

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT AND HOPE

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

MEDITATE: *Ephesians 3:1-13*

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

“As you read, pause frequently to meditate on the meaning of what you are reading. Absorb the Word into your system by dwelling on it, pondering it, going over it again and again in your mind, considering it from many different angles, until it becomes part of you.”

—Nancy Leigh DeMoss

BACKGROUND: Paul is writing to the Ephesians from a Roman prison in approximately A.D. 62. To learn how his imprisonment came about, read Acts 21-22.

DIG IN: *Read Ephesians 3:1-13.*

1. Paul is a “prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles” (v. 1). How does this benefit the Gentiles? (Consider v. 13; Phil. 1:12-14; 2 Tim. 2:8-10.)

Paul, “the prisoner of Christ Jesus” (v. 1)

Paul “claimed to be Christ Jesus’ man imprisoned (that is what is meant by *prisoner of Christ Jesus*, not that Jesus is the jailer!).”¹ “Paul did not think himself a prisoner of the Roman Caesar, awaiting the judgment of Nero. No, he saw himself as a prisoner of his Lord, accountable only to the judgment of God. ... Paul was content to be in prison if it served Christ. He was content to live free if it served Christ. He was content to die if it served Christ. He was the prisoner of Jesus Christ.”²

2. The apostle Paul has been appointed to be an “administrat[or] of God’s grace” (v. 2) and entrusted with an age-old mystery, “the secret things of God” (1 Cor. 4:1).
- a. How did he acquire this responsibility? (vv. 2-5; Rom. 15:15-16; Gal. 1:11-12)
- b. How has he been enabled to do this work? (1 Cor. 2:1-10)

3. Use verse 6 to find the mystery with which Paul has been entrusted. Fill in the blanks below.

“This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are _____ with Israel,
 _____ of one body, and
 _____ in the promise in
 Christ Jesus.”

“The mystery of Christ... was not made known to people in other generations” (vv. 4-5)

Though it is clear that God promised to bless “all peoples on earth” through Abraham (Gen. 12:3) – salvation for Jews and Gentiles alike – “the greatest men of God in the Old Testament did not understand this mystery.”³ It was “for ages past... kept hidden in God, who created all things” (v. 9).

4. The three-fold repetition of the word “together” (v. 6) places great emphasis on this “radical”⁴ new relationship in Christ between Jews and Gentiles. What does Paul mean by...
 ...heirs together with Israel? (Eph. 1:11-14; Gal. 3:26-29; Titus 3:7)

...members together of one body? (Eph. 1:22-23; 2:14-16; 1 Cor. 12:12-27)

...sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus? (Gal. 3:14, 21-22, 29)

5. These shared benefits, extended to Jews and Gentiles alike, formed “one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace” (Eph. 2:15). How have you seen the gospel bring unity among diverse believers in the church today?

The mystery is...

“the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ. It is this double union, with Christ and with each other, which is the substance of the ‘mystery’.”⁵

6. Paul began by calling himself a prisoner of Christ and now he describes himself as a servant of the gospel and as “less than the least of all the Lord’s people” (v. 8) – yet he has been given the privilege of “preach[ing] to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ” (v. 8). Can you relate to both Paul’s humility and the privilege he has been given? Explain.

7. What was the intent of God’s mystery which is now being revealed? (vv. 10-11)

The “Manifold Wisdom of God” on Display (v. 10)

“In union with other sinners made perfect, and as members of one body, we who come from every tribe and nation, people and personality, are on display as a church before the heavenly hosts as a testimony to the wisdom of God, the Creator. The heavenly hosts are to look at those of us in the church with all of our sin, differing personalities, cultural prejudices, and color differences and say, ‘How did God do that?! How did he get such difficult and disagreeable creatures together in one body to praise him? The manifold wisdom of the Creator God really is great!’ Just as Paul’s sin makes the grace of God more apparent, the uniting of sinners in the body of Christ makes the grace of God more brilliant – even to the hosts of heaven. By our unity in Christ’s body, the church, we are preaching to the angels about the power, wisdom, and glory of the God who made us.”⁶

8. What do you think Paul means when he says, “In [Christ] and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (v. 12, emphasis added)? (You may wish to consider Hebrews 10:19-22.)

PAUSE TO WORSHIP

Re-read Ephesians 3:1-13. 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.

¹ Turner, Max, “Ephesians” in *New Bible Commentary*, ed. G. J. Wenham et al., 21st Century Edition ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 1233.

² Stedman, Ray C., *Our Riches in Christ: Discovering the Believer’s Inheritance in Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1998), 129.

³ Stedman, 133.

⁴ Boice, James Montgomery, *Ephesians: an Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 96.

⁵ R. E. Brown quoted in O’Brien, Peter T., *The Letter to the Ephesians*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 236.

⁶ Chapell, Bryan, *Ephesians*, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg: P & R Publishing, 2001), 144-145.

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