

Prayers

Opening prayer

Dear Lord and Father, I have searched and I have found You there in the midst of Your creation, for You were waiting to be found. Forgive me for straying from the pathways of the soul and failing to look for You where You could be found, and thank You for staying faithful to me when I wandered. Lead me on to discover more about You, more about my faith, and more about Your glorious work in heaven and on earth. AMEN.

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: PREJUDICE

1. For yourself

Praise God for His salvation and for the work He has done in your life, to love you without prejudice and give you the hope of eternal life

2. For your friends and family

Praise God that He is able to overcome the problems people have with each other, and He can help us overcome the many prejudices that beset families.

3. For the church and its work

Thank God for the work He does through His people the church to overcome prejudice in the world. Pray that this work will go on and never stop

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

Thank God for the progress that has been achieved throughout the world in overcoming prejudicial attitudes towards the races. Pray that wherever this is done it will continue and not stop.

Meditation

Lord God Almighty:

If we are troubled,

lead us into the peace of Your presence;

If our minds are confused,

bring us knowledge and understanding;

If our hearts are broken,

comfort us with Your unsurpassed love;

If our strength is failing,

touch us with Your loving help and healing;

If our feelings are bruised,

pour on us the balm of Your comfort and Word;

If our pathway ahead is puzzling,

guide us with the calm and steady hand of Your Spirit;

For in You, and in Your peace,

we are eternally blessed and forever saved.

Bible Study

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 4:6-9

⁶ If you put these things before the fellowship, you will be a good servant (deacon) of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. Rather, train yourself for godliness; ⁸ for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, because it holds promise for both the present life and that which is to come. ⁹ This is a trustworthy saying deserving of our full acceptance. ¹⁰ For to this end we work hard and do our very best, because we have placed our hope in the living God who is the Saviour of all, most of all those who believe.

Review

In chapter four of his letter, Paul spoke to Timothy about his task as a leader to discern the truth, uphold right teaching, and honour God through reading the Word and prayer (4:1-5). He told Timothy that if he did these things he would do well; describing Timothy as a good servant (the same Greek word as 'deacon', also meaning 'minister'). It sounds like a counsel of perfection, because no minister can be so wholesome and perfect, but I suggest that Paul was speaking about what is properly expected of any minister through the spiritual anointing received for the task.

Christian ministry in the church today is not easy, and many who it take on are told to find their own calling within the mission of the church and encouraged to work according to their gifts. Yet most will recognise that there is a core work to be done, which has nothing to do with personal characteristics or interests. When Paul speaks to Timothy here in this passage, he passes on advice about the basic work of ministry that sustains the church. This must be secure so that the church can perform its primary calling to spread the Gospel and extend the Kingdom of God. Just as the individual Christian cannot grow and do God's work without maintaining contact with the Lord through studying the Bible and through prayer, so the church cannot function unless its leaders do the basic work of ministry Paul describes here.

It is clear from Paul's description that ministry is a work of personal spiritual grace and sacrificial service. On the one hand it seems simple, being a mixture of public functions and personal duties; on the other hand, it represents a high code of spiritual practice which may appear to some to be out of reach. Paul says that the basic ministry of the church is this; maintain sound teaching (4:6), avoid sin and train for godliness (4:7,8), and do ones best in everything for no other reason than it is right before God to do so (4:9,10).

So what is hard about this? The main requirement is to maintain standards of teaching (see the first five verses of the chapter). Paul says '*put these things before the fellowship*' (4:6), in other words, a minister must place his or her discernment of the truth above all else. This is not as easy as it sounds, for maintaining the Gospel truth requires firstly that this truth is known in personal experience, secondly that a minister knows scripture well, and thirdly that a minister is anointed by the Spirit for ministry. All these things make a high calling, and they may be found variously in nearly all of Paul's letters. Embedded within all this is the training in godliness which Paul mentions in verses 7 and 8; godliness is a word which means 'proper religion' and implies that those who minister should be examples of good religion to the world, and not people who complain about it! Also, ministry is hard work, and the world does not understand it. No one should enter ministry without accepting this, and church people who work with ministers, priests and pastors should also recognise that what their leaders do is hard work both spiritually and physically.

In addition to this, Paul indicates that ministry is a matter of spiritual calling, and anyone in leadership should be conscious of a need to demonstrate what they preach. If leaders do not live godly lives, then they will not preach godliness, however good their sermons sound. Congregations easily detect the hypocrisy of a gospel preached but not lived, and by saying this neither Paul, nor I in this study or any congregation, suggests or expects that a minister should be perfect! Rather that they obviously work hard and train in the things of God (4:7,8,10). There is no substitute for time spent with God's Word in private devotion and worship. Without it, a servant of God will stumble, and their own spiritual tanks will be empty.

Lastly, it is impossible to do the work of ministry unless '*our hope is in the living God who is Saviour of all*' (4:10). The faith of a leader must be built on the solid rock of Christ, so that when storms come, the house will not fall down!

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. In the light of this study, discuss whether it is ever possible to find the perfect church leader. What should we expect from our leaders?
2. How can those who are active in church leadership be helped and trained regularly for all the different things they do?
3. How can we best help those ministers and leaders who reach the point of saying that they can no longer live up to their calling?

Discipleship challenges

- *Find a leader of your church (at any level) and discuss these things with him or her. Note especially if any topic makes for a difficult conversation. This indicates that you are touching on thorny ground. Pray for the person concerned.*
- *Keep before yourself the question whether the Lord is calling you to some kind of church leadership. If He is, then you will find that He will lead you to where your call can be fulfilled.*

Final Prayer

Jesus, deliver me from all evil, I pray. Cleanse me, for my thoughts and deeds have been corrupted; liberate me, for an enemy has ensnared my path and darkened my way; lead me to liberty because Satan has been defeated on Calvary and I have found life through You! Thank You, Lord Jesus; AMEN
