

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

MEDITATE: *Ephesians 2:11-22*

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?

MEDITATE

"Meditation is obviously not an end in itself. There is spiritual and even aesthetic delight for the believer in the considering of God's self-revelation to mankind. Yet she or he does not meditate in order to get mental pleasure; when it occurs it is a by-product thankfully received. Meditating is in order to know the will of God and gain the desire and determination to obey it. It is a means to an end and the end is the glorifying of God. The end or purpose ought not to be (in the first place) the creation or support of any human scheme—however good, but the knowing of God and being in communion and in tune with him."¹

— Peter Toon

DIG IN: *Read Ephesians 2:11-22.*

1. This passage is about reconciliation between those who were enemies—the healing of relationships that, humanly speaking, were beyond repair. What two relationships does this passage address?

v. 11

v. 16; 2:1–5

2. What did circumcision signify for the Jews? (Gen. 17:7–14)

3. Paul notes that this circumcision “is done in the body by human hands” (v. 11). In making this note, what truth does Paul seem to be conveying about circumcision? (Deut. 30:6; Rom. 2:28–29; Col. 2:11–13)
4. This week’s passage begins by describing the desperate situation Paul’s Gentile readers were in before they were saved. Using Paul’s descriptions, fill in the table below to examine the differences between Gentiles and Jews before Jesus came. (In some cases you will need to make inferences.)

Gentiles	Jews
v. 11	v. 11
v. 12	v. 12 (implied)
vv. 13, 17	v. 17

5. What does Paul call the barrier between Jews and Gentiles? (v. 14)

THE BARRIER

The image of the wall calls to mind the physical barrier that kept Gentiles from proceeding beyond the outermost court of the temple. The holiest place was the furthest in; next came the court in which only priests were allowed, then the court in which Jewish men were allowed, then the court in which Jewish women were allowed. All of these were on the same level; “from this level one descended five steps to a walled platform, and then on the other side of the wall fourteen more steps to another wall, beyond which was the... Court of the Gentiles.”² Posted on the wall were signs with warnings like this: “No foreigner may enter within the barrier... round the temple. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death” (Paul understood firsthand the seriousness of this warning—see Acts 21:27–31).³ The image of the wall “also recalls the common rabbinic idea of the law as a fence dividing the Jews by their observance of it from all other races and thus arousing hostility.”⁴ A letter from around 100 BC, in speaking of the law, says that Moses “surrounded us with unbroken palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter, being thus kept pure in body and soul... worshipping the one almighty God.”⁵

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read Ephesians 2:11-22. 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.”⁷

- ❖ 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 Toon, Peter, *Meditating as a Christian: Waiting upon God* (London: HarperCollins, 1991), 42.

² Stott, John R. W., *The Message of Ephesians: God’s New Society*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979), 91.

³ Stott, 92.

⁴ 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), 40.

⁵ Turner, Max, “Ephesians” in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. G. J. Wenham et al., 21st Century Edition ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 1231.

⁶ Stott, 104.

⁷ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/5-steps-to-meditating-on-your-bible/>