "for the sake of his [Christ's] body, that is, the church" (v. 24) and he encourages those for whom he struggles to be "united in love" (2:2). "United in love suggests a harmony of purpose and thought. The same term appears in Ephesians 4:15-16 and Colossians 2:19 to speak of a unity derived from the church's attachment to its head, Christ. The love that unites believers has its source in their devotion to Christ, who empowers us to love one another (Ephesians 3:19; 4:1-4; 1 John 4:11). Only a love built on the knowledge of what Christ has done and a desire to serve others can unite the church (John 13:34-35). In speaking of the 'mystery' of God, as he does in

Romans 16:25-25; 1 Corinthians 2:7; and Ephesians 3:3-9, Paul has in mind "the content of preaching that is foundational: the good news of Jesus, once hidden but now revealed. ...Paul was [also] drawing on Jewish ideas about the mystery of God's plans, which culminate in Christ" (*Ibid.*, p. 348). "The gospel message of Jesus Christ indeed was a mystery until it began to be disclosed by Jesus (Compare 1 Timothy 3:16). But even though he brought, modeled, and explained the gospel message personally, people often did not comprehend (examples: Matthew 16:5-12; Mark 7:17-18; John 14:9), even right up to the day of his ascension (Acts 1:6)....This meaning and significance of Jesus' work received full treatment after his ascension as the apostles received full revelation and the rest of the New Testament was written (examples: Acts 10; Galatians 1:11-12). In that sense, the mystery is now disclosed to the Lord's people" (*Ibid.*)

### ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Discuss the extent to which we have grown confident in our ability to share Christ's message. Do we practice hope in our daily lives? Are we growing in resilience—creating tools to help when hard times come? Can you identify ways Christ's message is already being realized in our world today? Have we grown in our ability to share our love for Christ? Are we able to identify the beauty of Christ in one another? Explain and justify your answers with specific examples and evidence.

#### **iTHINK:** (5 – 7 min.)

- 1. Define *hope*. What does hope have to do with suffering? What is the relationship that Paul sets up between suffering and hope?
- 2. Share a story of a time when you learned from suffering.
- 3. Mr. Rogers said that when things go wrong in our world, we should "find the helpers." Where are the helpers today? List the signs of hope in our world today.
- 4. Discuss how we find hope in suffering without glorifying the suffering. How do we avoid making an "idol" of suffering?
- 5. Verse 27 talks about the mystery of Christ in you. What does it mean to have Christ in you? What does Christ's suffering have to do with our own?

KEY VERSES: I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2-3



June 3	IVI	ACIS 20:23-31	Bolaly Proclaiming the Kingdom
June 4	Τ	Exodus 19:9-11, 16-25	The Awesome Presence of God
June 5	W	Hebrews 12:18-29	The Consuming Fire
June 6	Th	Acts 4:23-31	The Church Prays for Boldness
June 7	F	Exodus 34:28-35	Transfigured by the Power of God
June 8	Sa	Deuteronomy 31:1-8	Be Strong and Bold
June 9	Su	2 Corinthians 3:5-18	Ministers of a New Covenant

#### **EXALT!**

**Invocation -** Teacher or Learner

**Celebration –** "Have Thine Own Way, Lord" - #492 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal* 

**Declaration –** 2 Corinthians 3:5-18 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

<sup>5</sup> Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, <sup>6</sup> who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

<sup>7</sup> Now if the ministry of death, chiselled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside, <sup>8</sup> how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory? <sup>9</sup> For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory! <sup>10</sup> Indeed, what once had glory has

lost its glory because of the greater glory; <sup>11</sup> for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

<sup>12</sup> Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with great boldness, <sup>13</sup> not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside. <sup>14</sup> But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds; <sup>16</sup> but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. <sup>17</sup> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. <sup>18</sup> And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

**Affirmation –** We will model the freedom of a life transformed by Christ. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

### **ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)

People become defensive and retreat when their credentials are challenged. How do we proclaim truth boldly in the face of such challenges? Paul declares that he is able to speak with greater boldness because of the evidence of believers' transformed lives

Discuss with the group the ease or difficulty one may have in telling others about her or his qualifications. For instance, one who is shy and reticent may be reluctant to talk about himself or herself, while another person who is brave and self-assertive may boldly state the things about herself or himself that make them qualified and acceptable for certain reasons. Where do you fit in here? Another issue is that one may have a past history of which he or she is not proud and, therefore, would not want to share any aspect of it. Another may be so proud of his or her achievements that he or she is eager to make details about them known to everyone. Where do you fit in here?

### **EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

**2 Corinthians 3:5-11**: Among the Corinthian Christians Paul finds himself in an uneasy situation in terms of ministry. There were those who compared him to Greek philosophical thinkers and found him lacking their eloquence in their thinking. Then, there were those who did not believe in the genuineness of his

role as an apostle. In the midst of this doubt and skepticism, it was difficult for Paul to minister. He was often on the defensive, having both to prove himself and to defend and spread the gospel at the same time. Paul's authority had been challenged, presumably because he was not a follower of Jesus during Jesus' earthly ministry. Thus, Paul seeks to defend his authority not on a human basis but as coming from divine authority (see also Galatians 1:1, 11-12). He asserts his genuineness by contrasting himself with those who would commend themselves and rather insists that he does not require a letter of recommendation because the Corinthians themselves are symbolically a "letter," one that is "written on our hearts" (3:2) and on "tablets of human hearts" (3:3). Paul not only states that the church itself is the letter, but further tells them, "You are a letter of Christ." Despite their failures, the Corinthians are thus identified as having their origin in Christ himself and are therefore of profound value, and Christ is thus the authority that authenticates Paul's ministry. He speaks of confidence and competence in 3:4-6. Notably, he insists that the Corinthians can be confident not because their competence comes from themselves but because it comes from God. In honesty and sincerity, Paul does not commend himself; nor should we. As does his, our commendation and our confidence come from God. From this perspective the differences between the "old" and the 'new" covenant can be seen. "A primary feature of the old covenant -the Law of Moses-was that it brought death in condemning people as lawbreakers (Romans 2:27; 7:5; 1 Corinthians 15:56). This was through no fault of the law; the benefit of following the letter of the law was learning God's ways, not earning salvation. The new covenant, by contrast, gives life. Therefore, life under the new covenant is connected with the Spirit, a concept introduced by Jesus (see John 6:63) and stressed by Paul (see Romans 2:29; 7:6)" (Ibid., p 355).



2 Corinthians 3:12-18: Paul draws a further contrast between the letters written on the heart with letters written on stone, thereby, contrasting the new covenant with the law that was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai (see Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27). He does not question the "glory" of the old covenant but insists that it is surpassed by the glory of the new covenant (v. 9). Further, believers may act with great boldness because, whereas, the temporary glory of the old covenant

passed away, the glory of the new covenant is permanent (v. 11). The new brings hope and freedom in the Spirit. "The phrase the Lord is the Spirit reflects Isaiah 61:1, quoted by Jesus in Luke 4:18-19. Both passages stress the freedom or liberty that Christ has brought. In contrast to the Israelites, who

most often had a human leader mediating between them and God (compare Hebrews 8), Paul's audience had access to God through the indwelling Spirit. Paul stresses that it is through the Spirit that they have freedom. Through the covenant of the Spirit, they were liberated from the veil. Unlike Moses, they did not have to place a veil over their face. The same face that Paul turned to the Lord was the same face that the people were able to see. Because now the glory never wears off. Unlike the glory of the old covenant that was only given to Moses, the benefits of the new are available to everyone in Christ. In this sense, we can see at least a glimpse of the Lord's glory. Even so, our current view of him is not crystal clear—given that we yet view him as a reflection in a mirror (compare 1 Corinthians 13:12) .... Even so, our reflected view is sufficient in this life for conforming us ever more closely to the *image* of the Son of God (Romans 8:29)" (*Ibid.*, pp. 358 and 359).

### **ELEVATE:** (5-10 min.)

Break into small groups and discuss/elaborate on the following points: 1) We experience freedom when we find our identity in Christ and grow in boldness in our faith by sharing our stories with one another. Give examples. 2) We are growing in willingness to share our identity in Christ and are learning new ways of sharing Christ's love with the world. Give examples of this. 3) In comprehending connections between the Old Testament and the New Testament, are we gaining a fuller sense of our story of faith? Explain your answer.

## **iTHINK:** (5-7 min.)

- 1. Review the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. How does the letter of this law compare to the spirit of the law?
- 2. Using magazines, make two collages that compare and contrast life without Christ and the freedom of life with Christ.
- 3. Using bold or neon markers, make a list of synonyms for *boldness*. Discuss how we can be bold in our faith in everyday life.
- 4. Brainstorm ways to share one's faith without using words.
- 5. Jesus said he came to fulfill the law, not abolish it (Matthew 5:17-20). Discuss how this relates to the 2 Corinthians 3:5-18 text today.
- 6. Draw a picture of what you imagine your spirit looks like. What metaphors did you use to describe your spirit?

