

“Powerful Faith”

Personal intro - MIC, DMI

Opening prayer:

Our Father in Heaven
Hallowed by your name
My kingdom come, *my* will be done
Out there in the world just as it is in my heart
Give me today my daily desires and wants
Forgive me my sins
And thank you for understanding that there are some people that I just can't forgive
Lead me... into a little temptation because, honestly, I like it.
Yet at the same time, somehow, deliver me from evil.
Amen.

I hope you didn't say 'Amen' to that prayer! (Or if you did, I hope you were just being polite and didn't mean it.)

I worry that many Christians today pray that prayer instead of the real Lord's prayer. I worry about this because sometimes I pray that prayer instead of the Lord's prayer. I don't actually say those words. But by the inclination of my heart and even the way I live out my life sometimes, I'd rather my will be done over the Lord's will. It's easier to not forgive others and to hold a grudge. I'd rather enjoy a little temptation from time to time than be bored.

But obviously this is not right. This is not how we are called to live as people who belong to Christ. This is not how we are to incline our hearts as people who are being transformed into Christ's likeness. We were saved for more than this. We are (as John the Baptist put it) to “produce fruit in keeping with repentance”.

The apostle Paul writes to Timothy to warn and to encourage him along these very lines. We're going to look at the first 5 verses of 2 Timothy chapter 3 - which bring the warning, and 2 Timothy chapter 4 - which bring the encouragement and the call.

Look at how Paul starts chapter 3: “But mark this”. He's saying ‘Pay attention now!, ‘Listen up!’, ‘Hey!’ Then he warns that there will be terrible times for us to endure in the last days. What follows are 19 character flaws or sins which are so relevant and prevalent today you'd swear they were written just last week:

“But mark this: ... People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.”

I encourage you to read and meditate on this this list when you get home and ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you might be lacking so that you can turn from it. This is the gift of God - to lead you to repentance. Today, I'd like to focus on just the last entry in this list because more than all the others it focuses on the whole church.

Paul warns against **“Having a form of godliness but denying its power.”** This scares me a bit. It can cut very close to the bone. We can come to church, sing songs, say prayers, take communion, and listen carefully to a sermon - we can have a form of godliness - but if we don't allow the power of God to change our lives, then it's worse than meaningless and Paul says we should stay away from such people.

The power of the gospel is best seen in changed lives. When the Holy Spirit is allowed to flex and His power is embraced, then sin habits are broken, character is changed, and hope transforms our whole outlook on life. We learn to delight in the fear of the Lord.

We would do well to check ourselves on this and ask:

If I am embracing the presence of Christ and the power of God in my life then why do I still watch entertainment with blasphemy (“unholy”) in it?

If I am embracing the presence of Christ and the power of God in my life then why do I still chase money and spend it as though it's all mine?

Why do I still struggle with self-control?

Why do I still watch pornography?

Why do I still carry grudges?

Why do I still get so easily angered?

Why do I still struggle with anxiety?

Why am I still so often indifferent to God?

Paul calls us to embrace the power of God in Christ to effect change in our lives for His glory.

Let's pause to pray about this now - and this is not a token prayer. This is where we invite God to really work in our hearts:

“Father, we don't want a limp, powerless form of godliness. We ask you to come and fill us afresh with the presence and power of your Holy Spirit to break sin habits, to bring newness of life, to bring boldness to live out our faith, to bring a fresh sense of purpose and design in the way we live, to fall in love with you once again, to delight in the fear of you, to become like you, to enjoy you and to bring pleasure to you. Amen.”

So there's a warning for us to avoid ungodly living and powerless religion. Paul now moves to encourage Timothy in the next chapter. Again, look at how Paul begins his encouragement:

2 Timothy 4:1—

“In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge:”

Paul is not about to make a flippant comment, or a casual suggestion. He is about to bring a serious, life-shaping word. He's using legal terminology to say, ‘Pay attention now!’, ‘Listen up!’, ‘Hey!’ ‘This is really important!’ Then he brings it:

“Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. [For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.] But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.”

Some of the instructions Paul is giving here are specific to Timothy’s gifting and ministry. But we can still easily make parallel or direct applications to Paul’s words here in our own lives. For time’s sake, I’m just going to focus on the last verse in the passage, starting with the fatherly words, “keep your head in all situations”.

