

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

MEDITATE: *2 Thessalonians 1:1-12.*

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

“It is not mere reading, but meditation... which extracts the sweetness and the power out of Scripture.”

—James Stalker, Scottish preacher of late 19th century

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 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12.*

1. The church in Thessalonica is suffering for their faith. Look at the two verses with which Paul begins his letter to these believers. If 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2 were the only morsel of Scripture you had, what encouragement would you draw from it?


In God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 1)

This may seem like a throw-away phrase but think of it in terms of a baby in the womb. All of a child's life, security, sustenance, and identity is drawn from the mother; there is no life apart from her. As believers, we are like that child but we are IN God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! (See Ephesians 1 and 2 for more of our benefits in and with Jesus.)

2. Paul often begins his letters with thanksgiving.
 - a. For what is he thankful in this letter? (v. 3)

 - b. Why does he direct his thanksgiving to God? (v. 11; 1 Thess. 3:12; Phil. 2:12-13)

3. Paul is impressed by the Thessalonians' perseverance and faith (vv. 3-4).
 - a. What have they been experiencing that makes these qualities noteworthy? (vv. 4-6)

 - b. Take a moment to imagine the Thessalonians' faith and perseverance as they were "feeling the power [and abuse] of other men."¹ What do you think this reveals about the Thessalonians? ( * Ps. 27; 1 Thess. 5:4-11)


All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. (v. 5)


"The verb [used here] means not 'to make worthy', or 'to be worthy' but 'to declare worthy' or 'to count worthy'...the apostle is excluding human merit even in a section where he is drawing attention to a noteworthy piece of endurance, and is emphasizing that attainment to the kingdom is not the result of human endeavour at all, but of the grace of God."²

4. In verses 6-9 "God's action is not one of taking vengeance but of upholding justice. God cannot be accused of acting unjustly or ungraciously towards [those who attack his people]."³
 - a. What consequences will the persecutors face when Jesus returns?

***Everlasting destruction* (v. 9)**

Destruction in this verse means "complete ruin. It is the loss of all that makes life worth living. Coupled with the adjective *eternal* ['everlasting'] it is the opposite of eternal life....exclusion from the presence (literally 'face') of God."⁴

- b. Why will they receive these consequences? (v. 8;  Acts 19:8-10)

- c. Perhaps when you read these verses, you were frightened or felt an urgency for those in your life who do not know God or obey the gospel. Take time to pray for them specifically.
5. What is there to look forward to at Jesus' return? (vv. 5, 7, 10;  1 Jn. 3:2)
6. In his previous letter Paul had written to the Thessalonians about Jesus' return. Now in this second letter, he compresses several aspects of the end times into a few verses. What do they reveal about Jesus? (vv. 5-10)
- Glorified in his holy people*** (v. 10)
Jesus "will be glorified in (not merely among) [his people]; that is, they will reflect his light, his attributes....Every vestige of sin will have been banished from their soul. They will mirror forth his image and walk in the light of his countenance (Ps. 89:15-17). In this he will rejoice....And in this each of the redeemed, seeing the reflection of Christ's image in all the other redeemed, will rejoice.⁵
7. It is interesting to see how Paul prayed for the Thessalonians in light of Jesus' coming. What strikes you about his prayer? (vv. 11-12; Perhaps you would like to incorporate his perspective in your prayers for others.)

**Below is the Phillips translation of 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 12.
Meditate on the future glory we will see and participate in.**

"But to those whom he has made holy his coming will mean splendour unimaginable. It will be a breath-taking wonder to all who believe....We pray that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may become more glorious through you, and that you may share something of his glory -- all through the grace of our God and Jesus Christ the Lord."

Why not enjoy wondering at and glorifying the Lord in your life now!

8. Look back at your answer to question 1. What more would you add now that you have completed this lesson?

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12. 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.”⁶

- ❖ 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), 119.

² Morris, 116.

³ Marshall, I. Howard, “2 Thessalonians” in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. G. J. Wenham et al., 21st Century Edition (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 1287.

⁴ Morris, 199.

⁵ Hendriksen, William, *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 161.

⁶ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-steps-to-meditating-on-your-bible/>