

## WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

### A Study of Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians and the Ephesians

This year in Women's Bible Study, we will take the opportunity to develop another aspect of spending time with Jesus. Meditation allows the Holy Spirit to speak to us through the Word as we slow down and let the words on the page come to life. Each week we will both “dig in” to uncover the meaning of the passage and reflect on it to allow the words, phrases, and concepts to have a deeper impact on us. This practice may be familiar to you or it may be a new way of approaching your Bible reading. Allow yourself time to develop this helpful way of reading God's word and see what riches are there for you.

#### **MEDITATE:** *1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.*

Quiet your heart before the Lord. This does not necessarily mean that your environment needs to be silent, although this can be helpful. Set aside a time free from distractions to focus on the passage as you read and meditate on it.

These instructions may help you develop a method for meditating on our passage each week. You may want to incorporate all or some of these ideas, whatever is helpful.

- ❖ Read the passage, slowly and prayerfully asking the Lord to speak to you from his word. Take several minutes to mull over the passage.
- ❖ Read the passage aloud and again take several minutes to give careful thought to it.
- ❖ Listen to the passage being read aloud. You may want to have someone else read it to you, or use a Bible program such as [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com) or YouVersion, a free Bible app.
- ❖ Read the passage in other translations.

#### **MEDITATE**

To meditate is to give serious and careful thought to, to chew over, consider, contemplate, mull over, ponder, ruminate, think about, or wrestle with something. As believers we have the Holy Spirit in us, so as we meditate on God's word we can trust that he is helping us understand the passage, see Jesus more clearly, and make connections to our own lives.

Finally, consider the following questions:

What words or phrases stand out to me? Why?

What questions does the passage raise that I want to know more about?

#### **DIG IN:** *Read Acts 15:22–18:18a.*

Today's reading in Acts is background for our study of the letters written to the Thessalonians. As we read about Paul's second missionary journey, we'll meet some of his companions, see the challenges he faced, and learn about what he was experiencing in Corinth, where he wrote the letters to the Thessalonians.


1. Who are Silas and Timothy and how did they come to join Paul's second missionary journey? (Acts 15:22-34; 16:1-3)

2. In Acts 16:8-10 we read about Paul's call to Macedonia. Continue reading chapter 16 to see what it was like for Paul and his companions as they journeyed into the region of Macedonia. You may want to find this area on the map in the back of your Bible. What stands out to you about Paul's experiences?
3. Since we'll be studying Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, describe how Paul's ministry began in Thessalonica and what his message was to them. (Acts 17:1-3, 7b)
4. What were the responses to his message? (Acts 17:4-10a)

Have you experienced similar responses? If so, maybe you can share some with your small group and pray for those who haven't believed the gospel yet.

5. Re-read Acts 17:10b – 18:18a. This passage tells us what occurred from the time Paul left Thessalonica through his time in the city of Corinth, where he wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians. Jot down anything that strikes you about this time in Paul's ministry.

**DIG IN:** Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.

6. Though Paul was only in Thessalonica a few short weeks, a church was established as a result of his teaching about Jesus.
  - a. How does Paul see those who have believed? (vv. 1, 4;  
 \* Zeph. 3:17; Jn. 17:20-23)

**“LOVED BY GOD”** (v. 4)

This denotes a "love which existed in the past but continues into the present with unabated force."<sup>1</sup>

Do you see yourself this way? Why or why not?

- b. How does the second part of his greeting, “grace and peace to you” (v. 1), connect with the Thessalonians’ new identity as believers?

**Grace:** Rom. 11:5-6; Eph. 2:1-5

**Peace:** Rom. 5:1; Col. 1:17-21

7. In verse 3, Paul commends the believers for three things. First, what do you think he means by each one? Give an example of when you have seen such fruit in yourself or someone else.

- a. **Work produced by faith** (📖 Eph. 2:8-10; Heb. 11:1)

Work here “may be pleasant and stimulating.”<sup>2</sup>

- b. **Labor prompted by love** (📖 1 Jn. 3:16-17; 4:7-12)

The focus of *labor* here “is on the cost, the exertion, fatigue, and exhaustion that it entails.”<sup>3</sup>

- c. **Endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ** (📖 Heb. 10:32-39)

8. What other good fruit is the Holy Spirit producing in the lives of the Thessalonians as a result of their believing the good news about Jesus? (vv. 4-10)

9. How does waiting for Jesus’ return, mentioned in verse 10, affect how we live our lives? (📖 2 Peter 3:10-13)

Any examples from your own life?

## PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10. Take time to interact with the Lord about the passage.

*“Once we’ve meditated to focus, understand, and remember, we will normally find our hearts inclined to worship. So, we pause to lift our gaze to the excellencies of Christ, to bend our eyes off the world, to express thanksgiving and adoration when we pray. Meditation leads to delight when the Holy Spirit inclines our hearts to see and savor how glorious God is.”<sup>4</sup>*

- ❖ How do I respond to the beauty I see in God’s will, work, and ways in this passage?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ❖ In what ways do I see Jesus more clearly through this passage?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ❖ Is there a song or hymn that comes to mind that helps express my response to the passage?

## REFLECT & PRAY

- ❖ How can I take what I’m learning from this passage and make it my own? Is there something specific to believe, do, not do, be grateful for, etc.?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ❖ How does this passage help me see myself and others differently?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- ❖ Pray the passage: Use the passage as a basis to talk to God about the things you are learning, seeing, and longing for as well as ways the passage speaks to your current life experiences.

\*📖 Indicates passages for further study

<sup>1</sup> Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Thessalonian Epistles: A Call to Readiness* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 50. Emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> Hiebert, 46.

<sup>3</sup> Hiebert, 46.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-steps-to-meditating-on-your-bible/>