KEY VERSE: All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18

# ADULT UNIT I: Experiencing Hope ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Empowered Servants ADULT TOPIC: Hope Amidst Differences

**LESSON 3 DATE: June 16, 2024** 

DEVOTIONAL READING: Philippians 2:1-13
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Romans 15:1-13
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

## **Home Daily Bible Reading**

June 10	Μ	Luke 22:25-30	Servant Leadership
June 11	Τ	Acts 1:1-11	You Shall Receive Power
June 12	W	Isaiah 61	Anointed by God
June 13	Th	Psalms 133-134	How Pleasant to Live in Unity
June 14	F	Ephesians 4:1-7	Bear with One Another in Love
June 15	Sa	Philippians 2:1-13	Embrace the Mind of Christ
June 16	Su	Romans 15:1-13	Prayer for Hope, Joy, and Peace

#### **EXALT!**

Invocation - Teacher or Learner

**Celebration –** "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" - #274 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymn

**Declaration –** Romans 15:1-13 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

## Please Others, Not Yourselves

<sup>1</sup> We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. <sup>2</sup> Each of us must please our neighbour for the good purpose of building up the neighbour. <sup>3</sup> For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.' <sup>4</sup> For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. <sup>5</sup> May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### The Gospel for Jews and Gentiles Alike

<sup>7</sup> Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. <sup>8</sup> For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, <sup>9</sup> and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, 'Therefore I will confessyou among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name'; <sup>10</sup> and again he says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people'; <sup>11</sup> and again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him'; <sup>12</sup> and again Isaiah says, 'The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope.' <sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Affirmation** – We will commit to acts of service, boosted by hope and the Spirit, even in the face of obstacles. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

#### **ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)

People enthusiastically serve a worthy cause, but their hope may falter when encountering obstacles. How do servants of such causes preserve or regain hope? Paul notes that the God of steadfastness and hope empowers harmonious and effective service for Christ.



Share your thinking with those in the group on biases we have that may hinder us in identifying and relating to people different from us. For instance, are we so occupied with our own daily stress that we are incapable of empathizing with others? What are some of the conflicts we have with others that prevent us from having common understandings and loyalties, especially in times of hardship and struggle?

#### **EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

Romans 15:1-6: When speaking of the "weak," Paul likely refers to those who feel compelled to observe prescribed rituals and dietary regulations, predominantly Jewish Christians; speaking of the "strong," he likely refers to those who, through faith, have recognized they are not bound to the regulations of the law, predominantly Gentile Christians. Obviously, "Paul considers himself one of the 'strong.' He sees the misinformed conscience of the 'weak' as real weakness; yet, he emphasizes the responsibility of the 'strong' to support the

'weak.' He does not encourage feelings of pride or flaunting one's freedom in matters offensive to the weak" (ESV Ref- 3ERNAC ormation Study Bible). Paul's hope here is that despite the disagreements between strong and the weak, they will serve one another through a model of service established by Christ (Romans 15:2-3; see Philippians 2:1-11) by pleasing their neighbors (v. 2) and welcoming one another (v. 7). Such hope is not individualistic or self-concerned, but rather focuses on the well-being of the



other and is rooted in Christian unity. Paul thus urges that they come together "with one voice [to] glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 6). "Those who had more understanding knew that eating or abstaining from certain foods wasn't what made a person faithful. Our challenge, whether stronger or weaker, is to build up each other so that all of us will please God in the Christian life. By helping one another, we accomplish the goal" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2023-2024, Large Print Edition, p. 363).

Romans 15:7-13: Paul acknowledges that divergent views exist within the church, and rather than promoting judgment and exclusion, he encourages a model of service and encouragement despite these differences. While the specific historical question Paul has in mind relates to the inclusion of the Gentiles (vv. 9-12), the model of unity expressed through service and inclusion applies to the church today. When confronted by divergent views on nonessentials, we should assume a posture of humility and inclusion. Paul's hope is rooted

in Scripture (v. 4) and in the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 13). "Paul gives us an image of a church gathered with members from every imaginable background and identity but with every voice raised in praise to God (compare Acts 2:46-47). But that expression of praise is not simply in corporate worship. It is vividly expressed in the concern for others more than oneself that each Christian demonstrates, the exercise of the unified mind in all the Christian's relationships. To glorify God is to praise God for what He truly is and has truly done. The true God is the *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*, who died and rose for unworthy humanity. That one is the ruler of all, the one in whom all God's people and, ultimately, all humanity will bow. To bow to him as Lord can only mean that we surrender our rights, customs, privileges, and desires to put others first. When we do, God is truly glorified, for in our actions the world sees what God has done" (*Ibid.*, p. 365).

## ELEVATE: (10 min.)

In small groups, share with one another ideas and responses concerning the following questions and issues: 1) May we grow in perseverance when we learn about past struggles of people of faith? Explain your answer. 2) How might we find resilience in the face of everyday struggles? 3) Is there a life-giving joy that comes from encouraging one another? How so? How not? 4) Do you grow in faith through reading encouraging Scriptures? Explain. 5) Do we have the understanding that God eliminates all divisions between people? If not, how might we come to grasp it?

## **iTHINK:** (5-7 min.)

- 1. Compare and contrast Christian and secular hope. What sets them apart? What do they have in common?
- 2. Explore the differences between Jews and Gentiles during Paul's time.
- 3. Define *steadfastness*. How does this concept fit in with our ever-changing world?
- 4. Write a letter of encouragement to someone who is struggling.
- 5. Gather motivational stickers from a teacher's store. Hand them out to one another, vocalizing what each person is good at.
- 6. Explore the lives of the saints, perhaps even your namesake. What can we learn from their struggles?

KEY VERSES: May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 15:5-6

# ADULT UNIT I: Experiencing Hope ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Full Assurance ADULT TOPIC: God Is Trustworthy

LESSON 4 DATE: June 23, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 23
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 6:9-20
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

### **Home Daily Bible Reading**

June 17	Μ	Psalm 42	Hope in God Our Help
June 18	Τ	1 John 5:1-13	Whoever Has the Son Has Life
June 19	W	1 John 5:14-21	Boldness in Christ for Prayer
June 20	Th	Psalm 23	The Lord Is My Shepherd
June 21	F	Isaiah 12	Trust in God Our Salvation
June 22	Sa	Hebrews 6:1-8	Maturing in Christ
June 23	Su	Hebrews 6:9-20	Trust God's Promises

#### **EXALT!**

**Invocation –** Teacher or learner

**Celebration –** "Standing on the Promises" - #260 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal* 

**Declaration –** Hebrews 6:9-20 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

<sup>9</sup> Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. <sup>10</sup> For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. <sup>11</sup> And we want each one of you to show the same diligence, so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, <sup>12</sup> so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The Certainty of God's Promise

<sup>13</sup> When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one

greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, 'I will surely bless you and multiply you.' <sup>15</sup> And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup> Human beings, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute. <sup>17</sup> In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.

**Affirmation** – We can see parallels between God's promise to Abraham and God's faithfulness in all promises. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

**ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)



People become distrustful when they experience broken promises. Where can people obtain trustworthy promises in an imperfect world? The writer of Hebrews assures believers that God's promises are guaranteed because it is impossible that God would prove false.

Share your thoughts on our reliance on the importance of keeping promises in the home, school, church, government, and other aspects of society. What happens when promises are broken? How often are we hurt by broken promises? How might the sense of trust be restored when promises are broken? Does patience play a role in our waiting for promises to be fulfilled? What is the limit of the waiting period?

**Hebrews 6:9-15**: The author of Hebrews expresses confidence in God's record as a faithful keeper of promises. Furthermore, God's faithfulness reflects God's justice (Hebrews 6:10). For encouragement, the author holds up the model of Abraham as one who maintained faith in God's promise, despite the Old Testament evidence of the many times Abraham expressed his doubt. The characteristic associated with Abraham's faith is patient endurance. By "patiently [enduring, he] obtained the promise" (v. 15). Another translation for "pa-



tiently enduring" is "persevering," and as Craig Koester notes, "'persevering' is the shape that life takes in between the giving and fulfillment of God's promise" (Hebrews, 326). Abraham "obtained the promise" in the birth of his son, Isaac. Much of Christian tradition sees Isaac (particularly his role as the only son who is to be sacrificed) as a forerunner of Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. We know that Abraham had trust issues. for after many years of waiting "he tried to help push God's plan along by the conception and birth of Ishmael (Genesis 16). But, in God's timing, the promise was indeed fulfilled as Abraham learned patience over the course of an additional 14

years until the birth of Isaac. As with other cases in the Bible, God's intent was eventually distorted by self-serving human tradition and pride. By the first century AD, a widely held belief was that physical descent from Abraham [was not required] for being right with God (see Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:18; etc.). But the more important issue was (and is) to be a spiritual descendant of Abraham (see Romans 4:9-17; 9:6-8; Galatians 3:7-9)" (*Ibid.*, pp. 373-374).

**Hebrews 6:16-20**: The image of hope as "a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" (v. 19) is striking. For many Hellenistic (Greek) writers, anchors were a symbol of security. They provided stability through storms. So also, hope offers believers security and stability through times of crisis. This hope, according to the author, enables entrance into the "inner shrine behind the curtain" (v. 19). This references the "holy of holies" within the heavenly tabernacle (see

Hebrews 9). In the earthly tabernacle/temple, only the high priest was permitted to enter the holy of holies on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). Through Christ, believers receive access to the heavenly temple. "The Gospels record that the temple's curtain was torn from the top to the bottom when *Jesus* died on the cross (Mathew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Thus, Jesus was in some sense *our forerunner...on our behalf*. The writer of Hebrews explains this further in Hebrews 10:19-25. The primary reference in the Old Testament to the mysterious *Melchizedek* is Genesis 14:18, [relates to] another one found in Psalm 110:4. The writer closes this section of the book of Hebrews by reflecting on the imagery of this psalm, as he did earlier in Hebrews 5:6, 10. Reference to this ancient person invites further explanation—an explanation that follows immediately in Hebrews 7:1-17" (*Ibid.*, p.375).

#### ELEVATE: (10 min.)

In small groups, share how it may take time to develop trust in God's promises. For instance, do we not grow in the ability to identify how God has fulfilled God's promises? Also, discuss how we may connect imagery from the Old Testament to the New Testament, gaining a greater appreciation for the fullness of Scripture. Give examples. Further, explain how we may grow in perseverance, patiently waiting with expectancy for God to fulfill God's promises. Can you share your experience of this? Can you name promises God has made to you? Finally, discuss how we may grow in understanding how promises are necessary in all relationships.

