

## Prayer

Lord God of happiness and joy, remind our stubborn hearts to rise above the things that occupy our minds, and look with joy upon the people who love and care for us. May we never take them for granted, but inspired by You, may we bless our loved ones with our smiles and happiness; not for anything in particular, but because they love us and in them we see something of Your love, O Lord. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: The gifts of the Spirit

*Pray that all God's people will be generous hearted towards the gifts of the Spirit, both in terms of receiving them personally, and accepting them as God's blessing in others.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for the efforts made in your country to help the economy*
- *Give thanks for the music you listen to and enjoy*
- *Pray for the world as it reacts to the elections in the USA*

## Meditation

Forgive us Lord, we have not understood.

The love You show us is not our personal possession,  
It is Your saving graciousness transcending time and space;  
An indescribable power that moves the heart and soul and will,  
Yet shows itself in One who died upon a Cross, and now,  
It touches our emotions, truly, as nothing else can.

We have felt it in the spirit;  
It is the life of One who lived two thousand years ago  
And reaches out unerringly to exactly where we are;  
Men and women in need of spiritual help and renovation,  
In need of a re-creation of the heart and soul and will.

Your love cannot be turned away;  
It will not go away, despite our infinite capacity to rebel.  
The only way to circumvent this love is to refuse it; to walk away,  
Reject it all by heart and soul and will; but there it stands  
Awaiting our return. True love never goes away.

Forgive our misunderstanding, Lord,  
Turn back my heart and soul and will, by love.

## Bible Study - 2 Timothy 3:14-17

*<sup>14</sup> But as for you, keep close to what you have learned and come to believe, knowing by whom you were taught, <sup>15</sup> and that from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise concerning salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup> All scripture is inspired by God and valuable for teaching, for refuting error, for correcting faults, and for instruction about what*

is right before God, <sup>17</sup> so that Godly people may be fully qualified and equipped to do good deeds.

## Review

This is a text well worth memorising! There are many such texts within the Bible, of course, but this one uniquely speaks about that discipline which requires a Godly man or woman to adhere to the historic and apostolic Christian faith by studying the Scriptures. Paul was asking Timothy of course, to remember the teaching and the nurture the he had given to the young leader, and was appealing to him to stay close to this. Paul believed that he was uniquely placed amongst the apostles to preach the Gospel amongst the Gentiles, and he did not feel that other preachers were so qualified, however charismatic their leadership and preaching skills (see 1 Cor 1:10f.). He had always claimed that he was someone properly trained in the understanding of the Old Testament, simply because he had grown up a Pharisee, so it was natural that he should make reference to the importance of the 'Holy Scriptures' (3:15). He believed that the purpose and objective of the Old Testament was to illuminate God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ (3:15), but also to use as a reference to God's will, a book to be referred to in order to discover God's mind on issues of morality and how to live in a right and just way (3:16,17).

**Scriptures – the Old Testament?** At the time Paul wrote this letter, many people doubt that he could have used the term 'Holy Scriptures' about anything other than the Old Testament. Paul would have certainly upheld the Jewish Scriptures, but there are two things worth pointing out about this that are easily forgotten. Firstly, the 'Old Testament' as Protestants use it today is not the same as the Old Testament scriptures used in Jesus' day. Jewish tradition accepted the Law (the first five books of the Bible) as essential scripture, followed by the 'former prophets' (meaning the books from Joshua to 2 Kings) and then the 'latter prophets' (meaning the three great prophets and the twelve 'minor' prophets, but not including Daniel).

**Scriptures, the New Testament?** It is this rather 'graded' approach to understanding 'Holy Scriptures' which is of interest to us in Paul's writing, because he almost certainly included a number of books such as 'Sirach' and 'Judith' which had been written in relatively recent times (within 200 years of Christ). It is therefore not unreasonable to think that Paul and other leaders in the early church gradually gathered texts which they regarded as specially 'Holy' because they reflected the story of Christ and the life of the early Christian community. Personally, I think this process began far sooner than scholars reckon, with the early acceptance of the sacred nature of the four Gospels, but the rejection of other works such as the 'Didache' (an early Christian teaching manual) and the 'Shepherd of Hermas' (an early Christian story). Incidentally, other Gospels were written, but they were quickly dismissed as lacking authority or not adding to the testimony of the four already collected. Out of all this, I think it is possible Paul was referring to some of the early gatherings of Christian literature which would one day (in the third to the fifth centuries AD) be agreed upon as the New Testament we now know.

**The whole Bible?** In the light of this, we should read Paul's entire advice carefully. Because it suggests that there is a link between the gathered holy writings of the early church and the true 'apostolic' faith to which Paul urged Timothy to stay close (3:14). As a young convert, Timothy must have experienced the excitement of the early church in learning how the great laws and prophecies of the Old Testament spoke of the Saviour, Jesus Christ. He would also have been aware of the passing of letters and written 'Gospels' between churches containing the story of Jesus and also the authoritative teaching of the disciples. Is it possible that Paul was appealing to Timothy to hold on to all of this, for Paul was never shy in confirming that he believed his own teaching was part of

the 'authentic' Gospel! All the Scriptures revealed by God are therefore presented by Paul as worthy of our attention to 'teach, refute error, correct faults and instruct' (3:16).

Paul undoubtedly believed that the Old Testament was God's means for presenting His people with the teaching of the Gospel and for training people in right living. Our theory that Paul may have suggested a wider understanding of 'scripture' remains just a theory, but there had to come a time when the early church became aware of the holy nature of some of the texts it gathered; letters, Gospels and writings. Certainly, what Paul says about 'scripture' in general should apply to the emerging New Testament as well as the Old Testament!

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Have you ever used the Old Testament to help you gain an understanding of the life of Christ? Discuss the O.T. revelation of Christ in your group.
2. Have you ever used the Old Testament to help you understand a moral issue? Discuss your responses with your group.
3. Why do people have Bibles in their homes (as research suggests) but fail to read them today?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*I feel that I am going out on a limb with this study, for I have not come across anyone today who accepts that Paul might have included the New Testament in his thoughts here. However, I regard my own argument as no more shaky than many I have heard which defend all kinds of theories about authorship and dating of various books of the Bible, or the suggested connections between books of the New Testament. The concept of scripture is important, and was already to be found within the earliest of Christians. It is no less important today.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- Write down what you believe 'Holy Scriptures' means to you, and also indicate any events in your life at which the Bible has played an important part.
- Consider your support of charities and other organisations that promote and teach the Bible. You may feel that you should increase your support, or be more involved with the various projects they have for distributing the Bible and making it available to people in all kinds of places around the world.

## Final Prayer

Heavenly Lord, smile on us with the passion, delight and love of a father, and comfort us with the care, attention and tenderness of a mother. May we, Your children, live and work under Your watchful eye, and thus grow to be like You in every way; You who are our Heavenly Lord; our Creator and our Saviour. AMEN