

## Prayer

When I am sorrowful; Lord Jesus, comfort me.  
When I am troubled; Lord Jesus, cleanse my heart.  
When I am tempted; Lord Jesus, deliver me.  
When I am forgetful; Lord Jesus, remind me.  
And as I receive your help, may I grow in confidence,  
for I have nothing to fear. Thank You Lord Jesus: AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Pray for the person who is nearest to you, your spouse, one of your parents or your children, or your closest friend*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the air transport industry** *Pray for those who transport delicate or important cargoes that are essential to the economy of the world or of your country*
- *Pray for the critical situation in Afghanistan at this time*
- *Praise the Lord for His love and mercy found in each moment of life*

## Meditation

For everything, there is a time, a place, and a season under God.

The rain falls, the sun shines, the winds blow and the seasons come and go;  
But the Lord holds the balance of all life in His hands.

Our nations are policed, the judges enact law and our prisons seem full;  
But the Lord brings true justice to the whole of His world.

Nation contends with nation and end up fighting others or themselves;  
But the Lord alone defeats the evil which creates war.

Doctors do miracles by curing diseases, and research promises better health;  
But the Lord heals all flesh and bone, and mind and spirit.

Politicians promise reform, we are cynical, and the press makes money out of it;  
But the Lord changes people's hearts and lives by love.

For everything there is a season, but the Word of the Lord lasts forever.

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## Bible passage - *Philippians 2:19-24*

***Paul commends Timothy to his readers; this was a man he trusted, who would both bring the letter to the Philippians and also report back to Paul about whether it was received.***

<sup>19</sup> It is my hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you quickly, so that I may be encouraged by news of you. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one else who shares my feelings and who cares deeply for your welfare, <sup>21</sup> and everyone else has their own concerns, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> But you know how valuable he is, and how he has worked with me like a son with a father, in the work of the Gospel. <sup>23</sup> I therefore hope to send him as soon as I see how things turn out for me; <sup>24</sup> and I am confident in the Lord that I will also come soon.

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# Bible Study

## Review

After delivering a powerful message about the unity of the church in Christ, Paul wanted to know how his message would be received! He did not write out of abstract interest, the Philippian church was one of his favourites, and the Christians there were people he loved. For this reason, after learning that there were problems at Philippi (1:15f.), he wrote to help overcome these troubles and wanted to know the effect of his letter. This passage contains an almost palpable sense of concern that the letter will be received and its message accepted.

Today, we live in an age of instant communication in which we can text someone instantly to find out their feelings and their plans, and it is difficult for us to appreciate how hard it was for people to handle the stress of not knowing what was happening to friends a long way away. It is not surprising therefore that this passage describes Paul's feelings and emotions. Paul is worried about the Philippian church, so he decides to send a letter not 'in the post', but by the hand of Timothy (2:19). It is his clear hope that Timothy will return to him, bearing news that he longs to hear.

Paul describes Timothy warmly. He had been with Paul when he first went to Philippi (see Acts 16:1f.) and would have been known by the church there. But after the founding of the church, the Philippian Christians would have had little reason to know much about what had happened either to Paul or to Timothy after they left. Paul therefore wrote like this to fill people in with what had happened since, and this also helped them to know how to receive the letter Timothy bore. Paul's warm commendation of Timothy served to ensure that the Philippians received him with the same courtesy with which they would have received Paul himself.

Timothy is often mentioned in Paul's other letters, and it seems that Timothy bore a number of his letters (1 Cor 4:17, 2 Cor 1:1, 1 Thess 3:2). Paul also wrote two letters to Timothy himself concerning instructions for the leadership of the church, and they assume that later on, Timothy exercised a significant leadership role within the church. It is likely therefore that Paul mentored Timothy for many years and used him to carry news for him, and he was eventually commissioned as a church leader.

The other main feature of this passage is Paul's comments about himself. We learn here that Paul felt Timothy was the only person who truly understood him (2:20). Elsewhere in Scripture, we tend to gain the impression that Paul was well known and looked after by the Christian church wherever he went, even as far as Rome (see Acts 28). This either means that Paul only trusted Timothy amongst many helpers, or it could mean that towards the end of his life, Paul was supported only by very few.

Certainly, Paul writes here with a certain trepidation about the future; he comments that he will send Timothy '*as soon as I see how things turn out for me ...*' (2:23). This comment contains the same sense of caution found in the first chapter, where Paul speaks of being willing to die and be with Christ, if God so wishes (1:19-26). Yet just as in the first chapter, the negative feel of this sentiment is overcome by Paul's confidence in the redeeming power of God, for Paul certainly looks forward to going to Philippi himself.

