

Today's Light October–December 2021

The following material is linked to the October–December issue of *Today's Light*, a quarterly magazine designed to lead God's people as they read through the Bible in two years.

We've tried to include enough discussion starters for about 45 minutes of study. Feel free to duplicate the questions as needed and use them with fellow *Today's Light* readers.

Suggestions for Using *Today's Light* Discussion Questions

- You could gather a group of *Today's Light* readers during Sunday morning Bible class time.
- You could invite all *Today's Light* readers in your congregation to a midweek home discussion.
- You could make the questions available to all *Today's Light* readers and encourage them to partner with one or two other people over lunch once a week.

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Today's Light Discussion Questions

October Week 1

October 1–3, Philippians 1–2

1. Read Philippians 1:4–5. With whom are you partners in the Gospel? Following Paul's example, how might you regard these people?
2. What is the relationship of God's working (Philippians 2:13) to our working (2:12; see also 2 Peter 1:3)? What does God work in us?

October Week 2

October 4–10, Philippians 3–4; Colossians 1–4; 1 Thessalonians 1

1. Read Philippians 3:12–14. What is the prize, the goal of the Christian life? When do believers attain it? In the meantime, how do we pursue it? To what are we responding as we do this; that is, what motivates and empowers us?
2. Review Philippians 4:4–7. What effect do outward circumstances have on the believer's joy (v. 4)? According to verse 5, what should characterize our dealings with all others (see also 2:3–4)? The Lord may return at any time, and from the perspective of eternity, His return is near. How can that affect our attitude toward circumstances and how we treat others?
3. Read Colossians 1:21–22. In these verses, Paul expands on the concept of reconciliation, applying it to the Colossian Christians and to all who believe in Christ. What previously separated the Colossians from God? How did Christ change this? What effect did Christ's work have on the Colossians and on their relationship with God?
4. Review Colossians 2:2–5. Paul explains the threefold purpose of his work as a minister of the Gospel: to lead God's people to a proper understanding of the mysteries of Christ, to help them escape from error, and to bring them stability of faith. How are all three of these really aspects of the same goal?
5. Read Colossians 3:10–11. Explain what Paul means by comparing the "new self" in Christ with putting on "the image of its Creator." (Think about the image that Adam originally bore, and that Christ demonstrated perfectly.)
6. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1–2. Paul felt responsibility toward the new believers in Thessalonica. Since he was forced out of the city by jealous Jews, he did not have the time to fully instruct them. While in Athens, he wrote to them, giving them support and further instructions. What responsibilities do you and your church have for new believers? What are some things you might do to help new Christians in their walk with the Lord?

October Week 3

October 11–17, 1 Thessalonians 2–5; 2 Thessalonians 1–3

1. Paul contrasts the word of man with the Word of God in 1 Thessalonians 2:13. How are they different? (Consider John 6:63.)
2. The accusation made against some Christians is that they say one thing and do something else. According to 1 Thessalonians 3:1–3, 5, in what way did Paul demonstrate that he believed and followed the advice he had given to the leaders in Ephesus (Acts 20:28)?
3. Note in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 that God doesn't forbid grieving, per se. What is the "hope" that Christians have—and the "no hope" of those who don't know Christ? See John 3:36; 1 Corinthians 15:55–57; Philippians 1:21–23; Ephesians 2:12. (How does "fallen asleep" indicate hope?) What's the value of mourning? Why is it quite natural to mourn (John 11:35)?
4. In 1 Thessalonians 5:5, Paul refers to Christians as "children of light" and "children of the day." State in your own words what Paul means by those expressions (vv. 6–8). What do you do in your own life to make sure that you stay awake and alert in the way that Paul is writing about?
5. The fact that the Thessalonians remained strong even under persecution and trial proved that God's judgment was right, meaning that He was working out His perfect plan for them (2 Thessalonians 1:5). What does the Lord promise in Matthew 5:10–12 to those who are persecuted and remain faithful?
6. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:2. Why did some of the Thessalonians think the "day of the Lord" had already come?

October Week 4

October 18–24, 1 Timothy 1–6

1. In 1 Timothy 1:1, Jesus is described as “our hope.” Think about the way you typically use the word *hope* in your daily conversation. Then write out a short definition for this everyday use of the word *hope*. How does the word *hope* take on a different meaning when it is applied to Jesus? In what ways is Jesus your hope?
2. Review 1 Timothy 2:5–6. How did Jesus become the “one mediator,” the one “go between,” between God and men? See also Romans 3:22–25a. As you reflect on today’s reading, explain in your own words what it means that Jesus is your mediator. You might also read Hebrews 9:14–15.
3. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul stresses the important qualifications for those who would serve as “overseers” and “deacons” in the church. An “overseer” is undoubtedly what we would call a “pastor” today. How do the qualifications for overseers listed in verses 1–7 relate to Paul’s overall concern for sound doctrine set forth in chapter 1? In other words, what is the connection between the service of qualified pastors and purity of doctrine?
4. In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul identifies “deceitful spirits” and “demons” as being responsible for leading some to abandon the faith. However, their faith-destroying work is done indirectly, through false teachers whom Paul describes as “liars whose consciences are seared” (1 Timothy 4:2). Explain what Paul means when he describes the consciences of such men as having been “seared” with a hot iron. Hint: What is meat like that has been seared? These false teachers were guilty of legalism—of making new laws and demands that the Scriptures do not make. What two examples of legalism are given in verse 3?
5. Review 1 Timothy 5:13. Why are “gossips and busybodies” especially destructive in the life of the Church? (See James 3:3–6.)
6. Read 1 Timothy 6:6–10. Does being content mean that Christians are forbidden to set their sights on better things than they presently enjoy? Why or why not? (In addition to today’s reading, you might reread 1 Timothy 4:4.)

