

## Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, by whom all good, joyous and wonderful things happen, please touch my life today. Within the mundane routine of my daily life, show me Your extraordinary power to transform all things for the better; heal me, save me, enthuse me and lead me forward according to the majesty and grace of Your glorious will. I pray this through Jesus Christ my Lord and Saviour; AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Rural life

*We will offer prayers this week for the countryside and the rural communities living there. Pray for communities in your country that have problems because of being remote.*

### On-going prayers

- Pray for people who are struggling to maintain a living
- Pray for the efforts made in your country to help the economy
- Give thanks for the music you listen to and enjoy

## Meditation

Lord Jesus, move my soul to worship You this day;  
Worship which is vibrant in the things of God, and is

Honouring to Almighty God, however I may wish to do it;  
Healing for the spirit, because You are present in power;  
Glorious in every way, to see and to feel and to share;  
Sensitive to the deepest needs of all who seek Your love;  
Fulfilling, because the word of God is taught and learned;  
Forgiving, for Your love is shared in fullest measure;  
Prophetic, and therefore speaking Your faithful word to all;  
Challenging, because it moves the heart and soul and mind;

May I be enabled to make my own contribution  
To the worship of all God's people this day, and be fulfilled.

## Bible Study - 2 Timothy 4:1-5

<sup>1</sup> *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is coming to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom, I solemnly charge you: <sup>2</sup> preach the word, and be ready whether the time appears right or not to correct, rebuke and encourage with the utmost patience in teaching. <sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but they will gather for themselves teachers to suit their own interests, because they have itching ears, <sup>4</sup> and they will turn their ears away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. <sup>5</sup> But as for you, be watchful in all things, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, and carry out your ministry to the full.*

## Review

For centuries, these words have challenged Christians and their leaders to face the call of Christ to spread the good news of the Gospel and stand firm against all manner of heresies and false teaching which constantly knock at the door of the Church. Countless services of commission and ordination services have used this text, and its words have informed the 'syllabus' used to teach leaders and preachers within the church. Placed where they are in Paul's letter to Timothy, they form the final round of Paul's advice to his protégé before he signs off, and concludes the letter with a series of greetings (4:6-22). There is no doubt, however, that this is the summary climax of the letter and the heart of Paul's advice to all preachers and leaders of God's people.

**Paul's solemn 'charge' to Timothy** The passage begins with a command given by Paul to Timothy, urging him to adhere to the advice of the letter. Scripture, as we know, forbids swearing on the Lord's name, so when Paul speaks in solemn terms invoking the name and life of Jesus (4:1), it is about as close as Paul can get to an oath without overstepping the mark. In his charge made 'in the presence of God and Jesus Christ', Paul refers to three aspects of Christ's life and ministry; His coming again in glory, His 'appearance' (meaning his life on earth) and His 'Kingdom'. This is an important summary of Paul's understanding of the Gospel, for as one who did not walk with Jesus as a disciple, his own connection with the Lord was through an 'appearance' to him on the road to Damascus. Secondly, Paul speaks about the 'Kingdom'. This was a major feature of Jesus' teaching, but Paul spoke only rarely about it, and where he did (e.g. Romans 14:17, 1 Cor 15:24,50), it was in reference to our inheritance in heaven through Christ. Thirdly, Paul mentions Christ's 'coming again to judge the living and the dead'; the final revelation of Christ at the end of time. This brief summary of what was important to Paul about Christian faith indicates the importance of people's experience of the risen Christ, their assurance of their place in God's Kingdom and their acceptance of God's authority over all creation.

**Maintaining orthodoxy** It is against these touchstones that Paul told Timothy to be faithful in preaching, in order to 'correct, rebuke and encourage ... with the utmost patience'. This is a challenge to us, in a day when preaching is expected to edify and teach congregations, and when some would deny a preacher the opportunity to preach if they were to publicly correct or rebuke from the pulpit! We may need to find new and appropriate ways of rebuking and correcting today, but scripture clearly indicates that we have a duty to do this in order to maintain the orthodoxy (meaning 'right teaching') of the church and stand against all that tempts people to wander from Christ's teaching and salvation. Such an appeal to 'orthodoxy' does not go down well in some quarters today, but this issue will not go away; principally because of Paul's comments in verse 3, where he caustically describes those who wander from orthodoxy as those who wish 'to suit their own interests', have 'itching ears', and wander after 'myths'. The example of Paul's life is that he broke through many boundaries for the sake of the Gospel, but he knew clearly where the heart of the Gospel lay in the person and work of Christ. In any debates about Christian orthodoxy, we should recall the whole of Paul's life and scriptural teaching. He insisted on orthodoxy, but also fought hard to offer the Gospel to all, without prejudice; and he made our efforts today appear pale by comparison.

**The work of an evangelist** The last verse of this text is a classic text, offering us another 'snapshot' of the work of Christian ministry. Firstly, Paul urged Timothy to remain watchful, possibly on two accounts; firstly for the return of the Lord, and secondly against false teaching, because for Paul the two went hand in hand. Secondly, he repeated the one theme consistent with both the teaching of Jesus and the teaching of Paul, which is that of endurance in suffering. Paul gives no explanations or descriptions of how to stand firm when life is tough. He simply reiterates the clarion call God's people always need to hear; 'endure suffering.' This sounds an awful thing to have to say, but in the context of the

whole sentence, it is but one of the aspects of doing the Lord's work, alongside the tremendous privilege of doing 'the work of an evangelist', and carrying out 'your ministry to the full'.

Lastly, we should note that the work of an evangelist is not an option amongst others, it is the defining ministry of the church, and the one by which the whole church is judged. For example, Timothy's personal call appears to have been to teach (see 1:13f.), but Paul says here that unless his teaching fulfilled the evangelistic call and purpose of the church, then it would not be 'complete'. The touchstone of every ministry in the church is evangelism, and this may be an unpopular message for some, but it is the only way to make sense of the Gospel and the duties of the church within the world.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss whether the different parts of verse 1 reflect an adequate summary understanding of the Gospel.
2. To what extent do God's people today have 'itching ears', prefer to suit themselves, and wander after myths?
3. Is the whole work and life of the church truly related to evangelism? Discuss whether this is in practice true of your church.

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*This passage is quite challenging because the whole of the church has struggled over the years to come to terms with 'orthodoxy'. Over the centuries, people have attempted to write down summary statements of orthodoxy, for example, the Anglican '39 articles' of faith, the Evangelical Alliance 'statement of faith', even my own 'journey of Christian faith' found elsewhere on this website. In the end, I believe that these can only ever be a guide to orthodoxy, which is found through our relationship with Christ, as informed by Scripture and as practised consistently by God's people throughout the ages. I believe that we can make sense of this orthodoxy, but I also know that many others doubt that it can be found.*

### Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Read over this scripture several times, and prayerfully consider whether you think you know what Christian orthodoxy might be, and how you recognise 'right teaching'. If helpful, discuss this with someone else.*
- *Fast and pray for the church, and bring to the Lord its need for consistent preaching and teaching which can help people be confident in their faith and witness.*

## Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, You continually bring new things into my life. You make me secure in myself so that I can be open with others; you give me gifts so that I can enjoy life to the full; You introduce me to people and lead me into new situations. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for Your guidance in all this and more. AMEN