

## WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

**MEDITATE:** *Ephesians 4:1-16.*

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**

“In all the diversity of character, creed, language or station in life, Christians are to prove that love has made them members of one body and of one another, and has taught them each to forget and to sacrifice self for the sake of the other... It is the test of their love to God, whom they cannot see... [and] the link between love to God alone and to people in general.”<sup>1</sup>

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

**DIG IN:** *Read Ephesians 4:1-16.*

1. In chapter 4, Paul builds on the theme of a vital, growing, unified church. In Ephesians 4:1 he urges the church to “live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”
  - a. What is the “calling” believers have received? (Eph. 1:11-12, 18a; You may wish to review chapters 2 and 3 as well.)
  - b. How do the five attitudes listed in verses 2-3 contribute to a life worthy of this calling?

2. No matter the era or culture in which we live, Christians are united to each other by a common faith and our spiritual union with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. The church worldwide is grounded in seven foundational truths. How does each of these encourage “the unity of the Spirit” (v. 3)?
- One Body (Eph. 1:22-23)

One Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13)

One Hope (Eph. 1:9-10, 13b-14, 18)

One Lord (Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Cor. 8:6)

One Faith (Jude 3, 20)

#### **FAITH**

“Faith” can be used in a couple of ways: first, “our experience of faith: there is no salvation apart from faith” or second, “the content of faith or what we believe, the gospel.”<sup>2</sup>

One Baptism (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27-28)

#### **BAPTISM**

Paul is not concerned here with modes of baptism, but with what baptism signifies, namely, identification with Christ.”<sup>3</sup> “The sacrament is therefore a sacrament of unity.”<sup>4</sup>

One God and Father of All (Eph. 3:14-15; 1 Cor. 8:6)

3. In verse 7 “grace” refers to “the privilege of a special calling in the service of God.”<sup>5</sup>
- a. What point do you think Paul is making in verse 7?

- b. Verse 10 describes the Risen One who has given gifts to his people. This description of Christ echoes the description in Ephesians 1:19-22. What in these descriptions offers extra encouragement as we use our gifts in a life of service to others?

Christ "descended to the lower earthly regions" (v. 9) in his incarnation (Jn. 1:14) and "he ascended on high" (v. 8) after his resurrection when he returned to heaven to the Father (Acts 1:11; Jn. 14:12).

4. Christ apportions special giftings to those who lead and equip the church. How have you seen these gifts of leadership in the church prepare God's people for "works of service" (v. 12)?
5. How is the body of Christ "built up" (v. 12)? (vv. 12, 16)
6. Have you had the blessing of serving/encouraging/building up someone in the faith recently? Or is there someone who comes to mind who has taught or encouraged you in a way that has been instrumental in your growth of faith? If so, feel free to share and encourage others as well.
7. What is God's ultimate goal for the church? (v. 13)
- we all \_\_\_\_\_
- in the \_\_\_\_\_
- and in the \_\_\_\_\_
- and become \_\_\_\_\_
- attaining to the \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Paul sounds a warning for those churches that fail to mature. What does this make them vulnerable to? (v. 14)
9. In contrast, what will characterize and protect a mature church? (vv. 15-16)

**DIGGING DEEPER**

"Attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (v. 13) is beautifully expressed in 2 Peter 1:3-11. Pick out some descriptions from this passage that particularly speak to your heart and spirit and your desires for yourself.

## PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read Ephesians 4:1-16. 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>6</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.

<sup>1</sup> Murray, Andrew, *Abiding in Christ* (Bethany House: Minneapolis, 2003), 159.

<sup>2</sup> Boice, James Montgomery, *Ephesians: an Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 131.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Foulkes, Francis, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 113.

<sup>5</sup> Foulkes, 114.

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