

## Prayers

### Opening prayer

Dear Jesus, when weariness overcomes my troubled heart, shine a light into my soul and take the weight off my heart, I pray. Shine the light of Your Word into my thoughts so that my own words may be good and wholesome, and keep me so close to You that the burden of my habitual sins rolls away from me and I rest in You, and not the arms of the enemy. You, dear Jesus, are there for me when I need you; You are constantly present and I praise You; thank God, AMEN

### Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: WEALTH

**1. For yourself**

*Seek the Lord's help for any personal financial needs, and do not be ashamed of the truth about things such as debt or things you have done wrong with money, for example, gambling*

**2. For your friends and family**

*Pray for any amongst your circle of friends who may have a problem with money, either in hoarding it, gambling, maxing out on credit cards or the like. You will probably not know for whom these are problems, but pray in earnest; these things are endemic and often hidden*

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

*Pray that the church of God will become a shining beacon of morality in a world dominated by greed and corruption*

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

*Pray for your nation and that it will promote honesty and integrity in business, commerce, finance, the arts, sport, entertainment, and every prominent area of national life*

### Meditation

Some people like to pray generally,  
No names, just impressions, feelings,  
wants and pleadings from the heart.  
Their God is but an abstract thing,  
As real as a star in the sky;  
Proved only by some theory or other  
Proposed by someone else.

Can you pray like that? Can I?  
No God is God unless He is there  
For us to speak to one to one:  
No God is God unless He has done  
What is needed to bring His creation back  
To its Creator; and without fear;  
And Christ has done just that.

Jesus is the one; He shows us God.  
Let Him be to you who He really is;  
God who cares.

God who delights to speak to us, personally.

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## Bible Study

### Bible passage – 1 Timothy 4:1-5

<sup>1</sup> Now the Spirit specifically says that in latter times, some will abandon the faith by giving close attention to deceiving spirits and demonic teachings, <sup>2</sup> through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are branded as with a hot iron. <sup>3</sup> They forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God made to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, but instead received with thanksgiving; <sup>5</sup> for it is made holy by God's word and by prayer.

### Review

In the previous study, we read what seemed like an end to the first half of Paul's letter to Timothy. In reading today's passage, we may wonder whether Paul had finished chapter 3 one evening, but woke up the next day burning to give further advice and with plenty more on his mind to say! This passage is fiercely direct and speaks with vigour about problems that were becoming a problem in the early church.

It does not take much to pick through this text to see the bones of his concern about the loss of Christians because of false teaching; *'in latter times, some will abandon the faith by giving close attention to deceiving spirits ...'* (4:1). It is impossible to know exactly when this letter was written, so we do not know whether Paul could have read Matthew's Gospel, which says something very similar; *'Beware that no-one leads you astray, For many will come in my name, saying "I am the Messiah" ...'* (Matt 24:4,5). Nevertheless, Paul certainly knew that Jesus warned against false teaching, and because it was happening before his very eyes, he felt it necessary to warn Timothy. Although the Church was indeed the Body of Christ, people were susceptible to the deceptive work of the enemy. Paul did not mince his words, describing false teaching as *'demonic'* (4:1) because of its power to draw people away from faith, and he accused false teachers of being insensitive to spiritual truth just as a burn on the skin becomes insensitive to touch and feeling (4:2).

But what was the teaching to which Paul so objected? We might have anticipated that Paul would object to those who tried to teach Judaism in the church as he had done in Galatians and Philippians, but here, he identifies the teaching of religious laws concerning marriage and food (as in Romans 14 and 1 Cor 7). In his various letters, Paul has much to say about moral behavioural, identifying the difference between what is 'of the flesh' or 'of the spirit', but he was not in the habit of making regulations about lifestyle issues. Now in the days of the early church, some people thought that the pressures of emotional relationships between men and women within marriage were a distraction from the things of God, but despite some sympathy for this view (see 1 Cor. 7), Paul would not forbid marriage. On the contrary, Paul taught that all things should be used for the glory of God, and not distract from the work of Christ (see 1 Cor 7:36f.).

The second issue is that of abstinence from various foods. Paul was probably referring to the eating of meat that had been dedicated to idols during sacrificial slaughter (see Romans 14). On the surface, it is quite understandable for people to object to eating meat dedicated to a pagan deity. However, in Paul's day, it was not possible to obtain meat slaughtered 'neutrally'. All animals killed for meat were offered up to some god; if people lived in Israel, their meat had been offered up to the Living God, but in other parts of the Roman Empire, then the meat for sale outside pagan temples had been ritually slaughtered. However, Paul's argument was simple; he said there was no point in worrying about such things. There was only one God known through Jesus Christ, and He had declared all food clean (see Mark 7:19), so the beliefs of Roman religious sects should hardly be considered a problem.

In a wonderful passage at the end of this text, Paul said to Timothy *'everything created by God is good ... it is made holy by God's Word and by prayer'* (4:4,5). In this way, Paul identified God's blessing through the Word (the Bible) and through prayer as greater than all pagan practices, and any teaching that attempted to make Christians sensitive to such things was false. The answer to these and all other issues were to be found through scriptures and through prayer. It was and is good advice, maintaining people's faith in the supremacy of God and Jesus Christ, and identifying all other religious practice as secondary.

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## Discipleship

### Questions for groups

1. Are there problems of false teaching in the church today? What are they and what should be done about them?
2. Why should people still feel today that it is relevant to choose to abstain from marriage in order to serve God?
3. Discuss in your group whether there are any foods we should not eat for spiritual or other reasons.

### Discipleship challenges

- *Read Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians to check out some of the background to the issues in today's text. Pray about anything you come across which reminds you of problems within the life of the church today.*
- *Plan to fast and pray for the Church of God, praying especially for maintenance of the Gospel and the identification and outlawing of false teaching. Seek the Lord's mind on these important issues.*

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## Final Prayer

Jesus, You are the King of my life; You rule my mind, You care for my feelings, You plan for my life, You direct my conscience, You advocate me to the Father, and You deliver my soul from death. Glory be to You, Lord Jesus Christ, for You are the King of my life: AMEN

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