

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord God, bless us when our lives are hard,
meet us when we do not understand the way,
heal us when our bodies are scarred by illness,
comfort us when our hearts are numbed with pain,
and in the midst of each and every trial and hardship,
become so real to us that we sing Your praises!
AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme for the week: HEALING

1. For yourself

Ask the Lord God to pour His healing balm of love over all the difficult situations you face, so that you do not succumb to the temptation to let troubles overpower you

2. For your friends and family

Ask the Lord God to pour His healing balm of love over difficulties within your family life

3. For the church and its work

Ask the Lord God to pour His healing balm of love over the church and all who profess His name

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

Ask the Lord God to pour His healing balm of love over the troubles of the world, whether close by to your home or far away ...

Meditation

The freshness of each glorious day anticipates God's blessings
He gives His amazing spiritual gifts to all who will receive Him:

The treasure of cherished moments reading the sacred Word;
The riches of quiet times and peace to revitalize the soul;
The opportunity to love again, where yesterday we failed;
The chance to be creative each day in discipleship and faith;
The challenge of sustaining work that it is important for us to do;
The excitement of always knowing that there is more to find in life;
The privilege of following Christ, and seeking to serve the poor;
The freedom to pray with others about our troubles, hopes and joys;
The wonder of resting in God at the end of a working day.

Is it possible for us to give adequate thanks to God for all He's done?
It is; and the more we do it each day the more we will know His peace.

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 1:18-20

¹⁸ I am giving you these instructions, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight, ¹⁹ having faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in

the faith; ²⁰ among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have turned over to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Review

The first chapter of Timothy ends with these words. At first they are easy to follow and heart-warming (1:18,19), but they then raise some difficult issues (1:19,20). Most of us have heard Paul's recommendation to Timothy to 'fight the good fight' (1:18), though people tend to apply it to everything from spiritual warfare to marriage to church meeting! A careful look at this text will show us that Paul had an important and specific point to make by saying this. The more difficult part of the text comes in the second half of the passage, in which Hymenaeus and Alexander were condemned for a bad misjudgement of theirs in the life of the church. Paul says that he has turned them 'over to Satan', which sounds rather extreme to our ears. We must ask whether this is indeed extreme, or whether it is something we need to understand much better.

Paul speaks about prophecies given to Timothy (1:18); both would have been aware of them, and they knew what they said about Timothy's ministry. Such prophecies were considered to be clear guidance for Timothy from God, and would have affected his whole life. Acts of the Apostles records instances of the giving of such prophecies, though not the ones given to Timothy. For example, in the commissioning of missionary work:

'Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers ... while they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said to them, "set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."' (Acts 13:1f.)

This is an example of how words of prophecy were used to give direction to both the work of the Gospel and also the life of individuals. At some point in time, a prophecy of this nature must have been given to Timothy, and given what else we know about Timothy from Paul's letters, we may reasonably guess that they gave Timothy the role of a servant or helper (probably what the Greek calls a 'deacon') to Paul. We can draw this conclusion from Acts 17:14,15, 18:5, 19:22, 20:4. and also from Paul's letters, Rom 16:21, 1 Cor 4:17, 2 Cor 1:1,19, Phil 1:1, 2:19, Col 1:1, 1 Thess 3:2.

Here, Paul urges Timothy to hold on firmly to his prophetic calling by fighting what he calls 'the good fight'. We might not use such a phrase today, but Paul used it back then to describe the amazing pioneering work of establishing churches in the first century AD. Together with Timothy, Paul and his other helpers had lived through some incredible experiences, including much persecution and hardship (e.g. 2 Cor 6:4f.). For them, the growth of the church was indeed a battle of immense proportions, and yet it was worth the fight. The Gospel was more precious to them than anything else. This was a fight for the future of the world and for the Kingdom of God; it was a battle which would be won through doing right, and fighting against the evil powers and authorities, earthly and heavenly, which stood in the way of the Gospel (e.g. Col. 2:8f.).

Paul's message was highlighted by the plight of those who had not stayed the course of the prophetic word and ministry to which they had been called, and this, I believe, is the context for which we must read the last verse (1:20). Paul attacks Hymenaeus and Alexander, because they had rejected 'conscience', the quality of mind by which people discern what is right and wrong. The dangers of this were obvious. Without a godly moral compass, those who proclaimed the Gospel would be shipwrecked on the rocky coastline of pagan immorality. This was all the more tragic because the individuals concerned had all made personal choices that led them to this disaster. We do not know what these were for Hymenaeus and Alexander, but the consequences were that they were compromised by their abandonment of the Gospel.

Paul's famous words, '*I have turned (them) over to Satan*', merely reflect his sad acceptance of the fact of their rebellion against God. In Hebrew, the name 'Satan' means 'the accuser', so Paul's words were like a call for them to face the sharp questions that arose from the godless immorality they had propounded. How else would anyone in the church learn the difference between what was right and wrong, and have the spiritual truth brought to the light? These are hard but necessary words, and we should learn from Paul how to be ruthlessly correct in all matters pertaining to the Gospel; God's Word define us, we do not define the Gospel!

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Is it appropriate for all people who have a call to Christian faith also to have a call to specific service in the cause of the Gospel?

2. What does the word 'conscience' mean to you and how would you define it? What does it mean here?
3. Does the explanation in the study help you understand what Paul means when talking about Hymenaeus and Alexander?

Discipleship challenges

- *Have you known what it is like for other people to prophecy over you about your own role and task in the life of the church? If not, then tell those you love and trust within the church, and ask them to discern God's will for you and for your on ministry.*
- *Put all other discipleship tasks aside and seek to spend time in prayer, until you find that the Lord gives you clear prophetic guidance about your calling within the body of Christ. Nothing is more important for you right now!*

Final Prayer

God of glory and God of grace; do great things among us now. By Your grace, show us how to love each other whatever our background or whatever our church life. Remove from our souls everything that prevents us from fulfilling our true calling and our true potential in You. Praise You, Lord Jesus Christ, praise You!
