

Prayers

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, we live each day expecting it to unfold in roughly the same manner as every other day, and that we will be able to do what we usually do and find peace within the order of our lives. We are grateful for these routines, but dear Lord Jesus, if we have become too reliant on them and have stopped being open to Your guidance, break them down and remould them. We open ourselves up to the possibilities of change by the power of the Holy Spirit, and we trust You, for You do all things for our ultimate good. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: TRANSPORT

1. For yourself

Personal mobility is something we take for granted; so praise God for your freedom of movement

2. For your friends and family

Pray for people you know who are not mobile, or have difficulty with mobility. Pray for God's healing and blessing

3. For the church and its work

Pray for the church, that it will always be a place where people who have difficulty with mobility will be free and able to come. Pray for the church's work to help those who are housebound

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

Pray that your country will be generous towards people who are not mobile either because of age or because of illness or difficulties since birth. Pray that godly people will make their presence felt for good within your country's social and care services, whether public or private

Meditation

Jesus, You are the brightness which fills my life,
When all around seems dull and cloudy.

Jesus, You are the colour which expands my vision,
Bringing meaning and life to all I see.

Jesus, You are the brilliance which designed the world,
Revealing Yourself through all You've made.

Jesus, You are the complexity which intrigues us,
Leading us to search for more and more.

Jesus, You are the happiness which floods our souls,
Leaving us to want more of God's good gifts.

Jesus, You are the kindness which surpasses generosity,
And all your good gifts are underserved

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 3:1-7

¹ This is a reliable statement; if anyone aspires to hold office in the service of God's people, he longs to do a fine work. ² It is therefore important that one who serves in this way must be irreproachable, the husband of one wife, sober, self-controlled, modest, hospitable, and able to

teach; ³ not a drunkard and not quick-tempered, but considerate, peaceable and no lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, keeping his children obedient and respectful in every way. ⁵ For if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?

⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become full of pride and fall into the devil's punishment. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and the devil's snare.

Review

Paul advises Timothy about the characteristics of good and worthy leaders of the church. It is part of Timothy's role to make sure that the church is led properly and by good people.

To begin with, this passage is Paul's personal advice for Timothy. It describes the ideal characteristics of one who is called to serve the church, not with high-minded idealism but with practical common-sense. It is clear that Paul expects this advice to be applied to other people in a wide variety of church situations, and his advice should not be quickly dismissed.

At the time Paul wrote, there were no formal structures to the church and various offices were quickly developing (e.g. Ephesians 4:11f.). Amongst the words used to describe the emerging offices of leadership was 'episcopos', the word we now translate as 'bishop'. It is found within the Greek of verse 2 and I have translated it, quite correctly, as 'one who serves'. I have done this because there is a massive gap between what Paul meant by this word and what the word 'bishop' means today. The office of bishop is now the highest position of leadership, reflecting considerable power and authority within huge church structures, and it is far removed from Paul's understanding of the church when writing to Timothy. It is only right therefore to interpret this passage as referring in general to offices of service within the church, not just the particular office of bishop as we have fashioned it over centuries.

Here, Paul describes what may best be called 'leadership through service', or alternatively 'oversight through service' (3:1,2), and this is the role he saw Timothy performing in the church. His words were a form of encouragement, confirming Timothy's own godly qualities. The list is not random or general, and each quality is important for a good reason, though we can only explore this in a full study of the text. No one should be allowed to exercise oversight or leadership within the church unless they measured up to these godly qualities.

Paul mentions excessive drinking, insecurity in home life, immodesty or rash judgement and the love of money, as killers of Christian ministry (3:2,3). They must be guarded against not just when someone is selected for leadership, but throughout their ministry. There is strong evidence that if the church does not care for its leaders by watching and helping them deal with Satan's temptations, then chaos will reign amongst God's people. Most people within the church will have come across painful stories of what happens when any of these wise words of Paul are overlooked, misapplied, or regarded as irrelevant. Of course, all this applies to bishops today, as well as any all who hold positions authority and leadership within the church.

Other details of this passage are worth remembering, firstly, Paul indicates the folly of giving leadership and oversight to those who have little experience in matters of faith because they are relatively new converts, however experienced they may be in worldly matters (3:6). If people are to lead, they must have experience and knowledge in order to lead and train those under their care. We should not assume that mere potential is a guide to good leadership.

Secondly, Paul mentions the connection between a leader's conduct at home and work for the Lord. Personally, I feel that too many churches ignore this, largely because it is thought inappropriate to inquire into a person's 'private' life. We must remember that people who have given themselves in service have given themselves completely, and that submission comes at the price of living to this high calling. However, inappropriate and uncaring attitudes towards church leaders have led to the situation where many keep their personal and family life entirely separate from their work, and no-one is allowed to question it. In this, we seem to be in complete denial of the wisdom and truth of God's Word about such matters.

You may feel this to be rather hard on the church. However, I have seen too many colleagues in ministry come to grief because they have not been loved by the church. Equally, I have seen churches collapse because of inappropriate leadership by people whose private lives have been chaotic and undisciplined. These issues need to be addressed, in my opinion, with urgency and genuine Christian love.

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Is it possible or reasonable for us to apply the standards written about in this passage to leaders and clergy today?
2. Discuss in your group the nature of the connection between home life and Christina ministry. How can Paul's advice be put into practice?
3. How can the enthusiasm of being 'young in faith' be channelled into church leadership in the course of time, without quashing its vigour?

Discipleship challenges

- *In the light of this passage of scripture, pray for your own leaders at church, and if you feel it appropriate, discuss this passage with them to see what they make of it.*
- *Fast (perhaps by missing a meal each day) and pray for a week to pray for any people you know who have not been able to sustain ministry within the church. Pray for God's healing and sustenance.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, speak to me when I do not know where to turn; when I am scared of what is happening to me and find it hard to explain or pray about things. Send Your Holy Spirit to comfort me and give me peace, so that I am able to hand over all my problems to You and deal with them in faith and peace. All thanks be to You, Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN
