

Jer. 33:14–16

Ps. 25:1–10

1 Thess. 3:9–13

Luke 21:25–36

Strengthened in Faith

**Goal for
the Session**

Children will begin Advent by helping one another grow in faith.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Allen Hilton

Consolation does not exhaust Paul’s purpose for his eschatological moment. He will not have these Thessalonians sitting on their rooftops. Rather, he chases his words of assurance with a strong call to vigilance and right living in the meantime. Because the longed-for Son will come “like a thief in the night,” the Thessalonians should be constantly ready for his coming—by living as children of light, embodying faith and love. And this watchful, awake way of living is not a private or isolated undertaking, but involves the work of mutual edification. The day of reunion will come. The meantime is full of mundane preparations for it.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” James H. Evans Jr.

The major Christian doctrine illuminated by this text is Christian hope. It is significant that this earliest of Paul’s letters would center on hope. As the church dealt with the delayed Parousia, the notion of hope moved from the foreground to the background in doctrinal reflection. It is hope that draws both love and faith into maturity. Because this text rests on the foundation of hope, Paul’s prayer in verse 12—“And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you”—can be understood as an exhortation and testimony to imperfect people pursuing a perfect love.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Philip E. Campbell

On the First Sunday of Advent many congregations light the hope candle. A vision of “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” can encourage hope, regardless of how or when it occurs, whether the hearer conceives of this coming literally in history or metaphorically in the experiences of individuals and communities. To be ready for the “coming of our Lord Jesus” is a faithful way of living not dependent on predictions as to when. Endings and beginnings abound. Personal tragedy or world calamity can intrude at any time. Faithful preparation and expectant living can help us face whatever comes.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Joseph R. Jeter

We are called to do the best we can to live lives pleasing to God. And though we will surely fail to live up to the high standards of perfection, we can be grateful for those things we have done for God and live in hopeful confidence that the love and mercy of the risen Christ will not let us go. As Tennyson wrote of his faith, “Not one life shall be destroyed, or cast as rubbish to the void.” And there is more. Remember, when Jesus comes, he will bring with him those who have gone before, those whom we have loved and lost a while.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

**1 Thessalonians
3:9–13**

Focus on Your Teaching

Like children everywhere, those in your group will not be immune to the holiday frenzy around them. Little difference may be detected between the anxiety of the youngest and the oldest in your group. However, children can come to relish a respite from all that excitement and anxiety for a brief time in this church school setting. Children are generally eager to help one another, and this session provides an opportunity for them to connect that concern with growing in faith.

Steadfast God, may caring for one another in this group be contagious in our congregation as we begin this season of Advent and a new church year. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- blue or purple cloth
- artificial evergreen wreath
- 4 battery-powered candles
- offering plate
- Bible
- Color Pack 1, 27
- Resource Sheet 1
- newsprint, marker
- 1" x 8 ½" blue or purple paper strip
- tape
- Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019; CD player

For Responding

- option 1: blue or purple paper, scissors, pencils or markers, clear tape
- option 2: Color Pack 2, copies of Resource Sheet 2, newsprint, marker, pencils, envelopes
- option 4: *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019; CD player

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, invite a church member to portray Paul and provide him with a copy of Resource Sheet 1 (A Script for Paul). For option 1 in Responding, cut blue or purple paper into 1" x 8 ½" strips, twenty-four per child. For option 3, gather information about your congregation's Advent mission project.

Greet each child with "Happy New Year." Some will recognize that Advent begins a new church year. Invite early arrivals to set up a worship space by arranging a blue or purple cloth (whichever color is in your sanctuary) in the center of your meeting area. Place on it an evergreen wreath with four battery-powered candles inside or around it, an offering plate, and a Bible open to 1 Thessalonians. (If you do not have a wreath, place the candles in a circle on the cloth.)

Gather the children around the worship space. Note that this Sunday begins a new church year and a new season, Advent. Find out what they remember about Advent. Then summarize that Advent ends on Christmas Day and is a time for us to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Point out the blue or purple cloth as the color for the season of Advent. Rehearse the "All" response below, then lead the Advent litany:

Leader: Prepare the way for God!

All: Come, Lord Jesus.

Leader: Today we light one candle on the Advent wreath.
And we pray,

All: Come, Lord Jesus.

Leader: The waiting seems long and we cry out,

All: Come, Lord Jesus.

Leader: Show us your path, God. Teach us your ways. You save us, and we wait for you all day long. Amen. (paraphrase of Psalm 25:4–5)

Select a child to collect the offering and place it by the candles.

To help the children approach the focus scripture with a common image, ask:

✧ How do you let people know news of your family, such as when a baby is born or when you do something special?

The children are more likely to name e-mail, phone calls, and text messages rather than written letters. Tell them that the Bible reading comes from a letter sent to a church long, long ago.

Older children may know about the division of the Bible into the Old and New Testaments and will be eager to display this knowledge. Questions about the Bible build the Bible skills of all the children.

