

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

MEDITATE: *1 Thessalonians 4:1-12.*

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


Cause me to understand the way of your precepts, that I may meditate on your wonderful deeds.
—Psalm 119:27

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 4:1-12.*

1. Previously Paul urged the Thessalonians “to live lives worthy of God, who calls [them] into his kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:12). What is he exhorting them to do now? (vv. 1-2;  * Col. 2:6)

“HOW TO LIVE” OR “WALK”

The verb Paul uses in the phrase “how to live” (v. 1) is more literally translated “walk.” “How to walk” is a phrase Paul uses in giving instructions on behavior. As N. T. Wright explains, “Behavior is seen as a matter of putting one foot in front of another; good behavior is taking care with the direction and placing of those feet.”¹

2. It is not unusual for believers to wonder what God's will is for their lives, and in this passage Paul spells it out with clarity. What is God's will? (vv. 3, 7; Lev. 11:44a)

SANCTIFIED

Being sanctified (v. 3) is the process of becoming holy. "Holiness for Paul is a matter of becoming more and more like the God who has chosen, called and saved us. The call to holiness is a call to discipleship, not a requirement for salvation. God does not simply call us to holiness, he provides the power to make progress towards that goal in the person of the Holy Spirit."²

3. In this first section (vv. 3-8) Paul focuses on sexual behavior. Why is this an important focus?
vv. 2, 8

1 Cor. 6:18-20; 2 Cor. 6:16—7:1

4. What guidelines does Paul give in this passage regarding sexual behavior, both negative and positive? (vv. 3-6; If it's helpful, think in terms of what to "put off" and what to "put on.")

PORNEIA

The Greek word *porneia*, translated "sexual immorality" (v. 3), is "a general term for nearly every type of sexual sin."³

5. It is God's will that we walk in a way that is holy (that is, consistent with our relationship with God) and honorable (that is, respectful and loving of other people).⁴ What if anything is the Holy Spirit revealing to you which needs to come into conformity with God's will regarding your sexuality, whether you are married or unmarried? Think in terms of thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.
6. The transition in verse 9 is natural, as living a holy life should result in love of others. What does Paul assume as the prerequisite for living this life of love? (vv. 8-9)

7. What three things does Paul tell his readers to do in verse 11?
8. Paul, a tent maker, did not rely on the Thessalonians for his financial support (1 Thess. 2:9). Why does Paul encourage the Thessalonians to work, and what is he implying about the purpose of work? (v. 12; 📖 2 Thess. 3:11-13; 1 Tim. 5:8)
9. Where in this passage do you see elements of the gospel, God's saving and transforming work in us? Please consider sharing with your small group.
10. What implications does our selfless love for those within the Christian community have for how we ought to relate to those outside the community?

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12. 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."⁵

- ❖ 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.

If this study has triggered a response from your own experience of sexual brokenness or abuse, please reach out for help in the journey to hope and healing, and talk to someone you trust. If you are local or international, you may contact Harvest USA: +1-215-482-0111 or www.harvestusa.org. If you are local to the Glenside, Pennsylvania, area and a victim of abuse, you may contact Laurel House: 1-800-642-3150.

*📖 Indicates passages for further study

¹ Wright, N.T., *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Ephesians* (London: the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 99.

² Holmes, Michael W., *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 130.

³ Holmes, 125.

⁴ Holmes, 126.

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