

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

MEDITATE: 2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:5.

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


Jesus, I am resting, resting
in the joy of what thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
of thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon thee,
as thy beauty fills my soul,
for by thy transforming power,
thou hast made me whole.

Jesus, I am resting, resting,
in the joy of what thou art;
I am finding out the greatness
of thy loving heart.

— From *Jesus, I Am Resting, Resting*
by Jean Sophia Piggot

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

DIG IN: 2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:5.

1. This week's passage begins with a simple word – “but” – indicating a contrast between what Paul has just said in 2:8-12 and his upcoming remarks. Having reflected on the destiny of those who refuse to believe, Paul is filled with gratitude for the Thessalonian believers whom God has chosen as “firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (2:13). Through what means are God's chosen people saved from condemnation (2:12)? (2:13;  Eph. 1:13-14)

FIRSTFRUITS

The original Greek word translated here as “firstfruits” (v. 13) has also been translated in many versions of the Bible to read “from the beginning”: “But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because *from the beginning* God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth” (NIV 1986, emphasis added).¹ “Other New Testament occurrences [of this word] point us back to the beginning of all things (e.g. Mt. xix. 4; 1 Jn. ii.13), and the idea of an election which took place before the world is familiar in the Pauline writings (cf. Eph. i. 4).”² We were not an afterthought but have been on God's heart from before the beginning of time!

2. While God chose “before the creation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) those who will be saved, how does he then “call” (2:14a) his chosen ones to faith in the present day? (2:14a; Rom. 1:16, 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:17-25)

In your own words, what is the gospel message?

3. What does Paul say is the ultimate purpose of God’s call? (2:14b; see also Rom. 8:14-17, 28-30)

4. Considering all that Paul has said thus far in chapter 2, why do you think it is so important for his readers to therefore “stand firm and hold fast to the teachings” (2:15) they have received from Paul and his associates?

What makes it possible for these believers to “stand firm and hold fast” in the face of deception and wickedness? (2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 6:10-18; Col. 2:6-8)

“God chose you... to be saved... that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (vv. 13-14)

Commentator Edmond Hiebert writes, “This salvation, grounded in the divine choice in the eternal past and initiated in present personal experience through the call of the gospel, looks forward to a glorious culmination, ‘to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ ... ‘Glory’ is the splendor and honor which now belong to our Lord as exalted at the right hand of God. That glory will be shared with His saints at His return (1:10-12). In 1 Thessalonians 2:12 Paul told the Thessalonians that God was calling them ‘into his own kingdom and glory,’ while here he associates that future glory with Christ. This ascription of glory to Christ, which Isaiah 48:11 declares Jehovah will not share with another, is clear testimony to Paul’s belief in the deity of Christ. The full confessional title ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’ stresses the character of the one whose glory they will share.”³

5. What does Paul affirm about how God relates to believers? (2:16)

6. What does he ask of God on their behalf? (2:17)

7. In 3:1-5, Paul, the great apostle and the Thessalonians' spiritual father, does two things: he asks these new believers to pray for him and his fellow workers, and he points them once again to Christ and his faithfulness. How are these things encouraging?

8. Reread this week's passage and write down every mention of the works and character of God that you find.

How do these offer us "eternal encouragement and good hope" (2:16) that we in turn can share with others?

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read 2 Thessalonians 2:13—3:5. 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 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

- ❖ In what ways do I see Jesus more clearly through this passage?

- ❖ You've spent some time meditating on this week's passage and looking more closely at the first two verses. Now pause to consider that God in his infinite wisdom and love has also called you, believer, to "share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2:14b). As you think about this, what is your response?

- ❖ 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

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² Morris, Leon, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 136.

³ Hiebert, D. Edmond, *The Thessalonian Epistles: A Call to Readiness* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), 325.

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