

## 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, and thank You for reminding me to search for You. Lead me on to discover more about You, my faith, and Your glorious work throughout the world. Alleluia, AMEN.

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

*Be still, and wait for the Lord to place prayers in your heart and your mind; pursue these with His help.*

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for Christian families.** *Pray for Christian families to maintain the witness of worshipping together for their own good and the good of all*
- *Pray for those who are struggling because of the weather*
- *Give thanks to God for the many things you enjoy about life*

## Meditation

Lord, I learn about You through opening my heart  
To appreciate what is happening all around me.

Through smiling, and seeing other people smile too;  
through silence in the face of deep suffering.

Through watching a child learn to walk;  
through steadying the hand of an elderly person.

Through eating a meal with friends and family  
through sharing what I have with those who have less.

Through listening to the song of birds;  
through enjoying the rhythm of a popular song.

Through finding faith and hope and love;  
through resting in peace because I know my Lord.

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## Bible passage – 1 Timothy 4:6-10

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. Rather, train yourself for godliness; <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> This is a trustworthy saying deserving of our full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> 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.

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## Bible Study

### 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!

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## Discipleship

### *Questions (for use in 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?

### *Topics covered by this text*

- *The nature of Christian ministry*
- *Sound faith*
- *teaching*

## **Personal comments by author**

*The subject of ministry in the church is very important. I am, as you can probably guess, of the opinion that the fundamental work of a minister is to maintain the basics of faith in a congregation so that it can do its duty and do the work of God. The work of the church does not, under any circumstances, belong to the minister or leader, and leaders do not serve the church well if they try and build a church which is a copy of themselves. Christ must be allowed to be Lord of all!*

## **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *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.*

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## **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

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