I relate to this very much in my work with DMI. Just in one week - the week I wrote this sermon - the following requests/emergencies arose in the ministry for me to deal with:

\$300 to support an evangelist for his wedding
\$280 for a flight to an important Christian conference,
\$1000 for surgery to avoid amputation,
\$180 to treat poisoning
\$1600 to replace a joinery that burnt down
\$300 for government required school books
\$4500 for a car repair
An additional \$50 a week for rent support or one of our evangelists

These are on top of the long-standing requests to build more churches, more classrooms, provide more training, pay our teachers more because they keep leaving for more highly paid work, and build more seminaries for the Deaf. We don’t have the funding to meet all these extra needs. It can be overwhelming. I’m very tempted to lose my head!! So the calm voice of authority saying “Keep your head in all situations” is meaningful. I expect it would be for many of you, too.

For time’s sake, I’d just like to focus on the very last entry in the last verse in this list of encouragements, and it’s this: **“discharge all the duties of your ministry”**. This might sound a bit dry and crusty. Most of us would rather hear a word of encouragement that says “You don’t have to do anything! Just enjoy your salvation!” We’d rather hear about being filled with love, joy and peace and being recipients of grace and mercy etc. Perhaps we feel we could do with such encouragements more at this time.

But however simply or profoundly, we’re all called to minister in one way or another. We’re all called to serve. And this is where we find a deep fulfilment. Just as there is something dissatisfying with leaving ministry work unfinished, or leaving a service undone, there is also something deeply satisfying, richly rewarding, in faithfully and fruitfully completing an area of ministry or service. There’s a thrill in anticipating the words, “Well done good and faithful servant”. Discharging the duties of our ministry is a blessing.

Let’s pause now again to pray for this. “Heavenly Father, thank you for calling each of us into service. Thank you that you delight in working with and through us. Strengthen our faith by your Spirit to do this work. Encourage us by your Word to persevere in good works. Fill us with joy as we discharge all the duties of our ministries and service. To this end, we trust in your unfailing love and rejoice in your salvation. Amen.”

Discharging the duties of ministry is a wonderful thing and I'd like to demonstrate this by sharing with you/updating you some of the extraordinary work that Deaf Ministries International has done by discharging the duties of its ministry.

For those who are unfamiliar with DMI, we are an International Christian ministry network taking the gospel, education and employment to the Deaf all around the world. That's what we do and that's what we have been doing for over 40 years.

[Some background here. I was first introduced to DMI about 30 years ago when I met the founder, an Australian man names Neville. I began to support DMI because I loved the work they were doing and I loved Neville. He was the real deal: faithful, gifted, humble, delightfully self-deprecating and lived a virtuous Christian life. I began to sponsor a child with DMI, then each of my children began to sponsor children, my church began to support DMI and then I was asked to serve on the Japan board of DMI which I did for about 6 years before I was asked to come on staff with them back in 2019. So my relationships with DMI is a long and happy one.]

To introduce DMI to you, let's have a quick look at the numbers:

- * We are active in 21 countries.
- * We have built or heavily invested in 10 schools for the Deaf serving a total of 700 students
- * We have developed over 70 employment projects
- * We employ around 100 staff and evangelists in the field
- * We have founded 180 churches for the Deaf and they serve 5000 Deaf people every week.

Just in the last 12 months we have, amongst other developments

Built a secondary school and office in DR Congo

Provided disaster relief and rebuilt our training centre and dormitory in Malawi

Developed a community employment project in Tanzania

Bought land to build a seminary for the Deaf in Africa

Built a new church building in the Philippines

Built a temporary church building in East Uganda

Built new classrooms in Lira, northern Uganda

Supported a large program for tradie internships in Uganda

Supported a new cafe business in China

Built a new junior high school in Kenya

This is just infrastructure. Most of our work and funding has gone into ministry programs taking the gospel to the Deaf, baptising new believers, holding discipleship and training programs and planting new churches for the Deaf.

Why is all this needed? Because the Deaf in developing countries are amongst the most neglected people in the world, especially when it comes to hearing the gospel. Local governments don't have the funding to properly support or educate even the hearing populace, so the Deaf are left uneducated, unemployed and without any community. Even in loving families, many live silent, lonely, frustrated lives without much opportunity or hope. Many others, however, are abandoned at birth and grow up with the stigma of being cursed, and end up begging or in prostitution. Many don't even know their own names.