## **iTHINK:** (5-7 min.)

- 1. Review God's oath and promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 and 22.
- 2. Examine traditional wedding vows. Think about how human promises differ from God's.
- 3. Share stories of when God's promises have been fulfilled in your life.
- 4. Define perseverance. When in life have you had to exhibit perseverance?
- 5. Anchors are used as symbols of steadfastness and perseverance. What other symbols do we use to depict the same idea?
- Make a list of common oaths or promises we make to each other on a daily basis.

KEY VERSES: We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:19-20

# ADULT UNIT I: Experiencing Hope ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Fearless Witness ADULT TOPIC: Hope in God Transforms Us

LESSON 5 DATE: June 30, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Philippians 3:1-14
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Acts 26:1-11
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

**Home Daily Bible Reading** 

June 24	Μ	Psalm 27	My Heart Shall Not Fear
June 25	Τ	Philippians 3:1-14	The Treasure of Knowing Christ
June 26	W	Galatians 1:13-24	Jesus Makes a Difference
June 27	Th	Isaiah 41:1-15	God Will Help the Fearful
June 28	F	Daniel 12	The Wise Shall Shine Brightly
June 29	Sa	Acts 9:1-9	Encounter with Christ
June 30	Su	Acts 26:1-11	A New Creature

#### **EXALT!**

Invocation - Teacher or learner

**Celebration –** "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" - #468 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal* 

**Declaration –** Acts 26:1-11 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively)

## Paul Defends Himself before Agrippa

<sup>1</sup> Agrippa said to Paul, 'You have permission to speak for yourself.' Then Paul stretched out his hand and began to defend himself: <sup>2</sup> 'I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defence today against all the accusations of the Jews, <sup>3</sup> because you are especially familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews; therefore I beg of you to listen to me patiently.

<sup>4</sup> 'All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. <sup>5</sup> They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have be-

longed to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee. <sup>6</sup> And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, <sup>7</sup> a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! <sup>8</sup> Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

<sup>9</sup>/Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. <sup>10</sup> And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. <sup>11</sup> By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

**Affirmation** – We seek God's boldness and courage in presenting the gospel of hope to others. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

**ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)



Our actions and life choices may seem strange and even unacceptable to others who observe us from a distance. What are we to do when those in authority question our actions and motives? Paul boldly bears witness to King Agrippa of his hope in God's promise to his ancestors.

Break into small groups and discuss the following questions:
1) Have you ever been seriously challenged to defend the choices you made regarding who you are and what is vitally important

to you? How do you think one so challenged may find the courage and evidence for his or her defense? Can you think of an example of a person who withstood such a challenge? If so, can you describe what took place? 2) From another standpoint, to what extent do you think people are reluctant to share their strongly-held truths with others for fear of offending someone? To what extent do you think people should withhold what they truly believe to be the truth for

such a reason? 3) How about speaking what you know is true when challenged by persons in power and authority over you and in society? From where might one find the courage to do so?

**EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

Acts 26:1-5: Paul stands before Herod Agrippa II, the last of the Herods to rule in Judea under Roman authority, to defend himself and his gospel. Paul understandably had a tough case before such a ruler whose predecessors were notorious for being ruthless. Not to mention the Herod responsible for the killing of babies in the time of the birth of Jesus, Herod Agrippa I was the one who had arrested and killed James (Acts 12:2) Paul's accusers have petitioned that Paul be put to death despite lacking specific charges beyond theological disputes with his fellow Jews (see Acts 25:19). Paul appeals to Agrippa's prior knowledge of Jewish customs. He respects his learning and seeks an honest and patient hearing. As part of his defense, Paul points to his former life as a Pharisee, which he identifies as the "strictest sect" (Acts 26:5). Central to the Pharisees' hope was the resurrection of the dead. Paul proves himself to be "no novice at interacting with authorities. By this time, his 26 years as Christianity's chief proponent had made him a seasoned debater (examples: Acts 9a;29; 13:45; 17:1-5, 16-34; 18:46; 19:8-10). Thus, he was practiced in the habits of defending his actions, counteracting personal attacks, and dividing his opponents (23:6-10)" (Ibid., p. 379).

Acts 26:6-11: "Paul's case was difficult for civic authorities to grapple with....

The authorities were primarily interested in maintaining law and order. But how was order to be maintained when it involved bodily harm due to issues of personal religious belief and practice?" (Ibid.). No doubt. Paul seeks to demonstrate the irony, even absurdity, of his being charged for preaching his belief in the resurrection of the Messiah. This was the very fulfillment of the hopes of the Pharisees. The only difference is that they anticipated the general resurrection of all; the newness



comes in the individual resurrection of Christ. Paul admits that he was himself at one time an opponent of early followers of Jesus and went to great lengths to persecute them in Jerusalem and other cities, even to the point of voting for their deaths (see 8:1). The about-face that Paul demonstrates, going from a persecutor to a proclaimer of the gospel, from one who put others to death for promoting it to one who was willing to give his own life to defend it, indicates the depth of conviction he experienced in embracing his newfound hope in Jesus' resurrection. "Should the authorities insert themselves into such disputes, or should they leave it up to the Jews and their own religious authorities to sort things out (compare John 18:31; Acts 18:14-17 25:18-21)?" (*Ibid.*). "Paul acknowledges Agrippa's familiarity with Jewish matters [however], as Paul does again in Acts 26:26. Herod's family was outwardly Jewish. They made a point of following aspects of the Law of Moses. But, it was equally obvious they were more interested in being loyal to Rome" (*Ibid.*).

#### ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups and discuss the following questions and issues: 1) Can you grow in your understanding of your own transformation by studying and examining Paul's transformation? Explain your answer. 2) What may help us grow in boldness to share our faith with others? Give examples. 3) How might we all grow in our faith by hearing about someone else's faith journey? Can you share some examples? 4) What experiences, knowledge, and encounters help us grow in trusting that God's promises will be kept? Give examples.

## **iTHINK:** (5-7 min.)

- 1. Have adults share their testimonies. How did their lives change after embracing a relationship with Christ?
- 2. Study the persecuted church in the world today. In what ways does their faith differ from ours?
- 3. Create a timeline of Paul's life. What changes does he undergo?
- 4. Study the promises God made to Paul. How did God keep those promises?
- 5. Summarize Paul's opening argument.
- 6. Study classical Greek oratory forms. What is Paul doing by following these forms? Is it effective? Why or why not?

KEY VERSE: I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors. Acts 26:6



LESSON 6 DATE: July 7, 2024

**DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 30** 

**BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Lamentations 3:16-24; Psalm 30;** 

**Jeremiah 52:1-30** 

PRINT PASSAGE: Lamentations 3:16-24

## **Home Daily Bible Reading**

July 1	Μ	Matthew 6:9-15	Forgive Us Our Trespasses
July 2	Τ	Jeremiah 52:1-15	An Evil King Seals Judah's Fate
July 3	W	Jeremiah 52:16-30	God's People Are Cast into Exile
July 4	Th	Hebrews 4:12-16	Boldly Approach the Throne of Grace
July 5	F	Hebrews 8:6-13	God Will Remember Sins No More
July 6	Sa	Psalm 30	Joy Comes with the Morning
July 7	Su	Lamentations 3:16-24	Hope in God's Steadfast Love

#### **EXALT!**

**Invocation -** Teacher or Leaner

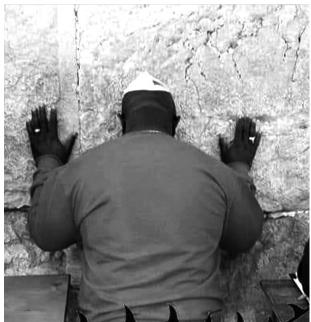
**Celebration –** "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" - #80 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

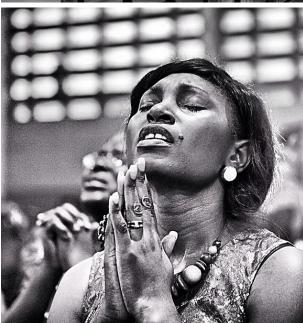
**Declaration –** Lamentations 3:16-24 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

16 He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes;
17 my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is;
18 so I say, 'Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord.'
19 The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall!
20 My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me.
21 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:
22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
24 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in him.'

**Affirmation –** We value the relief that comes when expressing our pain and despair to God. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

**ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)





Unit II, "Expressing Hope," turns attention to the prayers of ancient Israel as a model for offering to God our praise and petitions. These Hebrew prayers are also expressions of Christian hope. The first lesson of the unit is from a song of lament in Lamentations 3, while the remaining lessons of the unit are drawn from the Psalms.

During the profound pain and disappointments, we sometimes experience in life, how do we overcome despair? The writer of Lamentations reminds us of God's steadfast love and that faithfulness triumphs over despair.

Break into small groups and discuss your thoughts on the following: 1) How would you respond to the question: Why do bad things happen to good people? If possible, focus on examples in your experience, where this has been the case. 2) Discuss cases where people blame God for troubling experiences

in their lives and whether or not in some cases, they have reason to do so. 3) Are there situations you know of where people experience serious disappointments and pain, yet, persevere and find resilience to get back up after falling down and retaining belief and faith? If so, what is it that enables people to do so as far as you can tell? Share your findings with the larger group.

**EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

Lamentations 3:16-20: We might recall that in his desolation, Job cried out, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21), and he had not sinned. Despite his harsh situation, he refused to speak ill of God, but rather to glorify God. And later he asked, "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" (Job 2:10b). The passage of scripture here describes a truly harsh, bitter condition he and his people are receiving because of their sins against God. The people had been warned and did not heed the prophecies. The Book of Lamentations describes the fall of Jerusalem in 587-586 BC and is traditionally associated with the prophet Jeremiah, who had prophesied and was a witness to the fall (see 2 Chronicles 35:25). The destruction of Jerusalem, and particularly of the temple, was crushing to the Jewish people, for much of their theology was founded on the belief that God had given them this land, God's Glory dwelt in the temple, and God would protect them from their enemies. "A long siege left many dead from starvation, and a significant number of the remaining population was brutalized and taken captive to Babylon.... Especially hurtful to the inhabitants of Jerusalem was the utter destruction of the temple, the centerpiece of their city and the symbol of their special relationship with God (Jeremiah 17:4-14; 52:12-23)" (Standard Lesson Commentary 2023-2024, Large Print Edition, p. 386). As the beginning of this chapter makes clear, rather than portraying God as defender of Jerusalem, in the first half of this chapter, the speaker sees God as using the Babylonian conquerors as the "rod of God's wrath" (v. 1). This perspective is evident in verses 16-19 as well, and as noted in verse 18, leads the author to express that all he has hoped for from the Lord has been lost.

Lamentations 3:21-24: Noting the absence of hope in verse 18 and its renewed presence in verses 21-24, it is possible to understand the prior hope as a misplaced hope that needed to die before a new, more appropriate hope could take root. This new hope is rooted not in God's might as a warrior, but rather in God's love and mercy (v. 22) and faithfulness (v. 23). Recalling the harsh and bitter experiences of God's wrath has not led to total despair for there is, yet, something far more appealing and eternal. God's wrath will not last forever and neither will the sense of hopelessness. But God's love and mercy endures forever. The speaker "draws from the rich tradition of prayer and praise that

he undoubtedly knows from his own education, beginning in his boyhood. His recollection interrupts the downward spiral of despair with memories that are deeply ingrained through years of study and more profoundly formative than the traumatic memories of recent suffering.... His *hope* is revived as he begins to view his situation from the perspective of revelation and tradition rather than personal experience.... [Revelation and tradition reveal that] divine wrath is a function of divine love. God's anger over Judah's persistent sin was his love, taking disciplinary form. His purpose was not to destroy Judah, nor was it to forsake her and give up on his covenant. Rather, the judgment was a kind of radical surgery performed to save the patient" (*Ibid.*, p.389).

## ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Break into small groups and discuss the following: 1) Has this description of the experience of the chosen people of God impacted your understanding, growth, and trust in God? How might knowledge of the experience of God's chosen people impact others? 2) Does this study help you gain a better understanding of the cultural significance of the fall of the temple? If so, how might we relate this insight to our view of the church buildings? 3) How might this lesson help in our growth, understanding, and acceptance of God's unconditional love of us, as well as our empathy for others who are experiencing difficult times?

## **iTHINK:** (5 – 7 min.)

- 1. Study the role of the temple and the impact of its fall in 587-586 BC.
- 2. Write a letter to God lamenting a bad thing that has happened in your life. Seal the letter and burn it, letting go of the pain as it turns to ashes. How does this make you feel?
- 3. Write a letter to yourself from God in response to your lament expressing God's love for you.
- 4. Study other periods of time when cultures have been decimated by war. How did these cultures recover?
- 5. Brainstorm encouraging things to do or say for a person who is experiencing sorrow in his/her life.
- 6. Collect ways we try to relieve physical pain. Discuss ways that God relieves our emotional pain.

KEY VERSES: This I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end. Lamentations 3:21-22

## ADULT UNIT II: Expressing Hope ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Continual Proclamation ADULT TOPIC: God Is Faithful

LESSON 7 DATE: July 14, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Ephesians 3:1-13
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 71:12-21
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

## **Home Daily Bible Reading**

July 8	Μ	2 Corinthians 2:12-17	The Fragrance of Knowing God
July 9	Τ	Psalm 107:1-9	The Testimony of the Redeemed
July 10	W	Psalm 107:10-22	Sing of God's Deeds with Joy
July 11	Th	Colossians 1:3-12	Hope Laid Up in Heaven
July 12	F	Ephesians 3:1-13	Proclaim Christ's Boundless Riches
July 13	Sa	Psalm 71:1-11	Refuge in the Lord
Julv 14	Su	Psalm 71:12-21	I Will Hope and Praise Continually

#### **EXALT!**

**Invocation -** Teacher or Learner

**Celebration –** "Love Lifted Me" - #429 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal* **Declaration –** Psalm 71:12-21 (*Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.*)

<sup>12</sup> O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me! <sup>13</sup> Let my accusers be put to shame and consumed; let those who seek to hurt me be covered with scorn and disgrace. <sup>14</sup> But I will hope continually, and will praise you yet more and more. <sup>15</sup> My mouth will tell of your righteous acts, of your deeds of salvation all day long, though their number is past my knowledge. <sup>16</sup> I will come praising the mighty deeds of the Lord God, I will praise your righteousness, yours alone.

<sup>17</sup> O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. <sup>18</sup> So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come. Your power <sup>19</sup> and your righteousness, O God, reach the high heavens.

You who have done great things, O God, who is like you? <sup>20</sup> You who have made me see many troubles and calamities will revive me again; from the depths of the earth you will bring me up again. <sup>21</sup> You will increase my honour, and comfort me once again.

**Affirmation –** We affirm God as our faithful and loving sustainer. (Spoken together by class and teacher).

**ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)

Our interpretation of past events has profound influences on our present experience. What helps us interpret past and present situations in ways that are beneficial to us and others? In Psalm 71, the poet's hope is maintained by continual praise for God's past acts of faithfulness and love.

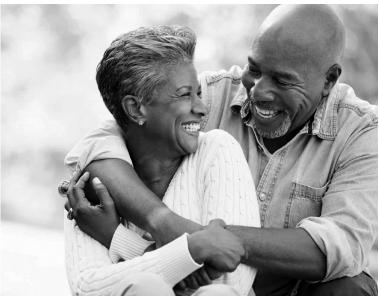


Break into small groups and discuss the following questions/issues: 1) People who deal with stress daily often use unhealthy methods of coping with stress. What are some healthy ways of dealing with stress? 2) Some people are keenly aware of shame and its effects. How would you help people overcome such conditions and avoid ruining their lives? 3) How can we overcome a sense of powerlessness? 4) Do you suppose reflecting on a person's youth and discerning growth and development will help get a better grip on life? Explain. In what sense is patience needed before a resolution to a problem can be found?

#### **EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

Psalm71:12-18: Shame is a theme that dominates this psalm, which "is part of a long list of prayers (going back at least to Psalm 50) that express the hope that God will help those who trust in God. This section of Psalms addresses the suffering of individuals or Israel, as a people in lament-after-lament. These psalms call God's attention to the human need for a continuing relationship of rescue. And, the psalms remind the people of Israel of their constant need for self-examination, repentance, and hopeful action" (Ibid., p. 394). For the theme of shame, note the references in verses 1, 13, and 24. The first and last verses bookend this theme, while verse 13 serves as the center point. The speaker seeks to avoid shame and for his enemies to be shamed. As an antidote to shame, the speaker expresses hope and praise (v. 14 and following), which are the response to God's "righteous acts" and "deeds of salvation" (v. 15). The speaker expresses hope that just as God has been faithful from the psalmist's "youth" (v. 17), God's faithfulness will continue into "old age" (v. 18). This leads the speaker to proclaim God's faithfulness to "all the generations to come" (v. 18). This "long view" of God's faithfulness is a profound expression of hope.

Psalm 71:19-**21**: Just God's faithfulness is expressed terms of time (from youth to old age), God's power is expressed spatial terms: it reaches "the high heavens" (v. 19) pulls the psalmist "from the depths of the



earth" (v. 20). There is no time or place where God's power cannot inspire hope. The speaker is no stranger to misfortune, as is evident in the references to the "many troubles and calamities" (v. 20), and yet, he maintains hope that God will bring restoration, honor, and comfort (v. 21). This adds depth to the speaker's hope. The psalmist's hope is not superficial or based only on pleas-

ant feelings or experiences. It is born out of anguish. "The psalmist expects God to increase the praying person's *honor* rather than allowing him or her to suffer social isolation and disgrace. This is not the request of a boastful or already successful person for even more power. Rather, this is the hope of an oppressed, downtrodden person to receive the honor due to all human beings who trust in God. This hope is rooted in God's character. The prayer asks God to reverse the painful situation that the psalmist experienced because of the slander of the enemies (see Psalm 71:9-11, not in our printed text)" (*Ibid.*, pp. 398-399).

### **ELEVATE:** (5-10 min.)

Would you agree that "When other people seem bent on our destruction, when everything we attempt fails, or when our most cherished plans crumble into the dust, even then, there is hope? Hope is possible because this life does not fully belong to human beings, and whatever evils we may dream of, carry out, or merely tolerate will not prevail in the end. God reigns in life. He works steadily for the good, building a world in which love prevails over hate" (*Ibid.*, p. 399). In small groups, respond to this quotation and to the following questions: 1) How do we grow in dealing positively with stress in our lives? 2) Name ways in which God has been at work in you own life and ways you have grown in understanding God's steadfast love for you, and ways you grow continually in your dependence upon God's Word for hope and strength. Share responses on these

## **iTHINK:** (5-7 min.)

- 1. Outline Psalm 71. How does its structure contribute to its overall message?
- 2. Reflect on a time in childhood when you felt shame or embarrassment. How did you recover?
- 3. Reflect on a time in childhood when you learned a lesson from God. How do you carry that lesson with you today?
- 4. Describe your daily stressors. What contributes to the stress and makes it worse? What helps relieve some of the stress?
- 5. Imagine you could have a superpower. What would it be? How would it solve some of your life problems?
- 6. Choose a favorite verse from this psalm. Memorize it. Reflect on how you have "used" this verse in your daily life.