October Week 5

October 25–31, 2 Timothy 1–4; Titus 1–3; Philemon

1. In 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul writes of the “gift of God” that Timothy should continue to fan into flame. Read the following passages and surmise what special abilities were included in this “gift” Timothy possessed:

1 Timothy 4:6

1 Timothy 4:11–14

1 Timothy 5:17

2. The words of 2 Timothy 2:11–13 may have been an early Christian hymn. The phrase “if we have died with Him” refers to more than just physical death. By what means has every Christian “died” with Christ? See Romans 6:3–4. How does 2 Timothy 2:12 speak to the experiences of Paul and the Church at his time (as well as ours)? See also Romans 8:18.
3. Read 2 Timothy 3. The Greek word *brephos* is translated in verse 15 as “childhood.” It is often translated simply as “child” or “infant.” In fact, this word is used in Luke 1:41 to describe the unborn John the Baptist, who leaped in his mother’s womb. What does Paul’s use of this word indicate about how early in a child’s life he or she should be taught the Holy Scriptures? Since the inspired writers of the Bible have used the same word (*brephos*) to denote both infants and babies still in their mothers’ wombs, what conclusion might we draw about when human life begins?
4. Review Titus 1:1–4. Like Timothy, Titus is addressed by Paul as a “true child in a common faith” (v. 4). The adjective *common* does not mean “ordinary.” It refers, instead, to something shared. All true Christians share together in the faith. Read Ephesians 4:4–5 and Acts 2:42. What are some of the holy things that are shared between Christians?
5. Read Paul’s description of godly living in Titus 2. What prompts the Christian to do good works and live a holy life? See Ephesians 2:8–10. What might have prompted Paul to stress the moral effects of God’s grace in this epistle addressed to Titus in Crete? (See Titus 1:12.) For personal reflection only: What worldly passion or ungodliness in your life is the grace of God leading you to say no to? Reflect on that wonderful grace of God now—His forgiving love for you in Christ—and breathe a prayer to God your Father, asking Him to strengthen you to say no in the power of His Spirit.

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6. Titus 3:4–7 is yet another wonderful expression of pure Gospel. What four qualities of God does Paul use in these verses?

7. Review Philemon. The word translated in Philemon 6 as “sharing” is the Greek word for “fellowship.” “Sharing of your faith,” therefore, should probably not be understood as “witnessing.” Rather, this verse shows that Philemon has been energetic in matters of fellowship with the other Christian brethren at Colossae. Rather than being passive, Philemon has actively expressed his fellowship with the saints. In what ways can Christians today actively express their fellowship with other believers? (For help, see Acts 2:42.)

November Week 1

November 1–7, Hebrews 1–6

1. According to Hebrews 1:14, what work do angels do?
2. In Hebrews 2:6–8, the writer refers to Psalm 8 and Genesis 1:27–30. While the writer of Psalm 8 apparently was writing about humans, the words also point to Jesus, the greatest man. What authority was given to man? to Jesus (see Hebrews 2:9)?
3. The devil tempts all Christians to doubt the goodness of God. All fall victim to this sin at times. Then the devil tries to change the doubt into unbelief, a condition in which we have completely lost our trust in God. When Satan succeeds here, he moves to the final step, the hardening of the heart and a resistance to anything that is of God. According to Hebrews 3:13, how can we help one another overcome sin's deceitfulness?
4. God's Word is called a two-edged sword in Hebrews 4:12–13. As such, it penetrates our very being, calls us to account by revealing what may be hidden to all humans, and judges our every attitude and thought. Read John 12:48. What else does it judge?
5. By one act, God accomplished eternal salvation for all who believe in Jesus. How is that stated in Hebrews 5:9?
6. Growth to maturity requires us to build on "elementary doctrine" (Hebrews 6:1), to go beyond always rebuilding the foundation. What ABCs does the writer mention in Hebrews 6:1–3?

November Week 2

November 8–14, Hebrews 7–11

1. The old covenant, with its human priesthood and its system of sacrifices and dos and don'ts, is obsolete. How can we be sure that Christ's priesthood will not also become obsolete, according to Hebrews 7:24–25?
2. Because it's hard to imagine that anything can be absolutely free, we may have trouble understanding grace. We feel we must do something to earn God's favor. Yet God's grace is truly free! Read the first sentence of Hebrews 8:10. Which words tell you that God is freely giving His grace?
3. Both the old and the new covenants had to be sealed with blood. What, according to Hebrews 9:16–18, accompanies the shedding of blood?
4. Read Hebrews 10:17–18. What assurance of God's complete forgiveness do you find there?
5. Hebrews 10:23 exhorts us to hang onto the hope given to us. Why are we able to do this?
6. Read Hebrews 11:35–39. What characteristic describes all those who enter the "Hall of Faith"?