To read this passage today is like returning to a time when people lived without communications. Nevertheless, people still needed to know snippets of information about each other in order to gauge who to trust with the things they said. Some may feel that there is little in this passage, but it gives us some important insight. We see here a picture of Paul as the mentor of Timothy, the man who would take over his leadership. Also, we catch a glimpse of Paul as someone who knew he was not invincible; he accepted that he would die one day and was unashamed to say so. Instead, he continued to write letters and make plans for his ministry after his death.

### Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- Timothy – mentoring for leadership
- Commending Timothy
- Paul's tension

### Going Deeper

The starting place for all future leaders is to learn their work by walking in the footsteps of those who have gone before; so the reason for Timothy's proposed journey in verse 19 is to do for Paul what he could not do for himself because of his imprisonment. All the evidence of the relationship between Paul and Timothy is

that the younger man was being mentored by Paul not simply to take over Paul's ministry, but to continue his work according to the call of God. There is a big difference, as we will find out by studying this text further.

### ***Timothy – and mentoring for leadership***

Scripture gives an example of such mentoring in the story of Elijah who handed the prophetic mantle over to Elisha (2 Kings 2:10ff), but there are few examples in the New Testament apart from Paul. Paul was concerned about the principles of mentoring when he parted company with Barnabas in the famous disagreement at Antioch (15:35ff). There, he was unwilling to take with them a man he believed had not stood up to the tests of Christ's mission under stress (a man called Mark, a common name and possibly not the Mark of Mark's Gospel). There is some evidence that Timothy was a man who had difficulties himself; he was young and older Christians appear to have failed to respect him (1 Tim 4:12) and he was not of good health (1 Tim 5:23). However, Paul saw in Timothy the spiritual qualities of one who had a heart for God's will, and was not a man to make a name for himself. Indeed, after Paul's two letters to Timothy which tell us much more about the Christian mentoring Paul exercised with Timothy, we hear little more of him, but the churches Paul founded continued to grow, and that may well be the best testimony we have of Timothy's leadership.

The reasons for Paul's choice of Timothy are given in verses 20 to 22. These verses have caused some controversy because it is hard to see clearly what Paul refers to in the middle verse 21; 'everyone else has their own concerns, not those of Jesus Christ'. Is Paul simply complaining about everyone else in the church, for example? It does not sound like an example of the kind of Christian unity and affection that Paul has required of the Philippians, so there must be a better explanation.

### ***Commending Timothy***

Paul begins by writing to the Philippians giving a recommendation of Timothy, who was the best person to represent him partly on the basis of his knowledge of the church there (Timothy was with Paul when the church was founded (see Acts 16). However, the fact that Paul said Timothy cared '*deeply for your welfare*' (2:20) was not a reference to everyone's health and general well-being. Paul was not in the habit of making any such pleasantries. He meant that Timothy shared with Paul his concern for the well being of the church fellowship in its unity, obedience and service to Christ, the three touchstones Paul used to assess the spiritual health of the church. This now is the context for the contentious next verse (21) in which I suggest that Paul is simply extending his reasons for sending Timothy. In comparison to Timothy's Gospel concerns for the Philippians, everyone else Paul has spoken to about the church and its problems had other more personal opinions, and Paul was concerned that none of this should get in the way of work of the Gospel at Philippi. The church was located at an important place in the Empire and he foresaw that it had an important role to play in the future.

Paul was therefore able to commend Timothy to the Philippians as one who had no partisan interest or personal 'axe to grind', and the relationship they enjoyed was '*like a father with a son*' (v22). Paul talked of himself as a father and of others as his 'children' in a number of circumstances (see 1 Cor 4:14, Gal 4:19). In each of these, he spoke as a preacher to converts (Timothy was one of Paul's converts - Acts 16:1,3) using a natural example of his day of family relationships. In his day, a young child was expected to be totally obedient to the father, and in a manner that is quite different from that of today. This obedience was the starting point Paul expected of all who sought to follow Christ and even more of those he mentored for leadership. With this commendation, the Philippians could expect that Timothy would truly represent both Paul and the Gospel he preached.

There is a great deal of discussion about the benefits of mentoring as a model for leadership training today, yet two things always seem missing within programmes I have observed, whether within the church or not. Firstly, Paul mentored Timothy with the direct expectation that he would soon be unable to continue his work and would have to hand it over. Few mentoring programmes today assume anything like this; rather, they assume that the one mentoring has virtually absolute and indefinite rights. Secondly, Paul mentored Timothy expecting total obedience of a kind that is simply not acceptable today. Paul's notion of obedience was of total and unquestioning commitment to his cause (the Gospel), and this is something that today would be the subject of debate and not a reflection of real working relationships. Obedience is something we generally talk about today, but rarely 'do'. Paul and Timothy were of one mind in their service of the Lord and commitment to the Gospel, and as far as Paul was concerned, that should be sufficient for the Philippians.

