

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

All power belongs to You O God, You who made all things and who will complete all things in Your own time. In Your wisdom, You have saved us through the life and death of Jesus Christ Your Son, and You are here with us now in the power of Your Holy Spirit. Reveal Your will O God, for our lives and for the future of this whole earth, so that we might live our lives in harmony with You, our Saviour and Redeemer. AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

**1. For yourself**

*Pray for spiritual healing. Our spirits can be broken by disbelief, trouble at church, and disenchantment, for example, and these things can have a physical affect. Commit these things to the Lord and seek His healing*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Pray for any of your friends and family who do not know the Lord; pray for their salvation and redemption*

**3. For the church and its work**

*Pray that the Christian church of our age will be healed of its divisions and godlessness*

**4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)**

*Pray for the healing of the nations; pray for godliness to triumph over ungodliness and for good to triumph over evil in every item of today's news*

### Meditation

Teach us, Lord God, what we need to know,  
So that we may be useful in Your Kingdom.

Teach us, Lord God, what we do not want to know,  
So that we may learn Your spiritual disciplines.

Teach us, Lord God, what we ought to know,  
So that we are strong to face the enemy.

Teach us, Lord God, to learn again what once we learned,  
So that we are not presumptuous about our faith.

Teach us, Lord God, what we fear knowing,  
So that we may face the truth and stand tall.

Teach us, Lord God, what we can never fully know,  
So that we embrace the mysteries of grace.

Teach us, Lord God, to maintain what we know,  
So that we never let go of Your love.

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – 1 Timothy 1:12-17

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he counted me as trustworthy and appointed me to his service, <sup>13</sup> even though I was once a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I been given mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief, <sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord has overflowed for me, along with the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (of whom I am the foremost). <sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, as the prime example, Jesus Christ might show complete patience, making me a pattern for those yet to believe in Him for eternal life.

<sup>17</sup> to the King who is eternal, immortal, invisible, and the only God; be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

## Review

This passage is a unique analysis of Paul's own conversion experience, an event used by God to change the world. There are three important places in the New Testament where Paul recounts the full story of his conversion experience; Acts 9:2f., Acts 22:5f., Gal 1:13f. He probably repeated this many times over and it may have been part of what people expected to hear from him, but here in his letter to Timothy, who probably knew it well, he refrains from giving its details and describes its meaning. In so doing, he conveys how important it is for a Christian leader to be open and frank about such things.

Here, Paul contrasts his sinful and unworthy past (1:13) with the trust God has placed in him to preach the Gospel (1:14). Before being a servant of the Lord he was undoubtedly the '*scum of the earth*', one who had persecuted Christians and even participated in proceedings that led to their death (9:1). This was no idle testimony, it was a matter of open record, and one in which Paul did not glory, but he used it to illustrate how far a man could be changed by the power of God's Holy Spirit. He describes himself here as '*a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence*' (1:13), and yet God eventually trusted him with the message of salvation for the Gentiles (1:12), a unique and world changing commission. Everything of Paul's former life was used by God to enable him to communicate to the Gentile world, and Acts of the Apostles (largely from chapter 13 onwards) traces the story of his work.

As the one God used so remarkably, Paul was able to speak about the '*grace of our Lord (which has) overflowed for me ...*' (1:14). This was not a theological remark, but an exclamation of wonder and amazement; how incredible it was that God Almighty had chosen the worst of hypocrites and sinners to represent Him by preaching the Gospel to the whole world! Paul put it all down to the '*faith and love which are in Christ Jesus*' (1:14). However, he went on, and after describing himself as the '*foremost of sinners*' (1:15), he quoted what could well have been a liturgical statement from an early form of church service; '*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*' (1:15). He then proceeded to explain what this meant for one who was a leader of the church.

Paul knew that the characteristics of a leader would be picked up by a church congregation, so he urged the people to see him as a '*prime example*' (1:16) of Christ's patience for a sinner. In this way, he diverted attention from himself to Christ. He could say with conviction borne from personal experience that there was no one for whom the Lord would not wait patiently, both to save and to lead into eternal life. Christ's patience was infinite, and Paul's experience of faith illustrated this; it was a '*pattern for those yet to believe in Him for eternal life*' (1:16).

In a not so subtle way, Paul was making a point to Timothy; he should speak and preach from his own experience, because this would win people for Christ and enable the church to grow. When a person speaks from personal experience, the hearer is under greater obligation to take the matter seriously, and as a rule, people tend to accept the personal testimony of a speaker and sit far more lightly to stories told about others. Paul knew that Timothy had a conversion experience. He was the son of a Jewish mother and a Gentile father (Acts 16:1f.), and he therefore knew what it was like to make a decision for Christ from both a Jewish background and a Gentile background. His testimony could therefore be used by God for greater things!

Testimony to the saving power of Christ lies behind all preaching and the communication of the Gospel, and for this reason, Paul says, '*This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*' (1:15). This is the Gospel and the glory of God, celebrated in the last verse of the passage (1:17), which is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving. God uses the experience of His people to bring the Gospel to others. He was and is '*eternal, immortal, invisible, and unique*' (1:17) and is to be praised for ever more!

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## Discipleship

### Questions for groups

1. How has God used the story of your own journey of faith? Have you told other people about it? How did this happen?
2. Discuss why the Lord overlooks 'ignorance and unbelief' (1:13). What does this mean here in this text?
3. In what ways is the Lord patient with you? Discuss this within your group and see whether this links with your understanding of this passage.

### Discipleship challenges

- *How has the Lord used you to share your personal experience to proclaim the Gospel to others? If not, ask others in your church about their experiences of sharing the Gospel. You may find that this will give you a broader understanding of what it means to do this.*
- *Set aside a day for fasting to ask the Lord to use your own experience of faith for the proclamation of the Gospel. You can never know how the Lord will work through you!*

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## Final Prayer

Your will, Lord God, contains the secrets of the Universe; its origins, its workings and its future. Show me how I am placed within your plan for the world and give me inner peace. May I show confidence in You as my Maker and my Redeemer, to the praise and glory of Your Name. AMEN

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