

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

MEDITATE: *1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11.*

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 place of our exhaustion and spiritual fatigue, God will give us rest. All He asks is that we come to Him...that we spend a while thinking about Him, meditating on Him, talking to Him, listening in silence, occupying ourselves with Him - totally and thoroughly lost in the hiding place of His presence.”
—Chuck Swindoll

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 4:13—5:11.*

1. In this passage, Paul is addressing a misconception that the Thessalonians have regarding believers among them who have already died. The Thessalonians are very upset and worried that their fellow believers will not be there when Jesus returns. Paul wants to make sure that they “do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope” (4:13).
 - a. What foundational truth is the basis for the hope they have? (4:14a)
 - b. What is this hope? (4:14b; Rom. 6:3-5; 1 Cor. 15:20-23)

2. When the Lord returns, it will not be like his first coming – as a baby born in a stable in a remote town.
 - a. How does Paul describe Jesus’ second coming? (4:16; If you wish, take some time to look at these passages and envision what his coming will be like: Mt. 24:27; Mk. 13:26.)

The Greek word translated “coming” in “the coming of the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:15) is parousia, a term often used in secular literature to refer to the visit of the emperor or another dignitary to a city. During the parousia of an official, great festivities would be held, and the residents of the city would go out to meet him. Sometimes new coins would be minted or it would begin a new era for the people. One wanted to be present at the parousia of an earthly official, so how much more will one want to be at the parousia of Christ?¹

- b. What effect will these things have on those who are “in Christ” (4:16b)? (4:16b-17; * Lk. 21:28)

3. At Jesus’ return “the trumpet call of God” (4:16) will be heard. The trumpet is a brass instrument with a very penetrating sound. What does the sound of a trumpet signify for the people of God? (You may want to listen to “The Trumpet Shall Sound” from Handel’s *Messiah*.²)
Exod. 19:16, 18-19

“A LOUD COMMAND” (4:16)

This isn’t the first time God will have used his voice to bring forth life. Take a look at the following verses to see God’s life-giving power and authority displayed: Gen. 1:3-31; Ezek. 37:4-14; Jn. 11:43.

Num. 10:1-10

Mt. 24:31

4. Why is Paul not able to give the Thessalonians any timeline for Christ's return? (5:2; Mk. 13:32–37)
5. Once Jesus returns, the resurrection will occur instantly. In that moment, people will either be ready to meet him or not. How can the Thessalonians be assured that they will be with the Lord at his return? (5:4–5, 9; Jn. 12:36; Eph. 1:13–14; Heb. 9:28)
6. As Paul continues, “[The Thessalonians] do not need further instruction but encouragement to live in accord with what they have already been taught.”³ Try to interpret Paul's many word pictures in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8a to answer the following questions.
 - a. How are the unbelievers living?
 - b. How are the believers to live? (📖 1 Pet. 1:13–21)
7. In 1 Thessalonians 5:8, Paul wants the Thessalonians to “put[] on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.” How would faith and love and the hope of salvation help the Thessalonians and all believers to persevere until Jesus returns? (📖 2 Pet. 1:5–8)
8. In the passage, Paul twice urges the Thessalonians to encourage one another (4:18; 5:11). What difference does it make in your life to know that Jesus has secured your salvation through his death and resurrection and when He returns, you will see him face to face and live with him forever?

Consider whether there is someone in your family or circle of friends that you can encourage with this truth.

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read 1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11. 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.”⁴

- ❖ 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? (Bonus track: “There Is a Day” by Lou Fellingham⁵)

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 <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/the-return-of-christ-february-2020#:~:text=The%20Greek%20word,the%20last%20day>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zk9ou-iJK4I>

³ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Thessalonian Epistles: A Call to Readiness* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 208.

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

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQuUWJ-Ch4Q>