By "discharging the duties of our ministry" (as Paul writes to Timothy), DMI is changing all that. The Deaf are educated. They are given meaningful employment. They are starting to live self-

sustainable lives. They enjoy new-found community. And many are finding faith in Jesus. The result of DMI's work is radically transformed lives on a massive scale. The discharging of the duties of our ministry is producing wonderful fruit.

I've taken you through some of the basic numbers. But let me tell you about the people. I have been so overwhelmed by the change in people's lives through DMI's work, that I began to interview many of the recipients of our ministry. Over the last three years I have interviewed and written in a blog the stories of almost 50 Deaf people. Their stories are extraordinary, yet in our work, they are also common.

Today, I'd like to share with you about Sylvia. (And I'll finish on this testimony.)

Testimony

Sylvia was born deaf. Her mother died when Sylvia was a baby and her father died when she was 5. So Sylvia was orphaned from a very early age. She was taken in by her grandmother who was an alcoholic and abused and beat her on a daily basis. Sylvia used to hide out on the streets until her grandmother was asleep but often she would awake and continue abusing Sylvia.

I remember Sylvia telling me all this and her groans and cries were so loud that I had trouble hearing the interpreter. Other things happened to Sylvia that I wasn't able to hear and to be honest, I'm glad I couldn't hear them.

She discovered she had some relatives in Kampala, so she ran away from her grandmother and travelled 270 kms to join them. They took her in and gave her a bed and some food but nothing more. They just gave her some food and then told her she had to pay for it. But she was just a child, and a Deaf one at that! How was she supposed to pay? She said, "I had no-one in the world who cared for me, no-one who loved me. I felt so completely isolated."

One day when she was 9, she met another Deaf girl who asked her if she'd ever been to school. She hadn't, of course, and the thought of ever attending school was a cruel tease. But the girl told her about DMI and how DMI might help her go to a school for the Deaf.

Sure enough, DMI sponsored her to go to school and from that day, Sylvia's life began to change. She said, "I was so happy. For the first time in my life, I felt accepted, excited. I felt loved!" Sylvia also began to attend the DMI's church for the Deaf and at the age of 13, she gave her life to Christ and was baptised.

Sylvia finished her schooling and, fast forward a bit, recently completed an internship organised by DMI at a signing cafe. She did so well at that that when I visited her last November, she is now the manager of the cafe.

More than this, Sylvia is now also the worship leader in the church in Kampala. I've some some gifted people lead worship before, but I've never seen anyone lead worship like Sylvia does. I've never seen such joy and humble exuberance in worship leading. Look at this video. Look how Sylvia encourages others on the worship team to worship before turning to the congregation to encourage them.

[Video]

I look back at how Sylvia was - a little girl whose life had been characterised by frustration, loneliness, abuse and fear, and now I see a grown woman whose life is characterised by purpose, friendship, peace and joy. Her dream is to be an apostle to the Deaf. The only thing left for her to find now, she tells me, is a husband!

In Sylvia's story we see a form of godliness that embraces the power of God for change. DMI has been faithfully - and very joyfully - keeping our heads in all situations, not despairing when looking into the darkness, enduring hardship (and there's plenty of that!), and discharging all the duties of our ministry. And the results are plain to see. Wonderful!

I'd like to give you an invitation. If you're not already supporting DMI, please do. We need support in prayer, finance and service.

If you'd like to be a prayer partner, there is a sign up sheet at the back and we will send you weekly prayer points. Prayer is the backbone of our ministry and the more prayer partners we have, the better.

If you'd like to support us financially, you can do this through child sponsorship, or through gifts to projects, pastors or our general fund. The cards of children available for sponsorship are on the table at the back.

If you'd like to support us in service, there are roles that we would love to see filled for assistant volunteers, regional ambassadors and at national board level. Please talk with me afterwards about how you can be involved in our ministry to the Deaf.

I'd like to finish by encouraging you to take your faith to the next level - to strengthen your faith in these "terrible times in the last days" (as Paul says); to leave behind the character flaws and sins that Paul describes in his letter to Timothy, and to embrace the power of God that makes us wise for salvation and mature in faith. Be prepared in season and out of season so you can keep your head in all situations, endure hardships and discharge the duties of your ministry.

The Lord be with your spirit.

Closing prayer:

Our Father in heaven
Hallowed by your name
Your kingdom come, your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For the Kingdom, the power and glory are yours,
For ever and ever
Amen.