EXPLORING

Ask a child to retrieve the Bible from the worship space, keeping it open. Point out the front of the Bible. Explain that the Bible is open to the text for the day. Ask:

- ✧ Do you think we are studying a passage from the Old Testament or the New Testament today?
- ✧ How did you decide?

Explain that the Bible is opened to the First Letter to the Thessalonians. The Thessalonians were Christians who lived in Thessalonica. Find that city on the map on Color Pack 1. Introduce the guest, Paul. After his presentation based on Resource Sheet 1, ask the question at the bottom of the resource sheet and invite the children to answer.

Ask the group to listen for words that would be encouraging as you read the paraphrase of 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13 in italics on the resource sheet again. Ask:

✧ What words might give the people in Thessalonica hope and encouragement?

Print the words they suggest on newsprint. With the children, make a rap or cheer using those words as a way to remember Paul's words of encouragement. Ask:

✧ How can you encourage one another as Paul encouraged the people in Thessalonica?

If some children are absent, a leader can add their names to the stacks of paper strips.

RESPONDING

Offer at least two options so children have a choice. One might be more challenging to interest older children who can work on their own.

- 1. Advent Prayer Chain** Paul prayed for the people in Thessalonica. The children and their families can pray for group members and others during Advent by using a prayer chain. Have each child make a stack of twenty-four paper strips. Provide pencils or markers for them to write their names on the top strip. Ask each child to set the top strip next to the stack and move to the stack to the left, writing his or her name on the blank strip at the top of that stack. Continue moving to the left until every child's name is in every stack. Then have the children write the names of leaders for the group, the pastor, and other staff on other strips. If blank strips remain, talk together about whom

EASY
PREP

to add, such as family members or people with particular needs. Have the children use the stacks to make paper chains to take home. Each day the children are to tear one link from the chain and pray for that person. When they reach the last link, it will be Christmas.

2. **Letters of Encouragement** Advent is a good time to provide words of encouragement to others. Show Color Pack 2, and recall how Paul wrote words of encouragement to the Thessalonians. Print some words of encouragement on newsprint. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (An Encouraging Word) and pencils. Read the letter outline together. Tell the children that this is a group letter, and ask each child to add something encouraging and sign the letter. Talk about the people who will receive the letters. As each letter is finished, fold it and place it in an envelope. Address the envelopes.

Option: The group could prepare a letter of encouragement for each one present.

3. **Advent Mission Project** Many congregations focus on a special mission project, such as a mitten or sock tree, during Advent. Tell the group about your congregation's project, and suggest that they and their families take part in it. If a member of the congregation is involved in the ministry that will benefit, invite him or her to tell the children how they can help.
4. **Musical Encouragement** When a thought is put to music, it enters our memory in a special way. If the children do not know the song "You Shall Love the Lord Your God" (track 21 on *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019), teach it to them. Sing the first line and have the group echo with the second line. Repeat with lines three and four. Pair up and have half the group sing lines one and three, and the others sing lines two and four.

Explain that Emmanuel is one of the names for Jesus. It means "God is with us."

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come,
 Emmanuel,
 And ransom captive Israel,
 That mourns in lonely exile
 here
 Until the Son of God
 appears.

Rejoice! Rejoice!
 Emmanuel shall come to
 thee, O Israel!

CLOSING

Gather around the worship space and light one Advent candle. Suggest that the first Advent candle is a reminder of encouragement or hope. Invite the children to say words of hope or encouragement.

To symbolize that this Sunday is the first Sunday of the new church year, begin a church year paper chain. Place one blue or purple paper link on the worship table. Tell the group that a link in the color of the church year season will be added each Sunday.

Sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (Color Pack 27; track 13 on *Singing the Feast*, 2018–2019). Pray aloud:

God, teach us your ways. We wait for you all day long. Amen.

Invite the children to respond: *Come, Lord Jesus.*

Say good-bye to each child with this blessing: "(Name), may God make your heart strong."

December 2, 2018
Strengthened in Faith

Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 1



A Script for Paul

including a paraphrase of Thessalonians 3:9–13

Good morning, everyone. My name is Paul, but I was also known by my Hebrew name, Saul. I was not a friend of Jesus when he taught and healed on earth. In fact, I was the opposite. I thought those Jesus people were all wrong until I had a strange experience on the road to Damascus. That totally changed my life! After Jesus spoke to me, I joined his friends in Damascus. Ever since that time, I have traveled the world to tell people about Jesus. I speak in synagogues to the Jews. If they don't listen, I speak in homes to Gentiles—that is, anyone who isn't a Jew.

Oh, I have lots of stories to tell of my travels. There was this time when I met with the followers of Jesus in Troas. We ate and then we talked about Jesus long into the night, because I was leaving the next day. After midnight, a young man named Eutychus (EU'-TIKH-US), who was sitting in a window, fell asleep and fell out of the window from the third floor and died. I hurried down the stairs and hugged him, and he came back to life. After that, we all had more to eat and continued talking until the sun came up when I had to be on my way.

There was also the time in Damascus when we heard that the Jewish leaders there were plotting to kill me. My new friends, followers of Jesus, saved my life. They let me down over the city wall in a big basket after dark.

