

## Prayer

Father, from the greatness of Your majestic creation to the wonder of Your love for every person You have made, Your works are glorious and perfect in execution and intent. Forgive us for our part in the evils of this world and all that prevents others from seeing the full glory of Creation, and make us into beacons of hope and love. We ask this in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ: AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Pray about an issue that troubles you, but instead of talking to God about it, listen for what he says*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for the United Nations.** *Pray for the World Health Organisation, which does significant work and monitors health issues world-wide*
- *Give thanks to God for His care and love, and His guidance of your life*
- *Pray about the forthcoming Copenhagen climate summit*

## Meditation

It is an awesome day when the Spirit of God  
Moves in the heart of a man or a woman,  
To bring salvation's bright and glorious dawn  
And change all things, for one soul, forever.

For in Christ, the colours of the world are different,  
And the faces of the saved are radiant, elated;  
The Bible is alive with meaning and purpose,  
And the love of God leaps from its every page;  
Prayer feels as natural as breathing clean air,  
And the soul that breathes the Spirit says 'Yes!'  
The potential of all who yield freely is tapped,  
And the infinite prospects of life are in Christ.

The truth has been held and brought blessing!  
The heart has rejoiced in its source and its destiny.  
The offer of Christ has been irreversibly received  
Transforming all things past, present and future.

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## Bible passage – 1 Timothy 1:1-7

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the authority of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, <sup>2</sup> To Timothy, my loyal child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>3</sup> When I was on my way to Macedonia I urged you to remain in Ephesus to instruct whoever it may be to teach no other doctrine, <sup>4</sup> nor devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which create disputes rather than doing the things of God that are known by faith. <sup>5</sup> Now the aim of this instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. <sup>6</sup> Some people have strayed from these and turned to empty words, <sup>7</sup> wanting to be teachers of the law, but without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

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# Bible Study

## Review

Paul's first letter to Timothy is a classic epistle containing a considerable amount of theology mixed in with comment and instruction about the life of the church. There is one major difference between the two letters written to Timothy and the other letters by Paul (apart from Titus); they are not general letters written to churches, but personal letters to a dearly loved friend and companion concerning the missionary work in which they were engaged. For this reason, they offer a considerable amount of personal advice.

It is not clear when this letter was written from the various reference to Timothy in Acts (16:1f., 17:14f., 18:5, 19:22, 20:4), but they do indicate that Timothy was with Paul in his missionary work in the Ephesus region, and was therefore someone who could carry his authority there (1:3); this gives us a hint at the purpose of the letter. It begins with affectionate greetings from Paul, littered with some of the theological words that are characteristic of his preaching the Gospel around the known world; '*hope*', '*faith*', '*grace*', '*mercy*', '*peace*' (1:1,2). Paul also sets out his authority as an apostle (1:1), but such introductions did not serve to tell Timothy anything about Paul which he did not otherwise know. Their purpose was probably to ensure that the bearer of the letter knew about its importance, as well as any future readers of the letter!

Paul was 'on his way to Macedonia' (1:3), though none of this fits exactly with the sequence of events found in Acts. It appears though, that Paul needed Timothy to remain behind in Ephesus in order to stabilise the situation there (1:3). We must remember that Paul was not talking about the church in Ephesus alone, however, because while he was there (see Acts 18-20), he was involved in an extensive ministry to the entire region around the city, involving places such as Philadelphia, Laodicea and Colossae (e.g. Colossians 2:1). Acts also tells us that Ephesus was where Paul met Christians converted under Apollos. They did not know about the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1f.) and Paul corrected this glaring error. As time went by, it seems that there was a further need for doctrinal discipline within the churches of the large metropolis of Ephesus and its satellite towns, and Paul was writing in response to this need (1:4,6,7).

Another issue may also lie behind Paul's comments here, which is hinted at in the phrase; '*myths and endless genealogies ...*' (1:4). It is most likely that this referred to heretical teaching based on something called 'Gnostic' mystery religions. These religions suggested that different layers of secret spiritual authority were stacked between earth and heaven, between people and God, and the soul had to pass through them sequentially to find salvation. Gnosticism is a complex subject, and it undoubtedly affected many in the first century AD. Some Christians thought of Christ as one of the spiritual levels through which one had to pass in order to attain to the divinity of God. Paul, naturally, sought to fight against all such beliefs.

So what was Timothy being asked to do? He was firstly required to be faithful to the apostolic teaching he had learned from Paul; he was to allow 'no other doctrine' (1:3). Then, in a fascinating sentence, Paul said more; '*Now the aim of this instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith*' (1:5). The dangers to the purity of the Gospel in the early church were plain, but notice that here, Paul was concerned not so much about the doctrines taught but people's motives for preaching and teaching about Christ. His emphasis on love, purity, good conscience and sincere faith show that he was concerned that those who preached the Gospel live the life of Christ as well as teach it; they were not to be hypocrites. People quickly spot hypocrisy and reject those who show it as well as their message.

What Paul says here is worth remembering. If such qualities are found in those who teach and preach God's Word today those who listen to them will seek to do the same, and the Gospel will be effective. Certainly, we can expect that the preaching of the Gospel will demonstrate 'good fruit', and if this is not found then like the churches around Ephesus, we may need a steadying hand on what is preached and taught.

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## Discipleship

### Questions (for use in groups)

1. What are the moral and spiritual qualities you would expect from someone who preaches the Gospel.
2. Why do people tend to be negative about the idea of teaching doctrine today? How might an understanding of doctrine be helpful today?
3. How can we know whether someone has a pure heart, or any other moral or spiritual quality?

## **Topics covered by this text**

- *The importance of teaching Christian doctrine*
- *The importance of moral and spiritual qualities in a teacher*

## **Personal comments by author**

*Paul's letter to Timothy is a powerful piece of writing which arose out of a friendship. Many great things have happened in history because they have been inspired by friendship, from art and music to literature; and this is as true in the church as it is anywhere else. I am reminded that my own friendship is important to others, and consequently I should be generous with it whenever I can.*

## **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Read through some of the texts in Acts which mention Timothy (quoted above). This will give you a good idea of the relationship between Paul and Timothy, and aid your understanding of this letter.*
- *Reflect on the importance to you of those who are your closest friends. It may be that the Lord is asking you to make sure you do not lose some, or He may be saying your friendship is spread too thinly. Pray about this.*

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## **Final Prayer**

I praise You, Lord God, for You have saved me and provided for all my needs. Help me take hold of this truth when I feel vulnerable, unloved, challenged or rejected; and as I do this, strengthen my faith and draw me closer to the path of holiness. Open up my heart to enjoy the great life You have given me. Alleluia!

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