

Discernment

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.

What is the one word in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 that sums up all these words:
Evaluate; probe; verify; judge; investigate;
research; scrutinize; examine; measure: _____

Discernment is used to describe the activity of going past the mere perception of something, to making detailed judgments about that thing.

Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Paul, in Acts 17:11 commended the Bereans for their “noble character.” What were they doing?

At school you trust your teachers to tell you the truth. At church you normally just trust your pastor or youth leader to tell you the truth too. Do you ever think to check up on stuff your pastor or youth leader says? _____ Why or why not?

You’d have to actually care about what they were saying to want to go to the effort.

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

In his book, “Reckless Faith,” John MacArthur says:
“[Martin] Luther’s well-known formulation, “Scripture and plain reason,” is the only basis on which we can properly ground true spiritual discernment. *Discernment* is the ability to understand, interpret, and apply truth skillfully”

2 Timothy 4:3-4 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

In 2 Timothy 2:15 Paul encourages Timothy to do his best to become one who:

Read 2 Timothy 4:3-4. What are some common *desires* of people?

1 Timothy 6:3-10 If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Example of *false teaching*: “Prosperity Gospel”

“It has been defined by the belief that “Jesus blesses believers with riches” or more specifically as the teaching that “believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’ through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings.”¹

Check out these verses: Malachi 3:10, Deuteronomy 8:18, John 10:10, 3 John 2.

If you concentrate only of these verses the “prosperity” theology actually seems quite real. It caters to the human desires for good health, riches, and fame.

However, after reading 1 Timothy 6:3-10, shown here, we can see that Paul strenuously objects to this theology that was taught even in his day.

Picking your battles: There are many false teachers and doctrines in the world today. In some cases you can just move on. But sometimes you have to stand up for truth. In all cases you need to be able to make sound judgements to discern the truth.

Verses are from The New International Version unless otherwise noted.

¹ Quoted from Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosperity_theology#Teachings_and_origins

Lesson Plan: Discernment

The Goal: The goal of this lesson is instill a willingness in kids to become good at discernment: judging what they hear and deciding the truthfulness. Children, for the most part, have grown up trusting adults. In the secular world bullies, abuses of power, and the news, will quickly teach them not to trust politicians, people who purport themselves to be their friends, and even police. But evidently it seems like church goers will swallow anything a *preacher* or the latest Christian book tells them without considering it's validity against the Scriptures.

Preparation: I recommend that you read my blog and do some research or reading on this topic so you can make this lesson your own. Copy the lesson plan so each kid can have a copy. Review the lesson in detail and make notes on your copy about things you would like to bring up or comments you would like to make. Check out my link on the "prosperity-gospel. Spend some time in prayer the evening before you teach.

Pre-Lesson Activity: Play "Two lies and a truth": Tell the students that you are going to tell them three statements about yourself. One will be false but the other ones will be true. What they have to do is to guess which the false statement is. Divide the class into two teams and tell them that they will score one point if they decide on the false statement correctly. They will take it in turns to guess. Say three statements to one of the teams e.g. I lived in Africa. I speak French. I come from England.

The students from that team should be able to guess which is false using the information that they know about the teacher. For example, "Yes, it's obvious you are British and I think you mentioned Africa so – no the teacher cannot speak French!" If the students are correct, score one point for that team. If they do not know, pass the turn over to the other team. If they guess correctly, then they score a point. Once you have done this, do the same but to the other team. Note: do not allow the other team who is not being asked to shout out the answer. Tell the students to each think of three statements about themselves. One false and the others true. Take it in turns for one team member to say his/her statements to the other team. That team should try to see if they can guess which is false. Note that the statement should not be too outlandish because otherwise it will be too obvious and the other team will scores points easily. Make sure that each team member says his/her statements to the other team. At the end, count up the scores. The team with the most wins.

Leading the lesson: Hand a copy of the lesson plan to each kid. Have a student read the first verse in the left column then ask the questions related to that verse in the right column. When you get to the statement in red, "**You'd have to actually care about what they were saying to want to go to the effort.**" you should have a short discussion on being passionate Christians. Ask them if they care enough about their faith to bother reading the whole Bible. Talk about "lukewarm" Christians (Revelation 3:15). You might be shocked to realize the extent that lazy Christianity has pervaded the church.

Next we consider Paul's words to Timothy. Remind them that Timothy was only a teenager himself when he pastored a church. Common desires of people can include: being rich, having friends, being healthy, having power and fame, or just having a nice life. Christian bookstores are filled with self-help books describing how to use God to get these things. Take a look through your personal library for books you might use as examples. One common book is, "The Prayer of Jabez," by Bruce Wilkenson. The example I use is the "prosperity gospel."

If you have time you can continue the conversation about being lazy Christians using Revelation 3:15-17. You can also talk about how to choose *who* you're going to follow. Believing everything your pastor or teacher says without checking it against the Bible is "following the pastor." Reading your Bible and having the Holy Spirit guide you "into all truth" (John 16:13) is following God/Jesus. Christians are to be Christ-followers."

Close with Prayer: Pray for your kids to have passionate, discerning hearts for God and be real disciples of Jesus.