November Week 3

November 15–21, Hebrews 12–13; James 1–4

1. Review Hebrews 12:4–13. What is the relationship between love and discipline?
2. Religious systems, orders of worship, and earthly shrines will not last. They are limited to customs, cultures, and locations. But they have a way of entrapping us. Hebrews 13:11–14 encourages us to look elsewhere for that which is unlimited and eternal. What do we look for? Where is it located? What may we have to endure if we dare to look beyond the present, limiting systems that people develop?
3. James's statement in James 1:12 seems to indicate that blessing comes as a result of our ability to endure trial. Is perseverance or endurance itself a cause of blessing? What or who enables a Christian to persevere under trials? What relationship is there between perseverance and fruit of faith (Galatians 5:22–26)?
4. James flatly states that faith that does not act is dead (James 2:17). Can faith and works ever be separated? Why or why not? What value are works without faith in Christ? What value is faith without its fruits, or the works of faith?
5. James 3:18 promises a "harvest of righteousness" to those who have the wisdom to "[sow] in peace." What are some practical things you can do to grow in godly wisdom?
6. Instead of arrogantly bragging and playing God in our lives (James 4:16), how ought Christians plan and live (4:15)?

November Week 4

November 22–28, James 5; 1 Peter 1–5; 2 Peter 1

1. James says, “the coming of the Lord is at hand” (James 5:8) and “the Judge is standing at the door” (5:9). Since Christ has not yet come, was James mistaken in his statements? Explain.
2. Jot down the practical steps for holy living Peter gives us in 1 Peter 1:13–16.
3. Peter begins 1 Peter 2 by referring back to 1:22–23 and amplifying its meaning. What do you think he means in verse 2: “long for the pure spiritual milk”?
4. Read 1 Peter 4:1–2. In your own words, what does Peter say suffering will accomplish in the life of the trusting believer? If you can, tell about a time when you found this to be true in your life.
5. What is the “crown of glory” (1 Peter 5:4)? Check 1 Peter 1:3–6 if you’re unsure. See also John 5:28–29 and 1 Corinthians 15:51–57.
6. Read 2 Peter 1:16–18. What are some of the “cleverly devised myths” that deceive people today (v. 16)?

November Week 5

November 29–30, 2 Peter 2–3

1. Read 2 Peter 2:4–10. Note how the Law and Gospel are vividly presented in this section. What warning and what comfort do they bring here?
2. Several times in 2 Peter 3, Peter refers to his readers as “beloved.” In what ways are we, as well as the first recipients of the letter, beloved of Peter? Think of the words of a hymn written by Isaac Watts, “The saints on earth and those above But one communion make” (*TLH* 478).

December Week 1

December 1–5, 1 John 1–4

1. Read 1 John 1:8–10. John speaks bluntly in verse 8 because the Gnostics denied the existence of sin. Sin is not a fashionable concept in our time, either. Yet if we deny our sinful nature, what does John say we're doing? If we confess our sins, what will be the result?
2. What is the will of God (1 John 2:17)? (If you're not sure, check John 6:40 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3.)
3. In 1 John 3:9, John paints a word picture. The living Word of God is compared to the sperm (seed; Greek *sperma*) in human reproduction. The Word gives us life, and the Father's characteristics are transferred to the child (believer). Jesus used a different comparison in Matthew 7:15–20. What principles can you glean from Jesus' words in Matthew to help us evaluate what we see, read, and hear?
4. What reassurance does John offer to us in 1 John 4:4 regarding the power of evil spirits over a Christian?

December Week 2

December 6–12, 1 John 5; 2 John; 3 John; Jude; Revelation 1–2

1. What are some practical consequences of the fact that we have overcome the world through our faith in Jesus (1 John 5:4–5)? Be as specific as possible.
2. Read 2 John. What have you “worked for” (v. 8) that could possibly be lost by falling prey to a false teacher?
3. In 3 John, John praises the generosity of his friend Gaius and sternly condemns the stinginess of Diotrephes. What is meant by “a manner worthy of God” (v. 6)?
4. As you wait for the coming of Jesus, Jude suggests that you “[build] yourselves up in your most holy faith” (Jude 20–21). How can you do that?
5. Read Revelation 1:4–8. Remembering that seven is the symbol for completeness, what might it indicate that God chose seven churches to receive this letter?
6. Read Revelation 2:12–17. What description of Jesus is given here (v. 12)?

December Week 3

December 13–19, Revelation 3–11

1. Read Revelation 3:14–22. What is the call to repentance (vv. 18–19)? What is the Gospel (vv. 20–21)?
2. How is the Lamb described in the first part of Revelation 5:6? What is the significance of Jesus being described in this way (see Isaiah 53:4–7)?
3. Read Revelation 7:9–17. What is the significance of the white robes and palm branches (see Revelation 7:9, 14; John 12:12–13)?
4. Read Revelation 9:13–21. What evidence do you see that God has not yet withdrawn from this world His offer of grace, forgiveness, and acceptance? What does all this suggest about why God has placed you in this world at this time and place?
5. Read Revelation 10:5–10. What is the significance of the scroll being both sweet and bitter (see Psalm 119:103; Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 3:3)?
6. Read Revelation 11:7–14. In symbolic language, this section shows us the final persecution and triumph in which the Church follows her Lord to death and resurrection. When will this persecution take place (v. 7; see also Matthew 24:14)?