KEY VERSE: I will hope continually, and will praise you yet more and more. Psalm 71:14

## ADULT UNIT II: Expressing Hope ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Delightful Precepts ADULT TOPIC: God's Word Brings Hope

LESSON 8 DATE: July 21, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Proverbs 30:1-9
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 119:73-80
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

#### **Home Daily Bible Reading**

July 15	Μ	2 Timothy 3:10-17	Equipped for Every Good Work
July 16	Τ	Matthew 4:1-11	Resist Temptation
July 17	W	Proverbs 30:1-9	Every Word of God Proves True
July 18	Th	Colossians 3:12-17	Let Christ's Word Abound in You
July 19	F	James 1:19-27	Doers of the Word
July 20	Sa	Psalm 119:57-72	Lord, Teach Me Your Statutes
July 21	Su	Psalm 119:73-80	Hope in God's Word

#### **EXALT!**

Invocation – Teacher or Learner

Celebration – "Trust and Obey" - #443 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymn

Declaration – Psalm 119:73-80 (Read together by the class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

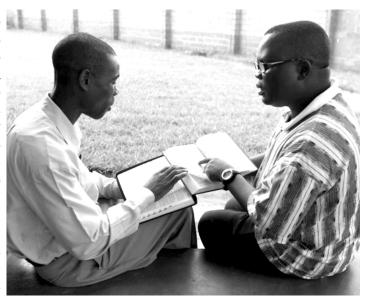
<sup>73</sup> Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. <sup>74</sup> Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word. <sup>75</sup> I know, O Lord, that your judgements are right, and that in faithfulness you have humbled me. <sup>76</sup> Let your steadfast love become my comfort according to your promise to your servant. <sup>77</sup> Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight. <sup>78</sup> Let the arrogant be put to shame, because they have subverted me with guile; as for me, I will meditate on your precepts. <sup>79</sup> Let those who fear you turn to me, so that they may know your decrees. <sup>80</sup> May my heart be blameless in your statutes, so that I may not be put to shame.

**Affirmation –** We are open to God's steadfast love working in us. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

#### **ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)

People are unsure where to seek help and comfort. Where do we find hope, and how do we encourage others in times of need? In Psalm 119, the psalmist finds delight and assurance in God's Word.

Break into small groups and discuss the following quesand issues tions and share vour central conclusions and findings with the whole body. 1) participants Ask to express their understanding the purpose and benefit of laws. Do you find differences among the group on the subject? If so, explain why this is the case, if you can. 2) Where do we discover what is right in our living?





From our parents, home, school, church, or other sources? How can we be sure of the right we know? 3) How do we determine equity and fairness? Is life always fair? Explain. 4) How do we determine if laws are just? What do we do when human laws conflict with morals? Give examples and explain.

### **EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

Psalm 119:73-77: Psalm 119 has been identified as "the most comprehensive of all the psalms" in that it offers a "many-coloured mosaic of thoughts" (Weiser, *The Psalms*, 739). It is composed of twenty-two formal units or strophes. These twenty-two strophes correspond with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, making this psalm an alphabetic acrostic where the first word of each strophe begins with a letter of the Hebrew Bible and are arranged in alphabetical order. In this particular strophe, the psalmist begins with a reflection on the creative work of God (v. 73) and asks that God continue in the moral formation of the individual by shaping the psalmist's understanding of the commandments. The psalmist assumes the posture of one who has been "humbled" (v. 75) and one who is a "servant" (v. 76). This reflects an openness toward instruction and learning. God's commandments are not seen here as being in conflict with God's "steadfast love" [Hebrew: chesed] (v. 76) or "mercy" (v. 77); rather God's commandments are an expression of those divine attributes. The psalmist "emphasizes the Law of Moses (the Torah) as a guidebook to a life of dignity and moral integrity. [He] invites faithful people to delight in such a life, not merely endure it.... [He sees the law as providing a clear structure to everyday life that] invites a person to inner peace and openness to the work of the creator God. These commandments rest on God's prior commitment to justice (often paired with or assumed to accompany righteousness). God's deep desire for a fair and fertile world for human beings underlies everything in the revelation at Sinai (Exodus 20; etc..), and it can underlie everything in human life. So, this psalm affirms" (Ibid., pp. 402 and 403).

Psalm 119:78-80: While we often perceive laws to be burdensome or restrictive, the psalmist rejoices in God's "law" (v. 77), "precepts" (v. 78), "decrees" (v. 79), and "statutes" (v. 80). These words of God are the psalmist's source of hope (v. 74), for the psalmist understands them not as prohibitions that limit one's potential but as guidance for moral formation and a means of reaching one's divinely appointed potential. "The instructions in wise and righteous living that the Torah—given to Moses by God for Israel's benefit (Deuteronomy 4:1-2)—provides joy in the person dedicated to following those laws. The person who pursues life in and with God will experience joy, even amidst trials (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Far from being a burden to be endured, the law orients a faithful person to a deeply meaningful pattern of life (example: Psalm 1:1-3) .... The psalmist did not simply obey rules. He enjoyed a relationship with God. That relationship was full of dignity and moral depth. The law was not just a set of rules but a guide to a meaningful life. God's Law contains the secrets of spiritual growth for the people of Israel and, to a certain extent, for Chris-

tians as well. We affirm this when we learn from the writers of Scripture who grew and learned because of their reverence for God's Law. A life of obedience should not be burdensome but joyful" (*Ibid.*, pp. 405-406 and 407).

# ELEVATE: (10 min.)



Break into small groups and share your responses to the following issues and questions: 1) How vital to our spiritual growth is our knowledge of Scripture and discernment of the meaning of God's Word? Explain. 2) Do we depend upon Scripture for guidance and support? Explain. 3) How might an understanding of the gifts of God's law differ from our understanding of human laws? 4) What part does growth and trust in the Lord play in finding hope in God's law as a guide for daily living?

# **iTHINK:** (5-7 min.)

- 1. Examine traffic laws. What is their purpose? Why do we sometimes disobey them? Does reflecting on traffic laws give us any insight as to why we disobey God's laws?
- 2. Memorize the Ten Commandments. Does studying them change their meaning or importance for you? How so?
- 3. Read Psalm 119, in its entirety, aloud as a group, taking turns so as to hear different voices reading the Scripture. Does reading the psalm in its entirety change the meaning or context of our passage for today?
- 4. Study the civil rights movement and the idea of civil disobedience. Is there ever a time when God's laws and human laws contradict? What do we do if they do?
- 5. Write a personal poem describing how God helps us stay on the right moral track.
- 6. Choose one verse to meditate on. Read it aloud, then spend a few minutes in silence. Read it aloud again. What word or phrase comes up during this meditation? Share the word or phrase with the group. Read the Scripture again. Then, share what you think God might be telling through the passage.

KEY VERSE: Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments. Psalm 119:73

# ADULT UNIT II: Expressing Hope ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Expectant Watchfulness ADULT TOPIC: God Redeems Us

LESSON 9 DATE: July 28, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 25:1-13
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Psalm 130
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

# **Home Daily Bible Reading**

Await the Dawning Day

July ZZ	IVI	2 Feler 1.10-21	Await the Dawning Day
July 23	Τ	2 Peter 3:1-15a	Await and Hasten God's New Creation
July 24	W	Psalm 59:1-9, 17	I Watch for God My Fortress
July 25	Th	Matthew 25:1-13	Watch and Be Ready
July 26	F	Matt 25:14-21, 24-30	Watch and Work Faithfully
July 27	Sa	Lamentations 3:25-36	Wait for God's Salvation
July 28	Su	Psalm 130	Wait and Hope in the Lord

#### **EXALT!**

Invocation - Teacher or learner

2 Potor 1:16-21

**Celebration – "**Just as I Am, without One Plea" - #415 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal* 

**Declaration –** Psalm 130 (*Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively*)

# **Waiting for Divine Redemption**

# A Song of Ascents

- <sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. <sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!
- <sup>3</sup> If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? <sup>4</sup> But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.
- <sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope; <sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more

than those who watch for the morning.

<sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. <sup>8</sup> It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

**Affirmation** – We develop confidence in God's steadfast love and desire to forgive. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

**ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)

People are often their own worst enemies. What are ways to address the enemy that is "us"? Psalm 130 reminds us that our sins may drag us down, but the Lord's power to redeem us will set us on our feet again.

Break into small groups and discuss the following guestions: 1) Under what types of circumstances do you/we experience the need for forgiveness? What about our need to forgive others? Is this also sometimes a pressing need? Why or why not? Do we sometimes experience a strong need to forgive ourselves? Why might it be necessary sometimes to forgive ourselves in order to find peace? 2) Within the same vein, consider the fact that we often have difficulty accepting forgiveness as well as extending forgiveness to others? Give examples. Why do you think



this is so? 3) Consider the problem of evil. Is it a universal existence that impacts all people? How do you cope with it?

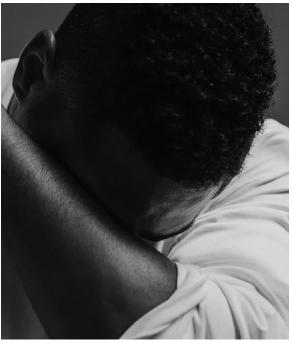
**EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

**Psalm 130:1-4**: This penitential psalm was a favorite of Martin Luther's, and it was the inspiration for his hymn "Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee," which is a

direct quotation of verse 1. Luther considered it one of the "Pauline" psalms, not to claim Paul's authorship but to acknowledge the theological similarity to Paul's message. The "depths" (v. 1) are a common metaphor in the psalter to indicate the spiritual affliction suffered by the speaker. Here it is a feeling of being separated from God on account of one's iniquities (vv. 3, 8). Particularly "Pauline" is the psalmist's question, "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?" (v. 3). The answer to the rhetorical question, of course, is "No one." The psalmist laments human nature's tendency toward sin in contrast to God's righteousness. The psalm focuses not on the outer, but rather, on the terrible inner forces of human sin that come "from the human tendency to allow vices [evil] to overcome us. That tendency threatens to take over everything we do and are thwarting our best plans and spoiling our best intentions" (*Ibid.*, p. 410).

