

Prayer

Forgive us when we wander from Your presence, Almighty God. Your path is straight and true, and we are always seeking to explore other options. Thank You for Your great patience with us, and remind us of the cost Jesus paid because of the sins of all humanity. Reign us in sharply where necessary, gracious Lord, remind us of our faults and continue Your gracious work of renewal in our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Seas

Pray for those who risk their lives at sea in hazardous conditions to drill for oil or work on ships, civil and military, and have to be away from home for long periods of time.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks to God for the liberties you enjoy
- Pray for those who repair and renew our roads and bridges
- Pray for those responsible for foreign affairs in your country

Meditation

We call upon You, Living Lord, Saviour and friend of all:

Heal us from the sicknesses of our disturbed world
Which flood our souls with destruction; through

Swearing and abusive use of language;
Degrading images of women and pornography;
Glamorised perversions of love on television;
The social lottery of care and health provision;
Financial pressures to spend, spend, spend;
Violence shown as the way to get what you want.

Show us the light of Jesus which leads us through darkness,
And brings us even now to that place of peace,
Which is 'faith, hope and love'.

Bible Study - 2 Timothy 1:8-14

⁸ Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but bear your suffering for the gospel with me, by the power of God, ⁹ who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not because of what we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, ¹⁰ and has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who has nullified death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel. ¹¹ I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of this Gospel, ¹² and this is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what He has entrusted to me, until that day. ¹³ Follow the pattern of sound teaching you have heard from me, with faith and

love in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴ Guard the good things entrusted to your care, with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

Review

There is a warm and personal tone to these words of Paul to Timothy, and we see in them something of Paul's humanity as he shares his personal feelings with his younger protégé. Sometimes, we may meet the great preachers or ministers of God's people who we have heard preach or speak, and discover that their whole characters and speech are filled with the same godly words and phrases they use in preaching. Also, the Gospel is so much a part of their lives that any conversations we have with them are never far from the words of scripture. The passage we have read today seems to reflect this characteristic in Paul, as he sought to encourage Timothy in the midst of his personal difficulties, and as he pointed out that his calling and teaching meant that it was inevitable that he should suffer.

Paul could have said this in many ways, but what he actually said virtually bubbles with the Gospel; so much so, that Paul all but preaches his encouragement to Timothy. Paul knew that Timothy was in difficulty and needed some firm, wise and godly guidance (see study on 1 Tim 1:1-7), but it was also Paul's nature to use scripture and the Gospel as the starting point of all his advice and guidance; and his example to us in this is superb.

The result of all this is an amazing text that talks about the connection between the Gospel and suffering with great spiritual power. Twice, Paul says with towering confidence, 'Do not be ashamed ...' (1:8,12). Paul had encouraged Timothy to be bold (1:7), so he directly tackled the spiritual root of timidity within him and identified Timothy's sense of shame as the root of his problems. If we read through the whole of chapter 1 of this letter, it seems obvious that Timothy, for whatever reason, felt a failure and was thus ashamed of his inability to attain to the standards Paul had set him in his first letter. Paul would have none of this, however. His stance was that God had chosen the young man and they were both called to preach the most important thing in the world, the Gospel. Moreover, the power of God was sufficient for all of his and Timothy's needs. The heart of his message to Timothy was that suffering was the pathway to God's salvation (1:10), the task of preaching and teaching the Gospel remained paramount (1:11,12), and God would not abandon what he had 'entrusted' to himself or to Timothy (1:12,14).

It is not hard for us to receive personal spiritual guidance from these words of Paul, because they have a spiritual power that stretches far beyond their original setting and what Paul wanted to say to Timothy. Paul speaks to all Christians who are conscious of the tasks God has given them to do because of their faith. He explains that suffering is an inevitable path by which we will mature in our calling; and this is not because God is testing His people all the time, but because there is always conflict between the Gospel we are called to uphold (through what the Lord has given us to do), and the world in which we live. This suffering can take almost any form due to the opposition of the world, but the Lord has been there before us on the Cross and has complete victory and authority over death. Our lives are utterly in His hands. Paul was a teacher, apostle and preacher and he suffered as such (1:11). You or I may be a door-keeper in God's house, and we will still suffer just as Paul and Timothy did, because the world despises us or the enemy attacks us. Nevertheless, the outcome of our efforts is already known; we have the victory in Christ, so why should we be ashamed or timid!

The most wonderful and mysterious part of this text comes in verses 12 to 14, where Paul speaks about what God has 'entrusted to us'. Some versions of the Bible translate in verse 12 'what He has entrusted to me' and others 'what I have entrusted to Him'; this is because the Greek original is unclear. I prefer the former because the whole passage is about how God gives us tasks to do in His kingdom and supports us throughout our worldly suffering

so that these tasks are fulfilled. The words; 'I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am convinced that he is able to guard what He has entrusted to me, until that day' have been a source of support and substantial spiritual encouragement to generations of Christians, and will remain so for many years, until He comes in glory!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What are the gifts or tasks God has given you and 'entrusted to your care'?
2. Discuss this passage in your group and ask each member of the group what they find most encouraging from the text.
3. What, in your mind, is 'sound teaching' and how do you define it or know it when you hear it?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I find it immensely encouraging that Paul speaks to Timothy in this way. There are times when Paul sounds very upset and concerned in his letters and sometimes he is quite sharp about those who have not stepped up to the mark and maintained the witness of the Gospel as he believed they should. Here we find a warmer and more daring Paul who has a friendship which is precious to him and he does not yield to more confrontational methods of addressing the issues to hand. We all react differently in different circumstances and to different people!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Write down 'what God has entrusted to your care'. This could be a list of gifts or tasks or work done, or it could be a testimony of God's grace in your life. The options are extensive. Write it down and share it with someone.
- Talk with someone close to you about your attitude towards death. What does death mean to you; are you scared (that is natural) or are you concerned about what happens afterwards? We can help each other greatly by sharing these things.

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, bless my soul that I might offer You the true worship of the sacrifice of my whole life. The world does not understand this, and sometime I do not understand this, but within such commitment lies my eternal destiny, as I seek to do now what I shall one day do in heaven! Praise You and thank You, Lord Jesus. AMEN