December Week 4

December 20–26, Revelation 12–18:24

1. What is the basis of our confidence and joy before the throne of God? (See Revelation 12:10–12.)
2. Compare Daniel 7:1–28 with Revelation 13:1–10. Identify at least three similarities between these two visions.
3. What parallel is there between Revelation 15:1–2 and Exodus 14:21–31?
4. What similarity do you find between Revelation 16:1–9 and Matthew 24:29–31?
5. Compare Revelation 17:3, 8–12 with Revelation 13:1–4. What does the beast on which the prostitute rides symbolize?
6. Read Revelation 18:1–24. What warning is given to the people of God in 18:4 (see also 2 Corinthians 6:14–18)?

December Week 5

December 27–31, Revelation 19–22

1. Revelation 19:11–21 describes the second coming of Jesus to judge the world in righteousness and to destroy His enemies. Who is the rider on the white horse (19:11)? What has the rider appeared to do (19:11–12)?
2. What great comfort is found in Revelation 20:14?
3. Read Revelation 21:1–8. Note that the new Jerusalem is described “as a bride adorned for her husband” (21:2). What does the new Jerusalem symbolize?
4. Compare Revelation 22:1–5 with Genesis 2:8–14. What similarities do you see between the Garden of Eden and the new heaven and the new earth of God’s promise?
5. Why are we to be ever watchful for the Last Day (Revelation 22:7, 12, 20–21)?

Leaders Notes

Many of the questions call for group participants to share personal insights, examples, or life experiences and applications. Answers to these questions will vary. If no one answers right away, allow a moment or two of silence so that everyone has time to think through the question. Other questions call for specific factual or analytical responses. Suggested answers for these appear below.

October Week 1

October 1–3, Philippians 1–2

1. Answers will vary. Many people consider themselves to be partners in the Gospel with their pastor and the other members of their congregation, with others in their church body, and with missionaries whom they might support. As we pray for our partners in the Gospel, we can, along with Paul, pray with joy because of their partnership with us in the great work of spreading the Good News of salvation.
2. It is because God works in us that we are able to do the spiritual work that Paul urges in Philippians 2:12. God works in us both the intentions and the actions to accomplish His good purpose.

October Week 2

October 4–10, Philippians 3–4; Colossians 1–4; 1 Thessalonians 1

1. The goal and prize is resurrection from the dead (3:11) and perfection (3:12), the sinless life believers will live in eternity with Jesus. We will attain this only after we die, not in this life. But that doesn't mean we should think it doesn't matter how we live here on earth. Instead, we strive for perfection as an athlete intently strives to win a race. We don't look back on any past accomplishments, thinking we can earn God's favor, nor do we look back at our past sins, but instead we trust in His forgiveness as we press ahead toward the goal. We do this in response to Jesus taking hold of us and God calling us heavenward in Jesus. Thus, it is the grace of God in Christ that motivates and empowers our striving to reach the goal of perfection.
2. Christian joy transcends changing circumstances because it is rooted in the Lord, who does not change and in whom Christians have wonderful blessings that no circumstances can change (see also Romans 8:35–39). Gentleness, or a forbearing attitude that humbly looks out for the interests of others, should characterize our dealings with all people. The nearness of the Lord's return can encourage us to rejoice in the Lord and can motivate us to have Christlike concern for others, just as Paul encourages.
3. The Colossian Christians had been separated from God by their sin. Through His death for those—and all—sins, Christ paid the punishment for sin and wiped away their sins. Christ's reconciliation freed them from slavery to evil and turned them into people whose lives gave evidence that they now belonged to God. Because Christ had taken away their sins, the Colossians could now come before God free from sin. Imagine the difference this would make in their attitude and approach to God . . . and others.
4. All three aspects of ministry are tightly bound together: a proper understanding of the mysteries of Christ will keep Christians free from error and stable in faith. These verses point out the importance of solid grounding in and understanding of the Christian Gospel. They also highlight the importance of Christian education. You might briefly discuss the responsibility all of us have to hear the truth in Jesus Christ and tell it to others.
5. When God created Adam and Eve, He made them in His own image—sinless and holy. Because of their sin, people lost God's image. Christ was the "second Adam"—He, too, was holy and without sin. Christ never lost God's image. When Christians are filled with Christ's Spirit and power—when we are born again—through Holy Baptism we are given the image of God. Through the forgiveness Christ won for us, and that God offers us, our sins are washed away. We are made holy and sinless in God's sight. It is good to remind participants that the process of forgiveness and renewal must be a continual, daily part of the Christian life.
6. We have the responsibility, just as Paul did, to help new Christians mature in their faith. Every church should ask how well they assimilate new members into the life of the congregation. Once received, are they simply left on their own to find the right

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Bible study? Do people seek them out and make them feel welcome? We might make a special effort to befriend new members, help them make friends with others in the congregation, and help them find places in the congregation where they can receive nourishment and encouragement, and use their own gifts to serve God. Encourage participants to respond personally to this question.

