

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

MEDITATE: *Ephesians 5:1-20*

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?

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

DIG IN: *Read Ephesians 5:1-20.*

1. This week's passage contains many exhortations about how believers are to live the Christian life.
 - a. What commands serve as an umbrella for all the others? (vv. 1-2a)
 - b. What identity has God given us that we should live this way? (v. 1)
 - c. What is the foundation for living this kind of life? (v. 2; 1 Jn. 3:16; 4:7-12)

MEDITATE

"Some believers think change happens through outward improvement—behaving more and more in accord with some moral norm (the biblical law, or the commands of Jesus, or conscience, or whatever). Others think change happens mainly through intellectual addition—understanding doctrine with greater breadth and precision. Others think it comes centrally through felt experience—sensory increase as we worship God.

"My argument is that all three of these elements are included in healthy Christian development..., but real growth transcends them all. Growing in Christ is not centrally improving or adding or experiencing but *deepening*. Implicit in the notion of deepening is that you already have what you need. Christian growth is bringing what you do and say and even feel into line with what, in fact, you already are."

—Dane C. Ortlund, *Deeper: Real Change for Real Sinners*

2. In last week’s passage, Paul exhorted the Ephesians to “put off your old self” and “put on the new self” (4:22, 24). This passage continues that teaching. Go back through this week’s passage and fill in the table below with characteristics of the old and new life. (Where you can, put opposing pairs of characteristics next to each other.)

The Old Life—Without Christ	The New Life—In Christ


3. Using your own words, sum up the kind of life described in each column.
The Old Life—Without Christ:

The New Life—In Christ:

4. Paul is writing to believers, people who have already been “included in Christ when [they] heard the message of truth” and were “marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance” (Eph. 1:13–14). Why do you think he feels the need to tell them all this?
5. Our passage this week has a lot to say about how we speak. Read what Jesus says in Matthew 12:34–37 about the importance of the words we speak. Go back through the table above and mark every item that has to do with words or speaking. You may want to consider which of these are especially challenging for you.
6. Paul gives multiple reasons why believers should steer clear of some things and put others into practice. What reasons can you find in this passage?

7. Paul twice links sexual immorality and impurity with greed (vv. 3, 5). Why do you think these things are connected in his mind?

In verse 5, he goes further and refers to those who are “immoral, impure or greedy” as idolaters. How are sexual immorality, impurity, and greed forms of idolatry?

8. How does Paul sum up the complete transformation that has taken place in the Ephesian believers? (Do you believe this about yourself?) (v. 8)
9. Verses 10 and 17 contain a different kind of exhortation: “find out [ESV: discern] what pleases the Lord” and “understand what the Lord’s will is.” What does it look like to do these things? How do we set about it? (You may wish to consider the following verses: Eph. 1:17; Col. 1:9-12; 3:16a; Jas.1:5;  Rom.12:2.)

“Such things” in verse 6 refers back to sexual immorality, impurity, and greed.¹ Paul warns his readers against those who would deceive them about sin; “there were then, as there always are, those who made light of sin, and scoffed at the thought of its consequences.”²

IDOLATER

“A worshipper [literally or figuratively] of false gods.”³

10. In what area(s) or way(s) do you think you need to be more “careful... how you live” (v. 15) and “mak[e] the most of every opportunity” (v. 16)? (You may want to think about your life generally, or you may wish to focus your attention on the table above.)
11. Our passage this week is bookended by reminders that we are God’s “dearly loved children” (v. 1) and that God is our Father (v. 20). How do these reminders help you view our passage differently?

The word translated “find out” (NIV) or “discern” (ESV) (v. 10) was “used of examining metals in order to detect impurities and prove genuineness. In this way it comes to mean discernment, the ability to evaluate.”⁴ To “understand” (v. 17) “is to give the mind to something so as to get hold of it. It implies that an effort has to be made: so it has the sense of ‘try to grasp.’”⁵ In other words, “[Paul’s] words imply that in living the Christian life we need to *think* about what we are doing.”⁶

Ephesians 4 and 5 “are a stirring summons to the unity and purity of the church; but they are more than that. Their theme is the integration of Christian experience (what we are), Christian theology (what we believe) and Christian ethics (how we behave). They emphasize that being, thought and action belong together and must never be separated. For what we are governs how we think, and how we think determines how we act.... It is only when we have grasped clearly who we are in Christ, that the desire will grow within us to live a life that is worthy of our calling.”⁷

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read Ephesians 5:1-20. 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.”⁸

- ❖ 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 Wood, A. Skevington, “Ephesians” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 69.

² Foulkes, Francis, *The Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries ed. R. V. G. Tasker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 143.

³ Strong’s 1496 at <https://biblehub.com/greek/1496.htm>

⁴ Ferguson, Sinclair, *Let’s Study Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2005), 133.

⁵ Wood, 71–72.

⁶ Ferguson, 138.

⁷ Stott, John R. W., *The Message of Ephesians: God’s New Society*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: IVP, 1979), 193–94.

⁸ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-steps-to-meditating-on-your-bible/>