But I came to tell you about the church in Thessalonica. Silas and I went there on my second long journey to teach about Jesus. We preached in the Jewish synagogue, and some Jews and many Gentiles believed in Jesus. More than anything, I would like to see my friends there again. I pray for them every day. Because I couldn't go there right now, I sent Timothy—now there's a fine young man—to see how they were doing. He has just returned and brought a good report, but he hinted that they need some hope, some encouragement. So I am writing a letter to them. It will take days to get to Thessalonica, but I know they will read it eagerly. This is part of what I have written:

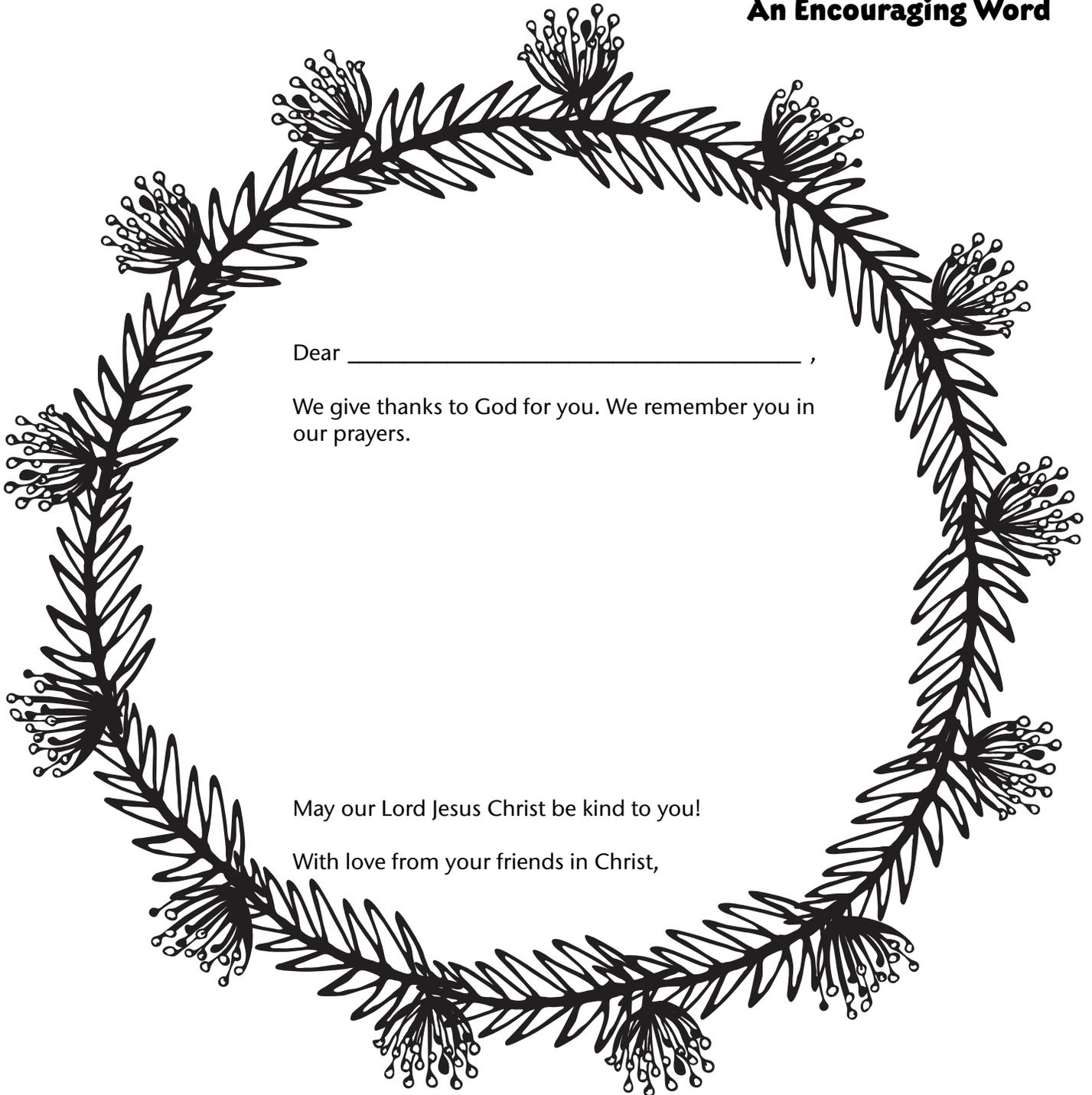
How can we thank God for you? You have brought us so much joy before God. Each day I pray that I will see you again and help you to continue to grow in faith. I hope that God will send us back to you. Meanwhile, may God make your number grow and your love for one another be as full as our love for you. May God make your hearts strong and you holy until Jesus returns. Amen.

What do you think? Will these words give the Christians in Thessalonica hope in God?

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Multi-Age
Resource Sheet 2

An Encouraging Word



Dear _____ ,

We give thanks to God for you. We remember you in our prayers.

May our Lord Jesus Christ be kind to you!

With love from your friends in Christ,