October Week 3

October 11–17, 1 Thessalonians 2–5; 2 Thessalonians 1–3

1. The Word of God and the word of man differ in many ways. Primarily, they differ in that the word of men is just that—words from fallible people. The Word of God comes from the infallible, all-knowing God. Our words are limited in what they can and cannot do. There are no limitations to the Word of God. Jesus said, “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:63).
2. Paul’s fear was that some of the Thessalonians might fall away because of persecution. He was so concerned that he sent his trusted co-worker Timothy to them, which meant that Paul would be left alone at Athens. This was in keeping with his words of advice to the leaders at Ephesus: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28a).
3. God does not forbid grieving altogether, but we do not “grieve as others do” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Why? Because we have hope, hope in the resurrection to eternal life! We know that after death is eternal life—with Christ. Unbelievers have no hope of an afterlife; worse, they face the wrath of God. “Fall asleep” is a beautiful metaphor for death as a Christian. Just as we awake from sleep, so shall we awaken from death—to see face-to-face Jesus and our loved ones who died in Him. Jesus wept at the graveside of Lazarus (John 11:35). Lazarus was His friend; it was natural for Jesus to mourn his death. God has given each of us the ability to cry. When we lose a loved one, it is natural and okay to cry. It can help us heal emotionally.
4. Paul describes us as “children of light, children of the day” (v. 5). In the days before electricity, people could not usually do work and other useful things at night. In those days, it was hard for an honest person to be a night person. Daylight Christians are those who stay alert and are aware that the Lord will come again, and who are self-controlled, keeping their physical appetites in control and behaving in a way that is in line with the Lord’s will. Encourage participants to say how they stay spiritually alert and maintain self-control. Such methods will likely include prayer, the regular study of God’s Word, public and personal worship, and conscious self-discipline in regard to physical appetites.
5. At times, it may not seem like there’s much glory in being a Christian, but God promises the kingdom of heaven and a reward in heaven for those who remain faithful (Matthew 5:10–12).
6. Some Thessalonians believed the Lord had already returned or that His return was already in process because of “a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter,” which supposedly came from Paul. Perhaps someone had prophesied in worship that the second coming had arrived, or perhaps the Thessalonians heard of someone who had heard of such a prophecy. Clearly their conception of the Lord’s return was not the biblical one—of Jesus’ coming to end this present age and bring judgment upon all mankind. For them, the Lord’s return allowed the present age to continue.

October Week 4

October 18–24, 1 Timothy 1–6

1. Answers will vary. We often speak of hope in the sense of wishful thinking (e.g., “I hope it doesn’t rain”; “I hope all goes well”). When hope is equated with Jesus Christ, however, it conveys the idea of absolute certainty and confident expectation of something that is unseen at the moment. In Jesus, we have a “living hope” (1 Peter 1:3) made certain by His resurrection from the dead. This hope endures even through suffering and “does not put us to shame” (Romans 5:1–5).
2. God wants all to be saved. This salvation can only be achieved through the one mediator between God and men, Jesus the Christ, “who gave Himself as a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:6) by paying for our sin when He died on the cross. In our world, a mediator is one who often works between two parties to resolve differences. Jesus is the mediator who offered Himself on the cross to make peace between God and sinners. Christ, as our mediator, brings us not only peace with God our Father but also a new life with God.
3. Pastors who meet the qualifications set forth in these verses would be able to devote themselves fully to preaching and teaching the truth of God’s Word. Unqualified pastors, on the other hand, would have to defend themselves against scandalous charges, would fail as teachers of sound doctrine, and would undoubtedly bring disgrace upon the Church and the Gospel.
4. A conscience that has been “seared” is a conscience that has been burned or cauterized. A conscience so traumatized would be numbed and insensible to the difference between right and wrong. It would be unable to distinguish between good and evil. These legalistic false teachers were forbidding people to marry and were forcing them to abstain from certain foods. They failed to recognize that marriage and food are gifts from God, intended for our benefit.
5. Sins of the tongue seem innocent and minor. But as James points out, the tongue can be “a world of unrighteousness” (James 3:6). Just as a small, insignificant spark can ignite an entire forest, so also can our gossip and slander do great harm to reputations, fellowship, and relationships within the Body of Christ.
6. It would seem that Christians can indeed set their sights on better things and do so without sinning. However, blessings that are currently enjoyed, as well as future blessings not yet received, must always be regarded with thanksgiving. That is to say, we must understand that what we now have is a wonderful gift from God. Likewise, the “better things” we may one day have must also be viewed as wonderful gifts from God. But if our striving for “better things” leads us to be ungrateful for what we currently have, then God’s gift of contentment has been lost.

