

GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE WINTER QUARTER:

This quarter explores faith that pleases God. Any person seeking God must believe God exists and must know God rewards those who are seeking God. In this quarter we will learn additional information about faith that pleases God as we review the description of faith and observe faith in action. We will understand why it is so important to have faith that pleases God in our lifestyle of faith today.

Unit III, “The Righteous Live by Faith,” has four lessons drawn from Isaiah, Daniel, and Habakkuk that allow us to see how the righteous live by faith. Isaiah reminds us how living by faith the righteous can see the power of God throughout all creation; Daniel allows us to see how living by faith the three Hebrew boys trusted God to protect them in the fiery furnace and how Daniel, living by faith, trusted God to protect him in the lion’s den; Habakkuk living by faith received instructions reminding him to be still and wait on God because the righteous live by faith.

February 4, 2024

Power Without Equal or Faith In The Power of God

Isaiah 40:12-13, 25-31

Unifying Principle (Focus)

The power of nature can make us feel small and insignificant. What thoughts ensue in the presence of such awesome power? Isaiah reminds us that the God who created everything around us is worthy of our trust.

Goals for the learners

1. To explore the tension between God’s creative power and human trust.
2. To perceive the relationship between renewing our trust in God while waiting for God to act.
3. To model trust and patience in God’s timing.

Challenges for the week

1. Summarize the future Israel faced at the time Isaiah spoke these words: first inevitable defeat at the hands of northern enemies, then eventual restoration according to the will of the all-powerful, always faithful God. What do you imagine about the reaction of the people who heard Isaiah’s message (ch. 40)?
2. Describe signs of the power of God you see in nature. (If possible, take a short walk outside while you make these descriptions.)
3. Think about an experience of “waiting for the Lord” and finding renewed strength (v. 31). What were the lasting effects of the experience on your faith?
4. Read the Print Passage aloud.
5. Compare Israel’s experience in Isaiah’s day with your present-day feelings of inadequacy when confronted by powerful forces you cannot understand or defeat.
6. Make a list of the questions Isaiah asks in verses 12-31. What is the recurring theme underlying all of these questions? What tone do you hear in Isaiah’s voice as he preaches this message (e.g., wonder, scolding, encouragement, sarcasm, astonishment)? How does the preacher’s tone impact the listener’s receptivity to the message?

February 11, 2024

Worth Risking Our Lives or Faith Amidst The Fiery Furnace

Daniel 3:19-28a (ending with “who trusted in him”)

Unifying Principle (Focus)

It is problematic to stand by personal convictions when we are threatened by extreme consequences for doing so. For what, or whom, are we willing to stand even at risk to our lives? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego declared their faith in God despite Nebuchadnezzar’s angry threats.

Goals for the Learners

1. To recount how a faithful choice led many to a new knowledge of God.
2. To appreciate difficult situations as opportunities for God to act in amazing ways.
3. To consider ways your church might bear faithful witness to God especially in seemingly hopeless circumstances.

Challenges for the Week

1. Give careful attention to Daniel 3:1-18, which gives essential background to the Print Passage (including the Key Verse).
2. Tell or write a modern story of someone or a group that has held fast to what they believed to be right in spite of the possible consequences (for example, a civil rights activist, a war protestor).
3. Research archaeological information about what a “fiery furnace” was like in Persia and its uses outside of executions.
4. What made Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to worship the gods of Babylon and what their refusal would communicate to other exiles and to Persian nationals?
5. Look online for news stories of a person or group who is being persecuted for their faith. (One source of information is available on the site “Voice of the Martyrs.”) How might you advocate for a person or group to relieve their plight?

February 18, 2024

Facing Great Danger or Faith In Times of Trouble

Daniel 6:10-11, 14, 16, 19-23, 26 (include verse 27 if print space allows)

Unifying Principle (Focus)

At times we endure a political climate in which the laws are in conflict with personal convictions. How do we take a stand against the powers that be? On account of his faith in God, Daniel stood up to King Darius's unjust decree even at risk to his own.

Goals For The Learners

1. To analyze Daniel's personal conviction of faith in God in the midst of injustice.
2. To prayerfully raise awareness of God's power and favor in times of difficulty.
3. To create opportunities (or increase effectiveness of opportunities already in place), to stand together against injustice.

Challenges for the Week

1. Compare the similar experiences of Daniel and his three friends who were cast into the fiery furnace. Note their shared background described in Daniel 1. Note also the change in political power from Babylon to Persia.
2. What is the background on Darius and Nebuchadnezzar's approaches to ruling the empire? Compare and contrast the two.
3. List methods a ruler today would use to enforce a demand for total allegiance. How would you think that you would respond to a government order to obey your national leader without reservation, no exceptions allowed.
4. What effect can a faithful witness to God have on others, no matter what the circumstances?
5. Identify risks, consequences, and benefits of standing firm in your ideals in circumstances that demand your compromise. What role does your faith play in standing firm in what you believe?
6. Name examples of when people have worked together to stand up for God's ideals. How can the work of a committed few make a difference? Identify ways that you can stand against injustice.

February 25, 2024

Waiting and Trusting or Faith In God's Purpose

Habakkuk 2:1-5

Universal Principle (Focus)

We are prone to discouragement when navigating life's hardships. How can we endure the wait and trust that better days are ahead? God's message through Habakkuk encourages us to wait in faith and trust God's timing.

Goals For the Learners

1. To critique the historical circumstances that resulted in the prophet's question and the Lord's response.
2. To grow in appreciation for the benefits of waiting on God's time.
3. To identify barriers to our patience when God's response to prayer is not immediate.

Challenges for the Week

1. Contrast Habakkuk's complaint in chapter 1 with the hope and trust he expresses in the Print Passage. Include information about the historical context in which Habakkuk prophesied.
2. Describe the role of the sentinel keeping watch for the coming of friends or enemies. What news does Habakkuk hope to hear and convey from his waiting stance? How do "sentinels" serve our communities today?
3. What were times when circumstances forced you to wait for some longed-for life development? Was waiting difficult? How did you cope with the need to wait?
4. What is the importance of trust as believers wait for God to act in redemptive ways? What do participants want God to do next? How do they feel when God seems to delay or to act in ways contrary to what they want?
5. Provide prayer suggestions expressing faith in God and confidence that God will do what God has promised. Confess that we are often responsible for defying God's will and bringing about our suffering. Ask for patience to trust God through the difficulties.

