

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

MEDITATE: *1 Thessalonians 2:17—3:13.*

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.

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?

MEDITATE

“It is not hasty reading, but seriously meditating upon holy and heavenly truths that makes them prove sweet and profitable to the soul.”

— Joseph Hall (1574-1656)

DIG IN: *Read 1 Thessalonians 2:17—3:13.*

1. During Paul's ministry in Thessalonica, a mob was stirred up that sought to take him into custody and he had to leave unexpectedly (Acts 17:1-10). Not recorded in Acts is how Paul felt about leaving Thessalonica. How does Paul describe this experience and his response to it? (2:17-18)

ORPHANED (1 Thess. 2:17)

Various translators have tried to capture the intensity of Paul's feelings upon being separated from the Thessalonians: “orphaned” (NIV), “torn away” (ESV), or “bereft” (NASB). The word Paul uses “is a strong word, fastening attention on Paul's sense of desolation. ... The thought of being orphaned emphasizes his affection for those to whom he writes.”


2. Opposition to Paul's ministry was much more than human opposition. He desperately wanted to return to Thessalonica to "strengthen[] the disciples and encourag[e] them to remain true to the faith" as he had in other cities (Acts 14:22). What prevented him from returning? (2:18; Contrast this with Acts 16:9-10.)
3. We often cannot see God's purposes in the roadblocks, detours, and trials of life, but sometimes, in retrospect, we can see good fruit come out of them and God's kingdom advance. Do you have an example of this you could share with your small group?
4. The Thessalonians' faith was born in the soil of "severe suffering" (1 Thess. 1:6), and after Paul's departure their trials continued. Paul fears that the tempter, Satan, might have discouraged them from continuing in the faith (3:5).
 - a. What did Paul tell them about these trials when he was with them? (3:3-4)

b. How did Paul address his concern? (3:2, 5)

GOD'S CARE FOR HIS OWN

"That the Thessalonians stood steadfast is due not to the missionaries, or even to the converts, but to God Himself who has upheld them under the storm of persecution. Paul viewed all spiritual blessings as coming ultimately from God."² (For more encouragement see Jn. 10:22-29; 14:16; 1 Pet. 1:3-5)

5. Imagine Timothy returning with "good news about [the Thessalonians'] faith and love" (3:6) and Paul immediately sitting down to pen a letter back to them. What impact does Timothy's report have on Paul and his companions? (3:7-11)
6. Our life of faith has the potential to encourage others and bring them great joy. The Apostle John echoed Paul's response when he said, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth" (3 Jn. 4). Describe a time when you experienced joy or encouragement as you observed God's work in the life of another believer.

7. Throughout his letters to the Thessalonians, the return of the Lord Jesus is a motivating and encouraging reality for Paul.
 - a. What does Paul desire in light of this? (3:12-13;  * Jude 24-25)
 - b. What does he anticipate and celebrate as he looks forward to the Lord's return? (2:19)
 - c. Our glory, hope, and joy can often reside in temporal things. Consider what you identify as your true glory, hope, and joy at Jesus' return. If nothing comes to mind, ask him to bring things of eternal significance into sharper focus for you.

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read 1 Thessalonians 2:17—3:13. 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 Morris, Leon, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 57.

² Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Thessalonian Epistles: A Call to Readiness* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 149.

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