October Week 5

October 25–31, 2 Timothy 1–4; Titus 1–3; Philemon

1. Timothy's special gift likely included his ability to serve as a minister of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 4:6) and perform the teaching that accompanied that calling (1 Timothy 4:11–14). Paul undoubtedly believed that Timothy was especially gifted at directing the affairs of the church (1 Timothy 5:17), evidenced by the great responsibilities Paul had entrusted to him at Ephesus.
2. By means of our Baptism, we have died with Christ and been raised to new life in Him. The phrase of 2 Timothy 2:11, "If we have died [past tense] with Him, we will also live with Him," alludes to our Baptism. Through Baptism, we enter into a vital faith relationship with Christ. It is a means of receiving God's grace, and it depicts graphically what happens as a result of our union with Christ. The phrase of verse 12, "If we endure, we will also reign with Him," would have had specific application to the endurance of persecution and martyrdom that Paul and others were facing. There would have been great comfort in knowing that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory" that awaits those who live under the cross in this life (Romans 8:18).
3. From the way this word is used in Holy Scripture, it would seem that it is never too early to start teaching little ones the truths of God's Word. God's Word makes no distinction between children who are born and children who are still in their mothers' wombs. The unborn are, therefore, persons in the sight of God from the time of conception. As such, they live under the protection of God's command not to hurt or harm our neighbor but to help and support him in every physical need.
4. In Ephesians 4:5, Paul writes of the "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" that all Christians share. In Acts 2:42, we read of the first Christians who devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread (Holy Communion), and prayer.
5. It is the Gospel (God's love for us in Christ) that generates good works and holy living. The Law cannot do this. It can only make us conscious of God's demands and our inability to meet them. The notorious reputation of the Cretans might have prompted Paul to stress this particular point. After all, the Cretans were best known for their propensity to say yes to all manner of ungodliness and worldly passions. The last question is for personal reflection only and should simply be skipped in the small-group discussion.
6. As Paul expresses the Gospel in these verses, he ascribes to our Savior the following qualities: goodness and loving kindness (v. 4), mercy (v. 5), and grace (v. 7).
7. As Christians gather for the Divine Service, it is especially important that their fellowship with other believers is actively expressed. By actively hearing and studying the teaching of the apostles, by responding to God in song, by praying for the needs of the whole world, and by joining together in the breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper), Christians today can be active in sharing their faith.

November Week 1

November 1–7, Hebrews 1–6

1. Angels serve believers, who are on their way to heaven.
2. Discuss how God used New Testament writers to bring out the eschatological (end-of-the-world) implications of words that seem nonprophetic. Note that Hebrews 2:9 applies the words of Psalm 8:4–6 to Jesus. Emphasize the joy that God offers us because we have the fullness of His message. God gave us as humans authority over created beings and the earth. He gave His Son authority over everything in heaven and on earth. Jesus has all glory and honor.
3. We can help others by encouraging them in their faith on a daily basis.
4. God's Word judges our eternal destiny.
5. "He became the source of eternal salvation." He is the only source.
6. The writer mentions the elementary "foundation of repentance" (the change of mind brought about by God's grace that results in turning away from sin and useless rituals); "faith toward God" (the turning to confidence in God's grace); "instruction about washings" (probably the Jewish baptism of proselytes, John the Baptist's Baptism, and the Baptism commanded by Jesus); "the laying on of hands" (probably in connection with ordaining, commissioning, healing, and bestowal of blessings); "the resurrection of the dead" (of all people on the Last Day); and "eternal judgment" (the destiny of those who reject God's saving grace and persist in their sinful ways).

November Week 2

November 8–14, Hebrews 7–11

1. Jesus, who lives forever, has a permanent priesthood.
2. God said, “This is the covenant that I will make.”
3. Blood was required because death was a necessary part of the covenant—death of animals under the old covenant and death of the Lamb of God under the new.
4. God assures us, “I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more . . . there is no longer any offering for sin.” God forgives completely.
5. God is faithful to the very end. He keeps His promises, and He strengthens us to hold fast to the hope we have in Christ.
6. The saints don’t “shrink back” from persecution and abuse, but remain confident in faith by the power of the Holy Spirit.

November Week 3

November 15–21, Hebrews 12–13; James 1–4

1. No matter how extravagant the love, unless discipline accompanies it, there is no training for endurance under hardship; discipline without love is punishment that is resented.
2. The writer points us to the eternal city of God, the new Jerusalem, located in heaven. En route, we may endure reproach.
3. In verse 12, the point of James' statement about enduring is not that a person earns a reward by enduring trials. That would be salvation by works. The point is that God Himself, through Christ's death and resurrection, offers us the gift of life and its fruitfulness. The "trial" is sin and Satan's attempt to snatch our faith and life in God away from us.
4. Faith and works cannot be separated, as if a person can have a choice about how to be saved, by either faith or works (see James 2:18). Faith in Christ does not exist in a vacuum. Faith without works is a contradiction. Faith in Christ always produces fruit. God's Word always accomplishes its purpose (Isaiah 55:11).
5. We never attain perfect wisdom, because in this life on earth, we are yet sinners; we Christians still struggle against our old sinful selves. Like Paul, we have to confess that we do what we do not want to do daily (Romans 7:21–8:1). Our sinfulness struggles against our redeemed, liberated life in Christ. This is what Luther calls the sinner/saint paradox. We are sinners yet at the same time saints because of Christ's death and resurrection for us. God promises to strengthen and preserve our faith through His Word. Therefore, Bible study, worship, and personal devotions should be included on a practical to-do list.
6. "If the Lord wills" is a statement of trust. The word "if" in the English translation is not to be considered as an expression of doubt. We put ourselves into God's gracious, forgiving care and keeping. We plan ahead, make schedules, and prepare carefully, but we place our life and all our activities into the hands of the Lord. We trust God (not the world or ourselves) for the welfare of our lives and our future.