### ***Paul's tension***

The last two verses of this passage demonstrate the tension within Paul about his own future, and echo some of the sentiments of the first chapter (1:21-23). On the one hand, Paul expresses Gospel confidence that he would come through his imprisonment, the word 'hope' (2:23) being far stronger in Greek than we commonly mean by this word in English, and matched by the word 'confidence' (2:24) in the last verse. But around these words are conditional phrases which display the uncertainty of Paul's future; '*as soon as I see*

how things turn out for me' (1:23) and the words 'in the Lord' (1:24) which, as we have seen above, are equivalent to saying 'if the Lord wills'.

How would you or I deal with the circumstances in which Paul was held? Some commentators try to assess when the letter to the Philippians was written by studying Paul's state of mind, on the assumption that the more he feared death, the closer he was to Rome and his own end, at the time when he wrote the letter. How sad an assumption! One such as Paul who had endured so much for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, had done so at personal cost (see 2 Cor 6:4ff), and it is presumptive of us to think we can assess timescales based upon a person's mental and spiritual state when facing the death penalty and also writing a letter. The remarkable thing about the letter to the Philippians is that Paul was able to hold together his own natural feelings of caution and perhaps fear at what awaited him (and there is nothing wrong with this, for even our Lord wept in Gethsemane), with his forthright proclamation of the Gospel of God's love in Jesus. In this he followed in the path of His Lord and gave an example to others in a way that few other early apostles and evangelists did. This was recognised by the early church and it is why his writings are now part of the Bible.

## Application

Today's passage says little new about the situation in the Philippian church, or what Paul wanted to say to the Philippians, or any other reason for the letter. It tells us about the plans of Paul and conveys a great deal about him as he faced the future, and about the mentoring of his 'son in the Lord', Timothy. Underneath this passage lies an assumption about the qualities of one who is sent by God to do a task, work for which Paul was mentoring Timothy, and which is little understood today. Ephesians 4:11 says '*some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.*' This indicates the importance of the role of one who is 'sent' (Greek 'apostle'). It is a task first taken on by the disciples by commission from the Lord Himself who 'sent' them (the word 'apostle' in Greek means 'sent') to proclaim the Gospel within the whole world (Matt 28:18ff), and this special call was taken up also by Paul. Since those days, the church has used the word 'missionary' (from the Latin word for 'to send' which is 'mission'), but most people think of this as a very specialist calling which lies beyond the scope of most believers.

An missionary is one who is sent by the Lord to extend the boundaries of the Kingdom of God spiritually and physically, as the disciples and Paul did. It is a vital call upon God's people today, and can only be exercised through commitment and obedience to the Lord of a kind that is radically different from any model of obedience, mentoring or training available in the world today. It can only be understood by reflecting on the Bible which describes it, and the history of Christian missions (the real life stories of those who have been Christ's missionaries throughout the ages). Those who are truly Christ's 'sent' people today may be hard to find, for by definition, they do not work in the comfortable places where churches have been for many years.

If you are called to this spiritual task which is at the heart of the Gospel, then whatever your real occupation, you need to find someone who will mentor you as a father teaches a son, and work for the Kingdom with a single-mindedness and obedience which comes from Christ alone, for this work has eternal consequences. You would also be advised to seek to mentor others who could learn from your wisdom if you are someone who has pursued this role for years and has consequently grown in Christ. The Lord will make these things clear to you.

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## Discipleship

### *Questions (for use in groups)*

1. Is there anyone who you feel especially close to in the church, with whom you feel that the Gospel is at the heart of your friendship? What does the Lord use this for?
2. Do you find that verse 21 of our reading affirms you or challenges you?
3. Is it always necessary to qualify what we plan by saying 'if the Lord wills'? Is it right for us to have absolute confidence in what we believe to be the Lord's will?

### *Personal comments by author*

*There are thousands of missionary tasks waiting to be done in the world today, and the Lord needs His people to respond to the call. I know I responded to this call years ago and I have found that the Lord has constantly led me into different situations in which things need to be done, and it has affected the whole of my life; my family, my income and my health (to name a few). He may have some work for you, on the internet, through your work, with people or institutions around you. Remember, the heart of the calling is to*

*the proclamation of the Gospel in obedience, and total life commitment. I do believe this is God's call for all who read this today.*

### ***Ideas for exploring discipleship***

- *I ask you to consider whether the Lord is calling or has called you to be a missionary as described in the Bible study above. Please do not be afraid of the terms. Be afraid only of the Lord who gave them, and calls people all the time to essential tasks within the Kingdom of God.*
  - *Fast and pray for all who do the work of the Lord as pioneers of the faith, even to this day. Some Christians work as 'undercover' agents in countries where it is dangerous to confess the name of Christ.*
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### **Final Prayer**

Your love, Lord Jesus, changes everything. It removes timidity and self sufficiency in a person and makes them outgoing and bold; it takes someone who is sick and gives them special work and meaning for life; it takes a zealous youth and trains them in the humility of submission and service. We offer ourselves to You, Lord Jesus; do with us as You will; AMEN

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