



Meeting With God Bible Reading Notes

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Week 37: Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians, 1 (A detailed study)

Young Christians usually need a fair amount of teaching and encouragement to grow in their faith. But due to circumstances beyond his control Paul was unable to spend very long with this infant church. (You can read the account of its beginnings in Acts 17:1-10.) Imagine his feelings when trouble forced him to depart, leaving the church to face continuing opposition! These letters, written quite soon after he had left Thessalonica, show us something of the relationship between Paul and the church - they are letters of encouragement to young Christians, and advice on living the Christian life.

Day 1. Thank God!

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul starts his letter by recounting the reasons he has to be thankful for the church in Thessalonica.

Note: Verse 7. Thessalonica was the chief city of Macedonia, the northern part of modern Greece, and Achaia was the southern part.

1. What does he say about their initial response to the gospel? Try and put it in modern terms - what might it mean for your non-Christian friends to respond to God in a similar way?

How ought you to be praying for your non-Christian friends? What specific problems would they face in becoming Christians? Stop and pray for them now.

2. What can you find out from this passage about the quality of the lives of the Thessalonian Christians?
3. How does your life match up to theirs? How far is it marked by the sort of commitment to God and his work suggested by Paul's description in verse 3?

Day 2. Paul at work, 1

1 Thessalonians 2:1-16

Paul's ministry was not always easy. Here he talks about suffering in Philippi, and opposition in Thessalonica. It looks as though people had accused him of preaching for personal gain, as some preachers of other sects had done.

1. What pieces of evidence does Paul give here for his sincere motives?
2. Why did he preach the gospel?
3. What is your attitude to telling others about Jesus? Do you hold back out of fear? If so, can you find anything to help you here? Or do you tell your friends, but for the wrong reasons? Perhaps it gives you 'status' in the eyes of your Christian friends, or a feeling of superiority over non-Christian friends - or perhaps your motives are mixed, some good and some bad.

Pray that God will help you see things from his perspective.

4. Verses 13-16 talk about the persecution the Thessalonian Christians suffered as a result of their faith. How do you think what Paul says here would encourage them to stand firm?

Day 3. Paul at work, 2

1 Thessalonians 2:17 - 3:13

It seems likely that Paul's enemies were also trying to cause trouble by accusing him of neglecting the church in Thessalonica.

1. How would you have defended Paul? Think both about the practical steps Paul took, and about his attitude to the Thessalonian Christians.
2. What picture of the Thessalonian church do you get from these verses? Make a list of their strong and weak points. (If you have time, look back through the previous two studies to see what else you've learnt about this church.)

Think about Paul's prayer in verses 12-13. What might it mean for your church if this prayer were answered? What would you expect to change? How would it affect you personally? Pray for your church along these lines.

Day 4. Practical Christianity

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

1. Make a list of all the reasons you can find in the passage for holy living.
2. Now think of particular temptations you find difficult to cope with. Is there anything in your list which will help? If you need encouragement, turn to God's promise in Hebrews 2:18 and ask him to fulfil it in your life.

The issues Paul raises here were probably the most significant problems for the church in Thessalonica - sexual immorality was an accepted way of life for the Greeks, and they despised manual work.

3. To what extent are these significant problems for us? How might Paul's comments apply to today's permissiveness?
4. Can you think of any other temptations which are major hindrances to

Christians wanting to live to please God today? Are these among the temptations you identified as difficult to cope with? If not, to what extent do they apply to you?

Day 5. The Lord's return

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - 5:11

It seems that the Thessalonian church had taken Paul's teaching on the Lord's return very much to heart, but were confused when some of them died before it happened, and thought they might have missed out on salvation.

1. When a Christian has died what encouragements can you find here for relatives and friends?
2. What reasons does Paul give for that encouragement?
3. What practical affect should the Lord's return have on Christians living in this world?
4. Do you let the expectation of the Lord's return affect your life? What differences does it make to the way you live? Is there anything you would do differently if you thought it would happen today?

An ancient prayer: *O Lord our God, make us watchful and keep us faithful as we await the coming of your Son our Lord; that when he shall appear he may find us not sleeping in sin but active in his service and joyful in his praise, for the glory of your holy name. Amen.*

Adapted from Gelasian Collect from Frank Colquhoun, *Contemporary Parish Prayers* (Hodder & Stoughton) and David Silk, *Prayers for use at the Alternative Services* (Mowbray).

Weekend

1. Spend some time looking back over what you have learnt from the church at Thessalonica so far - it would be useful to read the letter again, and see if anything strikes you that you missed first time through.

While it is true that many of the important Pauline doctrines are absent, it is also true that the letter reveals to us something of Paul's pastoral zeal and his intense interest in the spiritual well-being of his converts. Here we catch a glimpse of Paul the man in a way we do not always do when he is taken up with questions of more profound theological significance.

Leon Morris, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (IVP).

2. If you have time, read through 2 Thessalonians, in preparation for next week's studies.
3. If you haven't already done so, you might find it interesting to read the account of how the church in Thessalonica was started, in Acts 17:1-10.