

Prayer

Jesus, You heal the wounds of my body, and I thank You.
Holy Spirit, You heal the brokenness of my spirit, and I thank You.
Father God, You heal the sinfulness of my soul, and I thank You.
Make me whole like You, Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Life at Home

Give thanks to God for all the good things 'home' means to you, and place into His hands the issues which can make 'home' a difficult place to be. Thank God for your home.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those suffering because of poverty*
- *Pray for those you know who endure personal tragedy*
- *Give thanks for rest and sleep*

Meditation

(On growing faith)

As each and every leaf and flower bursts into life,
Lord, flood my senses with Your living joy,
And may the radiance of your light and life renew me.

As each and every seed finds life within the soil,
Lord, energise my dormant soul by Your love,
And may Your kindness flower in me in faith and hope.

As each and every plant now reaches upwards,
Lord, stretch my mind to show me Your truth,
And enable me to grow in joy and peace and confidence.

Lord, I live my life for You.

Bible Study - 1 Timothy 4:11-16

¹¹ *Instruct and teach these things.* ¹² *Let no one treat your youth with contempt, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, faith and purity.* ¹³ *Give attention, until I arrive, to the public reading of scripture, to preaching and to teaching.* ¹⁴ *Do not neglect the gift in you, which was given through prophecy and with the laying on of hands of the eldership.* ¹⁵ *Put these things into practice, be absorbed in them, so that all may see your progress.* ¹⁶ *Look after yourself and the teaching, and persevere in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.*

Review

In this passage Paul offers heartfelt advice and warm encouragement to Timothy. It is a wonderful mixture of sound advice and support, and it is a good example of how the mature

can encourage maturity in others. At the beginning, however, two interesting things come to light which are essential to our understanding of the whole letter. Firstly, we discover that Timothy is a relatively young man and secondly, he was someone with a specific gift, but the letter does not mention what it is!

The fact that we do not know the nature of this gift is disappointing, but there are hints here that might help us, and it is worth trying to discover what it is. Paul began his letter by mentioning 'teaching' and the solemn duty of passing on the truths of the Gospel (1 Tim 1:3) along with a clear instruction to Timothy to teach and train the people of God properly. The previous reading to this also speaks about instruction, teaching and training (4:6-10). Back in our passage, teaching appears in verse 13, and then after the mention of a special gift in verse 14, Paul says 'Look after yourself and the teaching and persevere in them ...' (4:16). The close relationship between Paul's concern for Timothy as a person and his teaching, along with all that has been said in the letter makes it possible, if not likely, that Timothy's gift was 'teaching and instruction'. The more we read of both the letters to Timothy, the more we will find this constant emphasis on teaching, and it is unlikely that Timothy should have a special gift only for Paul to ignore it! In general, Paul was concerned to keep Timothy on the 'straight and narrow', and it seems that he wanted to encourage the gift and ensure that Timothy's ability to explain and pass on the Gospel remained tightly focussed.

We can see now why Paul sought to encourage Timothy not to worry about his age. We do not know whether he was in his twenties, thirties or forties, he was still somewhat younger than Paul and some of the people he sought to lead and teach. In Paul's day, age was venerated, and a group of people tended to defer to the opinion of the oldest person present. Indeed, Paul may have been reaching an age where he would have enjoyed such veneration, but it is clear that Timothy was not. Paul was profoundly forward thinking in his insistence that the spiritual gift of teaching and the anointing of a leader by the laying on of hands (4:14) was to be respected by all. It would have damaged the church greatly if teachers and preachers were hampered in their efforts by older people present whose opinions were accepted merely because of their age! So when Paul said to Timothy 'let no one treat your youth with contempt ...' he was encouraging him not just to teach and exercise his gift, but to stand on the authority he had been given; not his own authority of course, but Christ's authority and the authority of the Word and the Spirit.

As we all know, we respect most those teachers and leaders who give an example of godliness through how they behave and go about their work; and this is the simple advice given by Paul to Timothy in verse 12. There is no one for whom advice to set an example of love, faith and purity, does not present a challenge, but it is not an impossible goal. If someone reaches out towards the highest goals and standards, then people will appreciate the genuine example given and offer their respect. Few of us may reach the goals, but leaders who have given up on such goals are those who are not trusted or respected.

Within the passage as a whole, Paul gives Timothy wise advice about preaching and teaching, emphasising the public nature of the Gospel and the importance of declaring it openly wherever possible (4:13). In fact, the Greek of this verse explicitly emphasises 'public reading', and the literal translation of the verse is this 'Give attention ... to public reading, preaching and teaching.' Paul also urges Timothy to 'be absorbed' in his ministry, because this will demonstrate his intent and seriousness about the Gospel (4:15); he does not tell Timothy to go and get a hobby or have a holiday to balance out his life, as we might suggest today! But finally, Paul expresses a genuine concern for Timothy; 'look after yourself and the teaching ... for in doing this you will save yourself ...' (4:16).

Paul recognises that one who is called to ministry will find that all life becomes intermingled with the call, and there is no separating of private life from work for the Lord. Many clergy

today are trained to believe that they must maintain a sense of their own privacy and identity apart from their work for the church. This is difficult territory, but I do suggest this is dangerous and leads to much stress. It is a simplification of what the call to work for the Lord is all about, and how it works in the human soul. Far better is Paul's advice to stay close to the heart of God's call, which runs like a thread throughout this passage.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. If you are a church leader, how do you respond to what is said here? Is it exciting or is it frightening?
2. If you are not a church leader, does this passage reflect what you expect of a leader? In what ways?
3. What place does special gifting have within ministry, and how much should be made of it?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

There are many difficult issues raised by this text to do with how people cope with the demands of ministry within the church. I suggest that God's advice that every man woman and child should have a Sabbath of rest is the most helpful starting place for any discussion about how a church leader might find balance in life.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Read through this passage and see what the Lord is saying to you personally through it. Sometimes the Lord will have a special word from scripture for us which is something we need to hear at a particular time and place, always be ready to listen.*
- *Pray for your church leaders and make it your business over a period of a week, to pray about what they do, their gifts, their reputation and preaching skills, and everything about them which people talk about in church. Pray with understanding.*

Final Prayer

Bless those we love this day, Lord Jesus. Keep them in Your care and protect them from all evil. If there are problems between us, may we be humble enough to let you heal us. When we are at peace together, may we give You the glory. You have given us each other. Praise be to You, Lord Jesus, AMEN