

Prayer

Praise You, Lord God; for You are always at work fulfilling Your plan.
Praise You, Lord God; for Your plan is always for our benefit.
Praise You, Lord God; for Your love for us is real and tangible.
Praise You, Lord God; for Jesus has opened up our way to heaven.
Praise You, Lord God; for we need have no fear in Your presence.
Praise You, Lord God; for Your plan is that we should be together in peace.
AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Babies

Pray for parents who are struggling with some of the difficult issues such as birth control and abortion given us by current medical practice. Pray for godly wisdom and guidance.

On-going prayers

- *Pray about the world economic downturn and its driving powers*
- *Give thanks for the joy of a good night's sleep*
- *Pray about magazines and their writers, editors and social influence*

Meditation

When the Lord lifts the soul, we see things afresh;
The world is different in the blessing of peace.

Colours have vibrancy, brightness and depth;
Vision is clearer, and sight is refreshed.

Horizons go further, the world has no bounds;
The sun ministers life and the blessing of warmth.

The spirit is willing, but the flesh is not weak;
For the love of the Saviour unburdens the heart.

Such times are precious but they need not be rare;
When open to Christ and His offer of love.

For our God is found in the world He has made;
And our faith in the Son is the treasure of life.

Bible Study - 2 Timothy 2:1-7

¹ You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; ² and what you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. ³ Bear your share of suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. ⁴ No soldier becomes entangled in civilian affairs; his aim is to please the one who recruited him; ⁵ similarly, an athlete cannot be crowned without competing according to the rules. ⁶ The hard-working farmer should be the first to have a share of the crop. ⁷ Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things.

Review

After Paul's warm yet considered advice at the beginning of his second letter to Timothy, he launched into a series of seven statements of advice. Each verse of our passage today is a small piece of wisdom and counsel, and on the one hand, each of them is plain, and yet each of them contains pictures and suggestions that lead us on to greater spiritual depth. Today, one could make each verse a 'bullet-point' in a presentation, and perhaps even headline the seven pieces of advice:

- Be strong in Christ
- Pass on the faith you have received
- Bear your troubles
- Aim to please God
- Do what the Lord requires
- You will receive your reward
- The Lord will help you understand all things.

Now, you might look at the passage and wonder whether the bullet summary above is a proper reflection of what is said in each verse of the passage, but if you follow what Paul is saying to Timothy then it does make sense. It is important to accept that the specific images and pictures in this passage have no value in themselves except how they illustrate the relationship of the Christian, and in Timothy's case the Christian leader, to the will of God. In this passage we read about those who are faithful and able to teach others, about soldiers who suffer and yet aim to please, about athletes competing in races and farmers receiving their share of the crop. Each one of these pictures is fascinating, but if we dwell on them too long, we will 'take our eyes off the ball' which is the serious intent of the Christian to do God's will.

For example, some do not like the use of military imagery in scripture and gloss over such references, but this ignores the fact that Paul's understandable illustration describes relatively little about soldiers or the army or war. It says a great deal about commitment and single-mindedness. Equally, some have dismissed Paul's occasionally used picture of the athlete running a race (see also 1 Cor 9:24) because they refuse to believe that attaining the crown of life is competitive; but Paul's point is not competition, it is seriousness of intent and purpose. It is also hard to correlate the agricultural idea in verse 6 that those who do the most work get the most benefit, with the teaching of Christ in, for example, the 'Tenants in the vineyard' (Matt 20:1-16). However, Paul is speaking words of reassurance here, not about status or 'earnings'. All this is quite clear from the general context of Paul addressing Timothy to encourage and strengthen him at a time when it seems he felt weak (see 1:6f.)

There is no doubt, however, that once we have stripped away potential misunderstanding, each of these verses is powerful, and deserves far more time and attention than can be given in this brief study. Paul begins by reminding Timothy that whatever he felt, his strength lay in the grace of Christ Jesus (2:1), and this is a 'motto' many of us need to embrace with greater zeal. None of us has a contribution to the Kingdom except by the grace of Christ, and the more we honour Him, the more He can use us. Indeed, the more we reflect upon what has happened to us (2:7), the more we will realise that our importance for the Kingdom lies in our performing the duty of passing on to others ('entrust to faithful people' – 2:2) the Gospel we have first received from others.

We will receive our heavenly reward (2:6) if we faithfully perform this task, and the three-fold advice at the heart of this passage indicates not so much the truth of the Gospel with which we are charged, but the attitudes of heart by which God's evangelistic will is done. Firstly, by accepting and bearing troubles and not imagining that our faith will elevate us to a place where God will protect us from the all world's ills (2:3). Secondly, by doing all in our

power to please the Lord who has saved us; the image of 'pleasing the one who recruited him' (2:4) is a very strange idea if taken as a purely military idea, for a soldier's duty is to do what his commander says. Paul had Christ in mind when he spoke about 'the one who recruits'. Thirdly, the picture of the race in verse 5 is not focussed around the idea of competition, but on engaging in the race 'according to the rules'. This is a salutary word to those who imply that Christianity is a riot of self expressive liberty; the Lord loves to see each of us fulfilled as individuals, but the truth is that we find fulfilment in being obedient to the God who made us. That is the glorious truth of the Gospel.

You can use these seven verses in a number of different ways and there is much more to discover; but they do fit together in this way, and no further exploration should ignore this; 'reflect on this ... for the Lord will give you understanding.' (2:7).

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. What do the words 'be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus' (2:1) mean to you, and how do they make you feel?
2. Would you agree that verse 2 lies at the heart of Paul's advice to Timothy in this memorable seven verse sequence?
3. Discuss how you can use the picture of either the athlete or the soldier to illustrate Christian will and intent today.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The seven-fold structure of this passage came as a complete surprise to me when I read this scripture, and it seems to me to make sense. Scripture was written at a time when people were more well versed in the art of 'rhetoric' than we are today. They were more familiar with these techniques of memorable speech because speaking was the primary means of communication, and today this is not so. It is always helpful when we find a pattern such as this in scripture.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Write down your own 'bullet-point' assessment of each verse and see what else the Lord wishes to teach you through this passage. On the way, compare your analysis with mine above and ask the Lord for wisdom and understanding.
- Pray for all evangelists who seek to pass on the Christian message in whatever ways they are called, individually, privately or publicly. Pray for an earnest enthusiasm for the Gospel in our world today.

Final Prayer

It is wonderful, Lord Jesus, to know that You are willing to speak to us and through us prophetically. Make us worthy to be your servants, immersed in the service of the Kingdom, use us as prophets who convey Your truth to the world and the Church. Empower us for this task, Living Lord Jesus AMEN