**Psalm 130:5-8**: Also, strikingly "Pauline" is the pairing of human iniquity with divine forgiveness, love, and mercy. The latter is expressed in verse 4– "But there is forgiveness with you"—and verse 7—"For with the Lord there is steadfast love." God's posture toward humanity is not one of judgment but of mercy. And so, moving from an attitude of despair ("out of the depths"), the "focus shifts toward God's inclination to save and the consequent hope that" (*Ibid.*, p. 411) all

Israel may share. Thus, God's mercy is the psalmist's and the people's source of hope (v. 5) as the Lord is the source of redemption (vv. 7-8). Indeed, divine forgiveness turns this penitential psalm, which began with a lament (v. 1), into a song of praise. In summary, "The poem, though very short, moves in several steps, from a statement of need addressed to God, to an acknowledgment of God's mercy and confession of hope, to an address to all Israel.... [Beginning with] a cry to God, as most laments do... [the psalm moves quickly to praise] born out of gratitude for God's generous response



to the petition for help" (*Ibid.*) "As laments often do, the psalm ends with an expression of deep trust in God (example: Psalm 22). This ending repositions

the whole poem because it moves the readers from focusing on the individual to God's care for the whole people. In God's great mercy lies hope for Israel and everyone within it.... There is a tight connection between the individual's experience and the community's proclamation. The people of Israel were the community whom God rescued from evil in all its manifestations, of which we are the spiritual descendants. The people announced and celebrated the good news that such a deliverance had occurred (example: Exodus 15), and they sought more of it. And, of course, that understanding also applies to the church, the community grafted into Israel (Romans 9-11). We also experience, both as individuals and as a community, the power of God's forgiveness, which we imitate in our dealings with others" (*Ibid.*, pp. 414-415).

# ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Gather in small groups and share your perception of the truth and validity of the following: 1) We are steadily gaining a spiritual understanding of our need for forgiveness, and we connect God's hearing of our prayers with God's forgiveness and redemption. 2) We accept forgiveness from God and therefore respond by forgiving



others. 3) We grow in dependence upon God as we fail in living up to God's standards of righteousness and constantly pray for forgiveness and strength to overcome our weakness.

# **iTHINK:** (5-7 min.)

- 1. Sing or read together Martin Luther's hymn "Out of the Depths I Cry to Thee." What does this song have in common with the psalm?
- 2. Examine the psalmist's comparison of those who wait on God's answers to "those who watch for the morning."
- 3. Write a psalm to God asking for forgiveness.
- 4. Write a response to that psalm in the form of a letter from God.
- 5. Outline the psalm according to theme. What do we learn about the psalmist's perspective on redemption?
- 6. Explore the "depths." What does the psalmist mean by the "depths"? What helps others when they are in the depths? Explore the difference between empathy and sympathy.

KEY VERSE: O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. Psalm 130:7

# ADULT UNIT III: Eternal Hope ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: The Fellowship of Encouragement ADULT TOPIC: Hope in Christian Fellowship

LESSON 10 DATE: August 4, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 121
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

# **Home Daily Bible Reading**

July 29	Μ	1 Thess 4:13-18	Words of Hope
July 30	Τ	Hebrews 10:19-25	Encourage One Another
July 31	W	2 Chronicles 30:21-27	Encouraging Words
Aug. 1	Th	Ecclesiastes 4:7-12	Two Are Better Than One
Aug. 2	F	Galatians 6:1-10	Bear One Another's Burdens
Aug. 3	Sa	Psalm 121	My Help Comes from the Lord
Aug. 4	Su	1 Thess 2:13–3:5	Encouraged in Faith

# **EXALT!**

Invocation – Teacher or Leaner Celebration – "No, Not One" - #258 AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal

**Declaration –** I Thessalonians 2:13–3:5 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

<sup>13</sup> We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. <sup>14</sup> For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, <sup>15</sup> who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone <sup>16</sup> by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last.

# Paul's Desire to Visit the Thessalonians Again

<sup>17</sup> As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you-in person, not in heart-we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. <sup>18</sup> For we wanted to come to you-certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again-but Satan blocked our way. <sup>19</sup> For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> Yes, you are our glory and joy!

3 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens; <sup>2</sup> and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, <sup>3</sup> so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that this is what we are destined for. <sup>4</sup> In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know. <sup>5</sup> For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labour had been in vain.

**Affirmation** – We will remain faithful, knowing that the Lord is with us. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

# **ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)

In I Thessalonians 2:13, Paul offers up a thanksgiving, which echoes the initial thanksgiving in 1:2. In it, he expresses thanks, especially, for the receptive spirit of the Thessalonians. They received the "word" that Paul had proclaimed and acknowledged its vine (non-human) origin. Here the "word of God" refers not to the Bible, but to oral proclamation of the gospel.



First Thessalonians 2:14-16, which speaks of "the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets" and who "displease God and oppose everyone" (v. 15), has tragically inspired anti-Semitic rhetoric and actions of some Christians. However, the Greek word *loudaioi* can be translated not as "Jews" but as "Judeans," and it is possible that Paul, himself a Jew, was referencing only the corrupt leadership in Judea. These texts must be handled thoughtfully. It is essential that encouragement of others within the Christian community does not come across as hostility or hatred toward those outside of the community. Paul likens his own position to that of an orphan (2:17); earlier in this chapter he compares himself to "a nurse tenderly caring for her own children" (2:7). This mix of metaphors, with Paul sometimes a nurse caring for her children and other times himself an orphaned child, indicates a non-hierarchical relationship founded on mutual care for one another.

Despite being "separated...in person," Paul insists they are not separated "in heart" (2:17). As one commentator notes, "The 'orphans' feel a strong bond with the church that distance cannot dilute" (Shogren, *The 1 & 2 Thessalonians Commentary*, 130).

Paul does not glory in himself or his own accomplishments; rather, as he tells the Thessalonians, "You are our glory and joy!" Paul's hope and joy are rooted in the meaningful relationships, founded on mutual care and love, that he has established with those in Christian fellowship.

Paul clearly describes his separation from the Thessalonians as the work of evil spiritual powers, which he identifies as "Satan" (2:18) and "the tempter" (3:5). We might understand community and friendship as the work of the Holy Spirit—while it is the forces that stand in opposition to the Spirit that disrupt this sort of communion.

**Unit III, "Eternal Hope,"** the four lessons of Unit III, (I Thessalonians, I John, and Titus), consider facets of the promised future God is preparing for those who call on the name of Jesus. What does hope look like as we wait for Jesus to come again in glory and finally set things right? Paul anticipates the nearness of Christ's return when he tells the Thessalonians how excited he is to brag about them (Lesson 10) even as he worries about the problems that might rock their faith in his absence from them. Similarly, I John (Lesson 11) anticipates Christ's return so that in seeing Christ we might become like Christ. The final two lessons of the quarter are from Titus, where we hear Paul's appeal to live out the present moment with hope rooted in God's grace-filled future, made certain in the death and Resurrection.

Break into small groups. Consider and discuss the following questions: 1) Seemingly, adults have a more difficult time making new friends, compared to children. Do you agree? Why or why not? Share with the group. 2) We have heard terms like "fake friends" and "frenemies." Adults value authentic friendships. Do you have any true friends who stick by you through "thick and thin?" Describe your relationship. 3) Adults are able to maintain friendships over time and distance. Can you think of someone with whom you have been friends for many years, have not seen in quite a while, but when you do, it is as if the years apart were nonexistent? Describe that feeling.

**EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

<u>Paul Suffers with the Thessalonians</u> (I Thessalonians 2:13-16): Paul begins this passage by thanking the Thessalonians for being receptive to the word of God. The New Testament had not been written yet; therefore, Paul is preaching to them with divine revelation from Jesus Christ. He notes that they have been imitators, and therefore, share in the suffering, of Jesus Christ. Because of their beliefs, this persecution is thrust upon the Thessalonians by the "other" Jews (who do not believe). Paul encourages them by telling them that



they are not alone-he shares in their struggle. Paul refers to the Jews who killed the Messiah and rejected and condemned the prophets in the Old Testament and caused him to be driven out of Thessalonica by night. The hostility between the Jews and Gentiles was no secret, and the Thessalonians were well aware of this fact. But Paul states that the divine wrath of God (v. 16b) would come upon those same Jewish leaders. (Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2023-24, pp. 419-420).

# Paul Desires to be with the Thessalonians (I Thessalonians 2:17-20):

During his second missionary journey, Paul is forced to leave Thessalonica, due to a violent mob. Paul must flee the city in the dark of night, but his desire is to return. Because of his hasty departure, there was work left undone, and he wanted the work to be complete. Some scholars opine that it was sickness or city leaders keeping Paul out of Thessalonica. However, there is one thing

standing in his way—Satan. While Paul may have had opposition, he also had a successful harvest of souls which was evident in his God-given ministry. (*Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2023-24, pp. 420-421*).

Paul's Remedy for the Thessalonians (I Thessalonians 3:1-5): At this point, Paul has been forced out of Thessalonica and Berea, so he heads to Athens under escort. Apparently, Silas and Timothy are still in Berea because Paul sends word for them to join him. It is unclear whether the three reunited in Athens or later in Corinth. It is believed, however, that Paul wrote his letters to the Thessalonians while in Corinth. Since he was unable to return, Paul's answer was to send Timothy to Thessalonica. Therefore, the message from Paul to the Thessalonians would be delivered by Timothy. Paul reiterates (v. 4) the message of persecution. Paul was also concerned about the faith of the Thessalonians, perhaps because of persecution. He stated, "I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor had been in vain" (v.5). Paul's concern was that persecution would lead to an exodus from belief in Christ, therefore, escaping the suffering accompanied by belief in Christ. If that happened, then Paul's ministry would be in "vain." The remedy to that problem was for Paul to send his "son in the faith" to encourage the Thessalonians. (Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2023-24, pp. 422-423).

# ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Discuss the following questions as an entire group: 1) Adults grow to value the importance of relationships through studying Scripture. Find three Scriptures that speak of relationships in the Bible. 2) Adults grow in trust and concern for one another. Can you think of one person in your life with whom you have grown in that manner? Share with the class. 3) Adults seek to determine the best methods for making and maintaining relationships. How do you maintain your relationships?

# **iTHINK:** (5–7 min.)

- 1. Have you ever lost a loved one or a friend? Describe your relationship with that person and how the loss affected you.
- 2. Some adults may experience social anxiety. Describe a time when you experienced anxiety in a setting while in the presence of others.
- 3. Share prayer concerns with one another. Pray together.

KEY VERSE: We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers. I Thessalonians 2:13

# ADULT UNIT III: Eternal Hope ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Christ's Love as the Rule ADULT TOPIC: Children of God

LESSON 11 DATE: August 11, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 John 3:1-10 PRINT PASSAGE: Same

# **Home Daily Bible Reading**

Aug. 5	IVI	2 Corintnians 5: 16-21	The Love of Christ Compels Us
Aug. 6	Τ	Deuteronomy 6:4-13	Love the Lord Your God
Aug. 7	W	James 2:8-13	Fulfill the Royal Law of Love
Aug. 8	Th	John 13:31-35	Love One Another
Aug. 9	F	Zephaniah 3:14-20	Renewed in Love
Aug. 10	Sa	Jeremiah 31:1-9	An Everlasting Love
Aug. 11	Su	1 John 3:1-10	God's Beloved Children

#### **EXALT!**

Invocation - Teacher or Leaner

**Celebration –** "Children of the Heavenly King" - #500 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal* 

**Declaration –** I John 3:1-10 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

- <sup>1</sup> See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.
- <sup>4</sup> Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. <sup>5</sup> You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. <sup>6</sup> No one who abides in him sins; no one who sins has either seen him or known him. <sup>7</sup> Little children, let no one deceive you.

Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. 
<sup>8</sup> Everyone who commits sin is a child of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. 
<sup>9</sup> Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God. 
<sup>10</sup> The children of God and the children of the devil are revealed in this way: all who do not do what is right are not from God, nor are those who do not love their brothers and sisters.

**Affirmation** – I am a child of God, and I will do what's right. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

# **ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)

The model of love expressed here is familial. God is Father and believers are "called children of God" (3:1). That this status is "given" implies something akin to an adoptive relationship as distinct from "begotten."



First, John distinguishes between "now" and the future "when he is revealed." With the new knowledge that will come through this revelation comes a transformation: personal "we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" (3:2). Whether the "him" refers to God or Jesus is not made explicit, but most commentators favor the latter. The revelation of Jesus will provoke transformation that leads us to become more like Jesus. This transformation is not

only something that happens in the future, for "all who have this hope" are already purifying themselves to become more like him.

In I John 3:4-10, the author contrasts two ways: the way of lawlessness and the way of righteousness. Those who are children of God are to be imitators of

God. As verse 7 puts it, "Everyone who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous."

The comments on sin are somewhat perplexing. The author states, "Those who have been born of God do not sin, because God's seed abides in them; they cannot sin, because they have been born of God" (v. 9; contrast with 1:8). It is likely that the author is speaking not of sin as a single act but rather of a characteristic way of acting. Sin is not characteristic of children of God.

It is also noteworthy that in verse 9 the author speaks of those "born of God" or "begotten of God" and may be speaking of a new mode of being that goes beyond the adoptive relationship discussed in 3:1.

Break into small groups. Think about and discuss the following questions: 1) Adults have difficulty determining right from wrong. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not? 2) Adults have made choices of which they are not proud. Think of a time when you made a choice of which you were not proud. Share your experience with the class. 3) Adults find it difficult remembering what life was like as a child. Can you think of a childhood experience that has impacted your life? How? Share with the group.

### **EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

The Love and Purity of God (I John 3:1-3): John begins this passage with an explanation of how God's love is lavished on humankind. God's love for us is immeasurable. And we cannot begin to love God as much as God loves us. That love is demonstrated by the sending of God's only Son, Jesus, to earth, so that we might be saved from our sins. John says that love lavished on us by the Father allows us to be called children of God (v. 1). Furthermore, when we demonstrate faith in the one whom the Father sent, then we also become children of God. Contrary to being the children of God, the world has failed to know God and therefore they are incapable of knowing the children of God (v. 1). And although he was older, John counted himself among the "children of God." John goes on to talk about the purity of God. He says we should purify ourselves as Christ is pure-Christ is pure and therefore without sin. The blood shed by Jesus Christ at the cross was to purify us of all sins. (Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2023-24, pp. 427-428) However, that purification does not give us a "license" to sin. We are to be thankful that when we do sin, we have a Savior, Jesus Christ, the Righteous and He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world. (The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Bicentennial Hymnal, 1996. p. 12)



The Mission of God (I John 3:4-6): Sin causes us to be seen as disobedient to God in the eyes of God. And God's desire was to save us from sin, so Jesus was sent to rid us of sin. Scripture records several descriptions of sin, for example, as foolishness (Proverbs 24:9), and as falling short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). Bottomline: sin = lawlessness (v. 4). John quickly reminds his audience that believers should attempt to understand and mimic the life of Christ. Knowing Him is not enough—we must be like Him. John reiterates that only Jesus has the power to rid us of sin through his sacrifice on the cross. John says no one who lives in Jesus keeps on sinning and no one who continues to sin has either seen Him or know Him (v. 6). To remain in Him means to receive and obey His teachings. The one who continues to sin is one who has neither seen nor known Him. John addresses this issue in I John 1:6; 2:4, where he concludes that it is not possible to love both God and sin. (Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2023-24, p. 429)

The Children of God (I John 3:7-10): Here, John takes on a fatherly approach with his audience. He warns them not to be led astray, presumably, by false teaching. Some in the community were falsely teaching that a person could be righteous without behaving righteously. On one hand, we have the person who is righteous, while on the other hand we have one who is sinful and disobeys God. People who willfully oppose God and his truth are aligning with the devil and following his lies. Contrary to the righteous person. Not only did Jesus come to earth to save us from our sins, but His mission was also to destroy the devil's work (v.8). Children of God will continue to fight against sin and the effects of sin. And although we have been released from sin by Jesus, we will continue to possess a sinful nature until Jesus returns to deliver us. And the only way to fight sin is through the power of God's Spirit. John concludes,

there is a clear distinction between children of God and children of the devil. Children of God will do what is right. Furthermore, they will love other members of the family of God. (*Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2023-24, pp. 429-431*)

### ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Discuss the following questions as an entire group: 1) Greensboro, North Carolina is home to the International Civil Rights Center & Museum. Its' primary focus is on the sit-ins of the Civil Rights movement. Discuss the movement and



the concept of civil disobedience. Is there ever a time when morality and following the law are conflict? 2) Create a timeline of vour life. Did you notice any changes in your behavior after

you became a Christian or after you started taking your faith more seriously? 3) Share stories of 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?

# **iTHINK:** (5–7 min.)

- 1. Make a collage of all the ways God's love manifests itself in your life.
- 2. Think about what specific ways Jesus showed His love for us. Make a list of Bible verses that show Christ's love.
- 3. Volunteer at a food pantry or homeless shelter. Journal about or list the ways we can share God's love with others without using words.

KEY VERSE: See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. I John 3:1



LESSON 12 DATE: August 18, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 37:27-40
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Titus 1:1-13; 2:11-15
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

Aug. 12	IVI	Deuteronomy 32:1-6	rne Lora is Just and Oprignt
Aug. 13	Τ	1 Corinthians 6:9-20	Bought with a Price
Aug. 14	W	Romans 12:9-21	A Godly Life Overcomes Evil
Aug. 15	Th	Proverbs 15:20-25	Walking a Straight Path
Aug. 16	F	Psalm 37:27-40	God Helps and Rescues the Righteous
Aug. 17	Sa	Jonah 2:1-9	Deliverance Is the Lord's
Aug. 18	Su	Titus 1:1-3; 2:11-15	God Redeems and Purifies

#### **EXALT!**

Invocation - Teacher or Leaner

**Celebration –** "My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less"- #286 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal* 

**Declaration –** Titus 1:1-13; 2:11-15 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

#### Salutation

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness, <sup>2</sup> in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the ages began-<sup>3</sup> in due time he revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour, <sup>4</sup> To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.

#### **Titus in Crete**

- <sup>5</sup> I left you behind in Crete for this reason, that you should put in order what remained to be done, and should appoint elders in every town, as I directed you: <sup>6</sup> someone who is blameless, married only once, whose children are believers, not accused of debauchery and not rebellious. <sup>7</sup> For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; <sup>8</sup> but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. <sup>9</sup> He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.
- <sup>10</sup> There are also many rebellious people, idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision; <sup>11</sup> they must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for sordid gain what it is not right to teach. <sup>12</sup> It was one of them, their very own prophet, who said, 'Cretans are always liars, vicious brutes, lazy gluttons.'
- <sup>13</sup> That testimony is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply, so that they may become sound in the faith,

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- <sup>11</sup> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, <sup>12</sup> training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, <sup>13</sup> while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. <sup>14</sup> He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.
- <sup>15</sup> Declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you.

