

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

MEDITATE: *1 Thessalonians 2:1–16.*

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 or YouVersion, a free Bible app.
- ❖ Read the passage in other translations.

MEDITATE

“In silence and in meditation on the eternal truths, I hear the voice of God which excites our hearts to greater love.”

—C. S. Lewis

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 1 Thessalonians 2:1–16.*

1. What would you say is Paul's main purpose in this section of the letter?
2. In verse 2 Paul mentions the outrageous treatment he and his companions experienced in Philippi (Acts 16:11–40). Following these events, “with the help of God” Paul and his companions moved on and boldly proclaimed the gospel in Thessalonica (v. 2).
Why do you think Paul reminds the Thessalonians of his suffering?


3. Opponents of the fledgling church in Thessalonica have apparently been spreading slander about Paul and his fellow missionaries. Read back through verses 1–12 of our passage. In the left-hand column of the table below, make a list of the things you infer Paul and company have been accused of. In the right-hand column, write down how you see Paul answering these accusations.

Accusations	Paul's Response

ITINERANT TEACHERS

To understand the accusations implied in this chapter, it's helpful to know a little bit of background: "The world of Paul's time was filled with wandering philosophers, prophets of other religions, magicians, false prophets, and others seeking not only financial gain, but also the prestige of a good reputation."¹ In bringing their accusations against Paul and his fellow missionaries, opponents of the gospel were seeking "to class them with the wandering, mercenary, religious teachers of that day who plied their skills on the gullible people for personal benefit."²

4. Paul repeatedly reminds the Thessalonians that they are witnesses of "how holy, righteous and blameless" he and his fellow missionaries were among them (vv. 2, 5, 9, 10, and 11). How has God himself also affirmed Paul's work and motives?
5. Paul uses many different expressions and images to convey the way he and his companions related to the people during their time in Thessalonica.
- What expressions and images stand out to you, and why?

- b. Do you have examples of this kind of care in your spiritual journey, or have you found ways to exhibit this kind of care for others? If so, please consider sharing your experience with your group.
6. What do you think motivates Paul to mount such a thorough defense against the accusations leveled at him?
7. Paul urges these former idol-worshippers who have been called “into his kingdom and glory” to “live lives worthy of God” (v. 12). Look at Ephesians 3:14–4:3 to see how such a life is possible and what it looks like—for them and for us.
8. Back in verse 1 Paul asserted that the time he and his companions spent in Thessalonica was “not without results” (NIV), or “not in vain” (ESV).
What fruit has their visit borne in the lives of the Thessalonian believers? (vv. 13–14; * 1 Pet. 4:12–16)
9. Paul writes hard words about the Jews who opposed Jesus and God’s inclusion of the Gentiles in his plan of salvation. What awaits these Jewish opponents—and indeed all people—who persist in rejecting and seeking to undermine God’s good purpose? (v. 16)

There is a future hope for the Jewish people within God’s sovereign plan. If you would like to read about it, see Romans 11. You may also want to read Paul’s own story in Galatians 1:13–16.

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read 1 Thessalonians 2:1–16. 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 of 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.”³

- ❖ 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

¹ Thomas, Robert L., “1 Thessalonians” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 253.

² Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Thessalonian Epistles: A Call to Readiness* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 22.

³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-steps-to-meditating-on-your-bible/>