November Week 4

November 22–28, James 5; 1 Peter 1–5; 2 Peter 1

1. The phrases “the coming of the Lord is at hand” and “at the door” are encouragements to always live expectantly (see Matthew 25:13). Just as the leaves of the fig tree are signs that summer is coming (Mark 13:28–30), so the signs of the end times, which occur in every generation, are reminders that the event can come at any time.
2. After encouraging his readers, Peter begins a series of imperatives: be prepared; be sober-minded (Spirit-controlled); rely on God’s grace (v. 13); live as obedient children; don’t conform to sinful desires that ruled you prior to conversion (v. 14); be holy—set apart for God, set apart from sin and impurity (vv. 15–16).
3. Healthy babies have only one thought: milk! Just so, we’re eager to desire spiritual food—God’s Word—as our essential nourishment. A lack of “appetite” for God’s Word is the sign of spiritual decline; we cannot mature without it. Incidentally, the Greek word used for “grow up” describes the typical growth and maturation of children.
4. Suffering can focus the believer more firmly on living a God-pleasing life. Suffering strips away nonessentials and spotlights what’s important. For instance, when one’s life is at risk, what once appeared vital is revealed as empty and meaningless. The believer who looks to Christ grows and matures in faith, even in the midst of distress. Encourage participants to share their own personal experiences of this truth about suffering.
5. When Christ returns, He will reward those who’ve served under Him. All believers possess eternal life now—that is, a living relationship with Christ by faith. When we die, we enter that which already is our inheritance: eternal life. When Christ returns, our bodies will be made alive and glorified.
6. A prominent example of today’s “cleverly devised myths” is Darwin’s evolutionary theory. It denies the biblical creation account, says we are only highly developed animals, and fails to recognize the fall into sin and the need for the Savior. Other modern myths include the idea that all religions are essentially the same or that Jesus was simply a great teacher.

November Week 5

November 29–30, 2 Peter 2–3

1. The Law shows God's awesome judgment against sin: the evil angels were sent to hell; the ancient world was destroyed by the flood; Sodom and Gomorrah were burned to ashes. On the other hand, the Gospel is also evident in these verses. God saved Noah and his family in the flood; He rescued Lot. As Peter declares, "The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials" (v. 9).
2. Even though we do not know Peter in the same way as many of the early Christians did, we share the same faith. Consequently, we, too, are part of the "beloved." One of the joys we look forward to in heaven is that we will not only be reunited with friends we know, but we will also get to know people like Peter and other saints of old.

December Week 1

December 1–5, 1 John 1–4

1. Denying our sinful nature means that we're deceiving ourselves (v. 8) and also making God a liar (v. 10). Knowing that the teaching of the Gnostics was popular—and appealing—John takes pains to refute it. Self-deception and denial of the clear truth of Scripture are evident when we deny our sinful nature and/or actions. Today, the world considers sin rather quaint and old-fashioned. Yet over and over, God's Word declares that we are sinners. Scripture is the account of God's dealings with sinners. When we believe in Jesus and confess our sins, His total forgiveness restores our communion with Him.
2. Christ's words are clear, and they're the only solid ground on which to build a life, now and forever. God's will is for all people to be saved from eternal death; the Son alone gives eternal life. The salvation or new life that God desires all to have through faith in Christ means that we grow in sanctification, in holy living (1 Thessalonians 4:7).
3. Jesus uses illustrations everyone can understand. False teachers may appear harmless, but they seek to destroy our faith. Pay careful attention to their deeds and to their lives, says Jesus. The tree produces fruit in keeping with what it is; it can do nothing else. Just so, our motives and our deeds, consistently observed, reveal what's inside us. ("Good" means God pleasing, in harmony with God's Word; good in its character, beneficial in its effect.)
4. Verse 4 makes it plain: We are born of God and will continue to be victorious over Satan and his evil spirits—by Jesus living within us through His Spirit. We can count on it! Jesus within us is always greater and stronger than Satan and his angels. When we depend on our own strength, we're pushovers.

December Week 2

December 6–12, 1 John 5; 2 John; 3 John; Jude; Revelation 1–2

1. Jesus overcame death and Satan on the cross, once and for all. That eternal victory became ours when we were reborn in Baptism. Still, we live in the world and its day-to-day influences, and Satan keeps trying to lead us astray. So we also experience a continuing victory over the world's sinful pattern of life by faith in Christ, which produces repentance and obedience to God, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, who lives in us.
2. "John and the other true Christian teachers spent their lives teaching the truth in Christ so that those who believe might remain faithful unto death and finally receive the crown of life eternal. John did not want his life's work undone by deceivers who would cause Christians to lose their reward" (*The Lutheran Study Bible*, 2 John 8 note).
3. Ministers of the church are not to receive so much that they become rich, and may thus establish an easy mode of life. Nor are they to be so poor that they become mean in spirit and lack the means to fulfill their responsibility to themselves, their family, their church, and their community (cf. 1 Timothy 6:9–10).
4. Christians are built up by regular and frequent reception of Word and Sacrament.
5. In Revelation 1:4–8, we have a beautiful description of the source of all revelation: God. God likely chose seven churches to indicate that His message is for all churches of every time and place.
6. Here, Jesus "has the sharp two-edged sword"—probably the Word that is a word of salvation to those who live in Christ, but a word of judgment and condemnation to those who deny or reject Him (v. 12).

