

Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus for the gift of this day. Lead me through its joys and trials, and through everything that happens help me understand something of Your will for me. May I continue to praise You through the whole of the day, and grow stronger in faith each hour. All glory be to You Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

In each circumstance in which you find yourself, give praise to God for His love and care

On-going prayers

- **Pray for major industrial nations** Pray for India and also Pakistan, which dominate the region politically and economically. Pray for peace
- Pray for world leaders soon gathering at Copenhagen
- Pray against the violence in your community and your country

Meditation

I am called by Christ, my Lord and God:

If I must change, may I do so boldly and with faith:

If I have sinned, may I repent and do what is right:

If I need to do something, may I do it with wisdom:

If I must speak, may I share my faith with all I know;

If I have been silent, may I open my heart to others:

If I need to listen, may I give others my full attention:

If I must be strong, may I rely upon the Spirit's strength;

If I have to show courage, may I be firm in love and faith;

If I need to wait, may I show patience by the grace of God.

I am blessed by Christ, my Lord and God.

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 3:8-13

⁸ In the same way, 'helpers' must be of good character, not deceitful, not addicted to drink or greedy for money; ⁹ they must take hold of the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

¹⁰ So let them first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are without fault. ¹¹

Likewise, women must be of good character, not given to gossip, sober and faithful in all things. ¹² Deacons must be husbands of one wife, and capable of managing their children and households well; ¹³ for those who serve well as deacons gain a good reputation for themselves and show great confidence in their faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Bible Study

Review

This passage of 1 Timothy is about the qualities required of those who aspire to work in the church as 'helpers' (3:8), for which the Greek word is 'diakonos', or as would say, 'deacon'. If you read yesterday's study and compare it with this, you will quickly realise that this passage says little more about Christian character than what was said previously about 'bishops' (3:1f.); it is difficult to spot much difference between

the two. We must examine these characteristics and make sure we apply them to all who seek to serve or help within the life of the church. This is not a formal 'checklist' for candidates who wish to hold office, it is a set of guidelines to help God's people begin to decide upon the godly characteristics of those who should hold office and serve within the church.

Paul initially defines good character as possessing straightforward honesty (or as he says here 'not deceitful' – 3:8), and self control that stands above dependency on drink or greed for money. Paul insists that those who hold office should have a firm grasp of the 'mystery of faith' (3:9), by which he means the revelation of the Gospel (1 Corinthians 1:2, Ephesians 3:3f. etc.), and that they must be tested (3:10). It seems obvious that by testing, Paul means that a candidate for office should answer questions about their grasp of the Christian faith, and also about their personal life and character. Only after this should they be allowed to take up office.

It is extremely important that we look carefully at verse 11, which says, '*Likewise, women must be of good character, not given to gossip, sober and faithful in all things.*' Here, Paul speaks about the qualities required of women candidates for leadership without distinguishing whether they are 'helpers' or 'overseers' (deacons or bishops). We could criticise him for suggesting that women need to answer further on matters of gossip, sobriety and faithfulness, but note that there is no hint of him banning women from leadership here; Paul assumes that they hold office. Some say that verse 11 allows the ministry of women in the diaconate but not in authoritative leadership; but this is to misinterpret the whole passage, which as I have explained, is intended to be advisory rather than definitive about leadership.

Lastly, Paul says that those who help in the church should be secure in family life (3:12) and have a 'good reputation' (3:13) in matters of faith. Good leadership is based on humble and modest attitudes, controlled behaviour and lifestyle, and rigorous faith and devotion, even in the home. These are the primary requirements for all in authority, whether treasurers, evangelists, administrators or preachers.

In our highly structured church organisations today, the office of 'deacon' in one church is a stepping-stone towards 'priesthood'; and in another it is a respected office of general service. Other Christians believe in the leadership structure of deacon, priest and bishop, and others to the more non-conformist pattern of 'eldership and diaconate'. Moreover, there are strong feelings amongst many about which is right and which is wrong! How terrible that we have created non-negotiable principles out of Scripture, which fuel our divisions and mitigate against our unity in Christ! Personally, I prefer to suggest that a good model of leadership in the church is to be found in its head, that is, in Jesus Christ, our 'prophet, priest and King', who demonstrated these and other spiritual characteristics of leadership within His ministry. His main model of ministry was to take a towel and wash His disciple's feet (John 13:1f.)!

Despite the guidance of this passage, some insist on trying to formalise what is said, as if it was intended to give us a systematic structure of church hierarchy with overseers (bishops) at the top and helpers (deacons) underneath. Certainly, the church has developed these roles, but we should not read them back into Scripture and imply that Paul's words formalised offices of which he never dreamed! Paul was concerned that the church was properly unified by oversight and that its work was done by people (helpers or deacons) of good and godly character. We would be unwise to imply more than this.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Discuss in your group the spiritual qualities which are described by this passage of scripture.
2. Do the qualities described within this passage fit any particular leadership role in your church more than others?
3. Is it right to aspire to have a 'good reputation' (3:13) for the work you do as a Christian?

Topics covered by this text

- *The godly characteristics of those who hold office within the church*
- *The characteristics of women leaders*

Personal comments by author

The appropriateness of these qualities are clearly evident to us now even though Paul wrote them two thousand years ago. Those who seek to be leaders of God's people are those who aspire to what is said in

1 Timothy 3 without reference to their role or status, and I believe that congregations of God's people respond immediately and instinctively to those leaders who have these qualities. People recognise them immediately as being godly and appropriate for the church.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- Pray for any in your church who hold office in your church, whatever form of help this gives to the running of the church. Find an opportunity to talk with anyone who holds this office about what they understand their duty to be and how it relates, if at all, to this passage of scripture.
- Consider how you measure up to the standards of faith and behaviour mentioned in this passage. If some of this seems impossible for you, why is this so, and do you think it affects whether or not you should hold office in the church?

Final Prayer

Keep me honest, Lord God, I pray. Show me how my life might reflect truth and integrity in the eyes of others; not so that I can claim anything for myself, but so that I might simply do Your will, and accomplish what is right. I ask this prayer in Jesus' name; AMEN
