

## WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

#### **MEDITATE:** *1 Thessalonians 5:12-28.*

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?

#### **MEDITATE**

“Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one...My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”

— John 17:11, 15-17

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

#### **DIG IN:** *Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28.*

#### **THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH IN CHRISTIAN LOVE**

Paul loves these new believers in the Thessalonian church, who are full of vitality, love for each other, and joy in the Lord. But he knows they need to mature in the knowledge of the Lord and the life of faith so they can stand strong in the face of opposition from outside the church and misunderstandings and failings from within. In this lesson we will consider many of the commands Paul gives to the church.

1. Paul knows that there will be disputes over decisions made by the leadership.
  - a. How does he characterize that leadership in verse 12?
  - b. Paul tells the brothers and sisters to acknowledge and hold their leaders “in the highest regard” (v. 13a). Think about your own relationship with the leaders in your church and prayerfully consider if there is any adjustment that you need to make regarding your attitude and interactions in light of this counsel.

2. Concerning relationships among all the believers in the church, Paul exhorts, “Live in peace with each other” (v. 13b). What helps us to obey this command? (Eph. 4:2-6)

3. In verse 14, Paul highlights three groups in the church – groups which we might find ourselves in at one point or another.

- a. What does Paul exhort the church to do for each group, and then for everyone?

The idle and disruptive:

The disheartened:

The weak:

Everyone (including those in the groups above):

- b. How do these actions show the love of Christ to fellow believers? (📖\* Col. 3:12-17)

4. Paul’s next exhortation (v. 15) goes against all common practice in both the Jewish and pagan cultures of the time, as well as in our own. Like the others in this passage, this one is briefly stated yet packed with meaning. What do the following verses add to our understanding?

Lk. 6:27-36

1 Pet. 2:23

## TRUST THE LORD IN EVERYTHING


5. Life inevitably brings suffering, pain, anxiety, and discouragement. But despite deep suffering and persecution, Paul testifies, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (Phil. 4:11). What reasons does he give for us to “rejoice *always*” (v. 16) and “give thanks *in all circumstances*” (v. 18; emphasis added)? v. 18b

Rom. 8:28, 35-39

2 Cor. 4:16-18

6. Paul also calls believers to “pray continually” (v. 17). But rather than a command to say prayers out loud 24 hours a day, he is speaking of an attitude of prayer or consciousness of God throughout the day. What would it look like for you to incorporate this mindset as you go through your day?

## SEEK THE TRUTH; REJECT THE LIES OF SATAN

7. Earlier in his letter Paul had to correct the false teaching on Jesus’ second coming which had caused fear and misunderstanding. Paul knows that some will be wondering how to know the difference between truth and falsehood. How are they to keep themselves from falling prey to false teaching? (vv. 19-21, 27;  Jn. 16:12-15)

8. Paul’s command to “reject every kind of evil” (v. 22) is a command every believer must heed; it points to rejecting all of Satan’s schemes as well as our own sinful desires. Choose from the verses below to find some ways we can cling to what is good and reject what is evil.

Rom. 12:2

Rom. 16:17-19

Eph. 6:11-12, 18

Phil. 3:17

Titus 2:11-14

### THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PROPHECY

Prophecy is speaking the wisdom of God as inspired by the Holy Spirit, and prophets “were the human channels through whom the Spirit made known His will and purpose for His people. The prophetic revelation might at times concern the future (Acts 11:28), but not necessarily so. The prophetic message generally was in the nature of instruction and guidance concerning the present (Acts 13:2).”<sup>1</sup>

## PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH

9. Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonians in verses 23-24 echoes Jesus’ prayer for believers in John 17:11, 15-17 (see the meditation on page 1).
  - a. How have you seen God sanctify you and grow your faith?

### SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification is the profound and life-changing process of being made holy, in which the Lord draws his children closer and closer to himself in love. As the Holy Spirit opens our hearts, minds and spirits to know and love God more and more deeply, we grow in faith and understanding. As we grow, he shows us where we need to change, and then works within us to bring that change.

- b. Where in your spirit, soul, or body (v. 23b) do you feel the need of God's sanctifying power to change you? Paul confidently assures the Thessalonians – and us – that “the one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (v. 24).

## PAUSE TO WORSHIP

*Re-read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28. 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.”<sup>2</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), 245.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-steps-to-meditating-on-your-bible/>