**Affirmation** – He is our hope, hope like none other. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

# **ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)

The purpose of this letter, as noted in verse 1, is "for the sake of the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godli-

ness." The author clearly identifies a link between encouragement in faith and the seeking of truth, which leads to moral development.

The author notes two different appearances: one that has happened (2:11: "God has appeared, bringing salvation to all") and one that is future (2:13: "we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ"). From the latter, it is clear that the former ref-

erence to "God" is in fact a reference to Jesus. Jesus is God with us.

Notably, the author indicates that this appearance brings "salvation to all." This underscores the author's belief that there is one God who is Savior of all of creation. It is both a challenge to the author's polytheistic context and a comfort of universal hope.

The initial appearance brought both salvation and "training" in how to live a morally upright life (2:12). It is not cheap grace but grace that expects an appropriate response.



Those who respond appropriately "are zealous for good deeds" (2:14). The deeds are not a prerequisite but the result of redemption.

Break into small groups. Think about and discuss the following questions: 1) Most adults exercise patience and wait to get something they want. Think of a time when you waited for something you wanted. Share with the group. 2) Some adults are so occupied by their own stress that they may miss how their actions affect others. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not? 3)Adults desire to do the right thing, but don't always know what that right thing is. Can you think of a time when you wanted to do right, but would not or could not?

#### **EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

God's Message (Titus 1:1-3): Paul's letter to Titus begins by noting the eternal promises of God. God promised "before the ages began" that God's

elect would enjoy "eternal life" (1:2). So vast is this hope that the conception of time bursts all possible boundaries, both past and future.

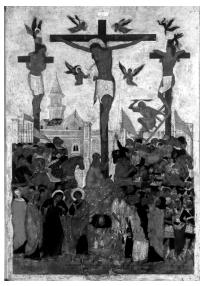
Paul opens this letter to Titus with a purpose–to strengthen God's elect people, so they would better understand their salvation. God has promised that people can experience eternal life when they enter a saving relationship with Him. (Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2023-24, pp. 435-436)

#### God's Grace (Titus 2:11-

15): Paul writes about God's grace. Grace is necessary for salvation because when God extends that grace to us, we can be saved from sin. Grace is not deserved or warranted, in fact, it is only based on the love of God. Ungodliness describes the blatant evil behavior against God's righteous nature. God's grace instructs believers to replace ungodly behavior with righteous behavior. Righteousness is God's standard and God wants the same for believers. These same believers possess a blessed hope of Christ's return and the eter-







nal life to be spent with God. And though we may experience trials and tribulations while we are here on earth, we can take hope that God will be faithful to His promises and bring redemption and renewal to the world.

God's grace was shown when Jesus gave himself for us on the cross. As we await the return of Christ, we are reminded of the first coming. Jesus came to redeem us. The second coming, the shedding of His blood cleanses us from all impurity of our sins. Our purification from sin leads to our sanctification, and ultimately a holy and more godly behavior. The result of that redemption and purification is that we become identified as

a "people that are His very own"—an elect people, redeemed and purified as God's own. And as His redeemed people, we wait with great anticipation for the return of Christ. Paul encourages Titus to strengthen the faith of the believers. And as Titus declared the word of God with boldness and confidence, he followed in the footsteps of Paul. (Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2023-24, pp. 436-439)

# ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Discuss the following questions as an entire group: 1) Using a timer or a stopwatch, sit in silence for five minutes. Discuss how it felt to have to sit patiently and wait. 2) List ways you have had to exhibit self-control in everyday life. 3) Share a time when you had to make a difficult moral decision.

# **iTHINK:** (5-7 min.)

- 1. Create a timeline of your life. Where has God's grace appeared? How did you respond to that grace?
- 2. Discuss the concept of perfectionism. How does perfectionism differ from the expectations in this passage?
- 3. Define the terms self-control and godliness. What do they mean to you?

KEY VERSES: The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Titus 2:11-13.

# ADULT UNIT III: Eternal Hope ADULT GENERAL LESSON TITLE: Devoted to Good Works ADULT TOPIC: Grace and Good Works

LESSON 13 DATE: August 25, 2024

DEVOTIONAL READING: Ephesians 2:1-10
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Titus 3:3-11
PRINT PASSAGE: Same

# **Home Daily Bible Reading**

Aug. 19	Μ	Proverbs 3:27-35	Do Good Wherever You Can
Aug. 20	Τ	Proverbs 31:1-9	Defend the Rights of the Poor
Aug. 21	W	Ephesians 2:1-10	Saved by God's Rich Mercy
Aug. 22	Th	James 2:14-26	Faith without Works Is Dead
Aug. 23	F	Isaiah 30:18-26	Walk in God's Way
Aug. 24	Sa	Matthew 5:13-20	Shine Your Light Before Others
Aug. 25	Su	Titus 3:3-11	Saved by God's Mercy

#### **EXALT!**

Invocation - Teacher or Leaner

**Celebration –** "Grace Greater Than Our Sin" - #343 *AME Zion Bicentennial Hymnal* 

**Declaration –** Titus 3:3-11 (Read together by class, by a volunteer or responsively.)

<sup>3</sup> For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Saviour appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. <sup>6</sup> This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup> The saying is sure.

I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works;

these things are excellent and profitable to everyone. <sup>9</sup> But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. <sup>10</sup> After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions, <sup>11</sup> since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned.

**Affirmation –** We've made it this far by the grace of God. (*Spoken together by class and teacher*).

### **ENGAGE:** (5-10 min.)

Paul begins by contrasting his past mode of living with the new expectations, acknowledging that he was once "foolish, disobedient, led astray," and so on (v. 3), but that it was out of God's own goodness and "not because of any works of righteousness we had done, but according to his mercy" (v. 5) that he was saved.

This resonates with Paul's statement elsewhere that "while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Grace is a pure gift not based on merit. Verses 4-8 are often identified as a baptismal hymn. Note the imagery of "water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" that is "poured out" (vv. 5-6). This would fit the broader theme of leaving behind an old life and embarking on a new way of life.

Paul identifies those who have been justified by grace as "heirs" (v. 7) and as Raymond F. Collins notes, "The very idea of an inheritance is forward looking. An inheritance is something that a person will receive in the future. Baptism is the guarantee that there will be an inheritance in the future" (*I & II Timothy and Titus*, 366).

The inheritance in question is "eternal life" (v. 7). In the Pastoral Epistles (I and II Timothy and Titus), as in the Gospel of John, "eternal life" is the expression that denotes eschatological salvation.

Paul concludes with a warning about avoiding controversies and those who stir up division. His advice is to admonish them once, but if they are non-responsive, to shun them. Such persons are identified as "self-condemned" (autokatakritos; v. 11), which is a very rare word in the Greek literature and may have been coined by the author himself.

Break into small groups. Think about and discuss the following questions: 1) Some adults have questions and/or fears about the end of life. Have you ever considered the end of life? Share your thoughts. 2) Adults feel that they have to earn the good things in their lives. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not? 3) Adults can experience getting things they don't deserve. Have you ever gotten something you didn't feel you deserved? Share with the group.

**EDUCATE:** (10-15 min.)

<u>God's Grace</u> (Titus 3:3-8): Paul begins by stating the obvious: Everyone has been foolish (i.e., sinned), which means that no one person is entirely righteous. Paul does not exclude himself in the classification of sinners. Sin can affect a person's mindset, actions, and their relationships with other people. The text lists malice and envy, two feelings directed towards another person. These feelings result from sinful desires and may lead to other sins.

But in verse 4, God's love and kindness are front and center. God has revealed kindness through a gracious benevolence to help sinful people. The ultimate example of God's kindness was the sending of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus was sent to pay the full price for our sins. Despite the sins of humanity, God delights in showing mercy—much like most parents—despite the antics of their children, they really do want to show mercy. Our merciful God has made a way for salvation that does not require our righteousness (Romans



9:15-16). Instead, God has initiated our salvation through his gift of grace. By his grace and mercy, we are justified by faith, and therefore, we are saved. There is reference to baptism (i.e., washing of rebirth) in Christ. When we are baptized, we are buried with Christ, then clothed with Christ. Paul reminds us that only through God's grace and our faith in Christ's sacrifice, are we justified. (Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2023-24, pp. 443-445)

Dealing with Discord (Titus 3:9-11): Paul lists some things that should not be taught, for example, foolish controversies and quarrels about the law. He warns against the divisive person, stating that they cause discord and disruption. So, believers should avoid the person. In response to such a divisive individual, Paul shares a strategy for dealing with them. He says they are to be given two warnings. If after the second warning, no change is made, then they are to be rejected. The reason for the two warnings is an exercise in patience. The second warning is given in anticipation that the offending party would repent and change. This practice is like one performed by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17, where he taught about dealing with sin in the church. By following Paul's instructions for dealing with this matter, Titus would no longer give attention to the people who brought distraction and division to the church. (Standard Lesson Commentary, NIV 2023-24, pp. 446-447)

# ELEVATE: (10 min.)

Discuss the following questions as an entire group: 1) Create a list of rules to follow when having conversations about controversial ideas. 2) Share stories about a time when you 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?

# **iTHINK:** (5-7 min.)

- 1. Adults grow in understanding their baptism. Were you baptized as an infant or an adult? Contemplate the impact baptism had on you.
- 2. Discuss infant vs. believer baptism. What are
- 3. the positives and negatives of both perspectives?
- 4. Perform a "random act of kindness" for someone. Discuss how it made you feel to offer something to someone who didn't "earn" it.

KEY VERSES: When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:4-5







# THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

- 1. You shall have no other gods before me.
- 2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
- 3. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
- 4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
- 5. Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.
- 6. You shalt not kill.
- 7. You shall not commit adultery.
- 8. You shall not steal.
- 9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- 10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

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