December Week 3

December 13–19, Revelation 3–11

1. Jesus called upon this church to turn to Him to find the gold to make them spiritually rich, white clothes to cover their spiritual nakedness, and eye salve to heal their spiritual blindness. Jesus suggested that He might have to discipline and rebuke them to move them to repent, but He would do it in love. Christ offered to enter the hearts and lives of these people to bless them and to give them the right to sit with Him on the throne of glory.
2. The Lamb looked like it had been slain. As our sacrificial lamb, Jesus willingly laid down His life to pay for our transgressions.
3. The palm branches point to the homage given Jesus already in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He is the promised Messiah, in whom our sins have been cleansed (symbolized by the white robes) and through whose cleansing blood we now can appear before God.
4. Though one-third of mankind is killed, God graciously permits two-thirds to survive. By God's grace, the Church continues to teach the Word and administer the Sacraments, unhindered to this two-thirds; sadly, many will not repent. In our day, the Church continues to grow, even in places where those who follow Christ are severely persecuted. We are part of the Church. It is our privilege and obligation to reach out to others with the saving Gospel as God opens doors for us and empowers us. Ask students for examples of how God has used them to share the Good News with someone else.
5. That the scroll was sweet indicates joy in the promises of God. The Gospel of Jesus Christ itself is sweet and glorious. But the scroll also contains a word of judgment; its proclamation is often followed by bitter persecution and rejection.
6. The persecution will take place when the witnesses have finished their testimony. Recall Jesus' words and the similar vocabulary He used when He said that the Gospel must be preached in the entire world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end would come (Matthew 24:14).

December Week 4

December 20–26, Revelation 12–18:24

1. Revelation 12:10–12 is a beautiful description of the victory over Satan and his accusations, and the sure hope of eternal life with God that Jesus won for us through His life, death, and resurrection.
2. Similarities between Daniel 7:1–28 and Revelation 13:1–10 are, among others, the following items: Daniel saw four great beasts arise from the sea (Daniel 7:3). The beast of Revelation also emerged from the sea (13:1). One of the four beasts of Daniel was like a lion, one like a bear, and one like a leopard (7:4–6). In Revelation, “the beast that [John] saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear’s, and its mouth was like a lion’s mouth” (13:2). The fourth beast of Daniel (7:7) had ten horns. The beast of Revelation also had ten horns (13:1). Other similarities can be noted. Note the identification in Daniel of these beasts as political powers (7:17).
3. The sea in Revelation 15:2 may allude to the Red Sea, through which the exodus from Egypt occurred. Following the exodus, the people of Israel watched as the sea was used by God to defeat their enemies. In Revelation, we see, standing next to this fiery sea, those who have come out of this world and who will now witness the judgment of God against their enemies.
4. Both Revelation 16:1–9 and Matthew 24:29–31 emphasize that catastrophes in the physical universe will be a sign that this age is passing away and that the Lord will return to make all things new.
5. This beast, the beast from the sea in chapter 13, symbolizes the civil governments of this world in their anti-Christian aspect.
6. Although God’s people must live in the world influenced by the prostitute, they are not to be taken in by her allurements. They are to separate themselves from her and refuse to share in her sins that they might not experience her judgment.

December Week 5

December 27–31, Revelation 19–22

1. The rider on the white horse is Christ, who is completely faithful and true. Therefore, we can fully and safely entrust to Him our whole being and future. Jesus comes to judge in righteousness and justice all those who in this lifetime rejected His grace, forgiveness, and life. A person can be judged either in justice or by God's grace in Christ. Those who choose justice will surely be condemned eternally because of their sin. But by the power and wisdom of the Holy Spirit, others are led to rely on the redemption purchased for them by Christ. They are assured of eternal life.
2. The great comfort to be found in Revelation 20:14 is that death, which causes people such great suffering, will be destroyed forever.
3. Just as the Church is sometimes described as the new Israel, here the new Jerusalem symbolizes the Church, the Bride of the Lamb. John may also have in mind a literal city that God will build in the new earth, or this may be a completely figurative description of the Holy Christian Church.
4. In Eden, there was a river to water the Garden and there were trees "pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Genesis 2:9). There were two special trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. All in the Garden of Eden was perfect, created for the praise of God and the enjoyment of God's people forever. For the new heaven and the new earth, the angel showed John a river also, "bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city" (Revelation 22:1–2). It will be "the water of life" (v. 1). There will also be the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. Even the leaves will serve "for the healing of the nations" (v. 2). There will be nothing accursed, and all will be praising God. All will have the blessed privilege to see God's face, to identify with God personally, for "His name will be on their foreheads" (v. 4). God will be all in all to them "for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever" (v. 5).
5. Jesus will return soon and suddenly, when we may least expect Him. In a real sense, He comes for each of us at the time of our physical death. Many people die with no advance warning. We are always to be prepared for Him when He comes to take us.