

Prayer

For every minute of this day when we have forgotten to live according to Your standards of mercy and love, O God, forgive us. And by Your grace, remind us through others when we fall short in our call to live according to the only standards of Christian discipleship; death to self and new life in Christ. We ask this through Him who has lived and died, and lives again in us forever; Jesus Christ our Lord, AMEN!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Travel

We all need to travel, for work, family or leisure purposes; but we can all choose how to travel. Pray today that people will realise the increasing cost to our world of travel.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the opportunities we have to share our faith
- Pray for those who look after relatives with Alzheimer's disease
- Pray for young people who are deciding what to do with their lives

Meditation

Renew us, Lord Jesus. By Your Holy Spirit, renew us.
Restore our bodies through rest; and strengthen them with exercise;
Replenish our minds as we read Your Word, and fill them with truth;
Re-ignite the fire of Your love in our spirits, so they may shine for You;
Recover our zeal by challenging us to do Your will, all of our time;
Replace the tiredness of our hearts with the vigour of enthusiasm;
Rescue our feelings from the grip of the enemy and set them free;
Recharge the energy of our souls through worshipping You at all times;
Renew us, Lord Jesus. By Your Holy Spirit, renew us.

Bible Study - Proverbs 1:8-19

⁸ Pay attention, my son, to the moral discipline of your father, and do not reject your mother's instruction; ⁹ for they will be like a wreath of honour for your head, and pendants around your neck. ¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. ¹¹ If they say, 'Come with us, let us set a trap for the unsuspecting and innocent, and attack them; ¹² let's come on them like death and take them whilst alive and whole, and then give them hell. ¹³ We will then get hold of all kinds of valuables and fill our houses with the loot. ¹⁴ Throw in your lot with us, we will share all our money together. ¹⁵ My son, do not follow in their way, keep well away from their paths; ¹⁶ for their feet run to evil, and they hurry to shed blood. ¹⁷ Now, it is useless to throw a net to trap a bird whilst it is watching! ¹⁸ And they lie in wait for their own blood, having set a trap for themselves! ¹⁹ This is the end result for all who become wealthy through violence. It destroys the soul of those who do it.

Review

After its introduction (1:1-7), the book of Proverbs launches straight into a typical style of teaching which draws a comparison in order to make a moral point. It reads almost like a parable, and it is not hard for us to understand the point being made, which is about the attractiveness of easy gain. Even in ancient times, the wayward youthful desire of some people to lay their hands on the wealth of others (1:13) was a temptation that led to strife and social disorder, and it is not surprising that this is where this book of moral instruction starts!

Moral discipline The first verse of our passage is interesting, however. You may well find that your own version of the Bible reads a little differently from my translation, but I have attempted to bring out some of the underlying significance of the Hebrew words used. Although addressed to a 'son', Proverbs offers a parable in which the father (1:8) gives not merely 'instruction' (as in most translations), but 'moral discipline'. This story is obviously not about obeying instructions and laws, but of having both an understanding of right and wrong and the courage to make mature decisions. It is also interesting that Proverbs mentions not just the moral contribution of the father to this moral order, but also the mother. She is the one whose 'instructions' (often translated 'teaching') should be obeyed (1:8)!

Obedience to parents The first half of the parable is brief and to the point. Paying attention to the moral discipline of the father and obeying the mother are the key attributes of one who has a future. Verse 9 is not easy to follow because the Hebrew uses words and refers to social practices that are not common today. Clearly, in ancient times, it was normal for a child who was good, was obedient and did what they were told, to be rewarded by items of clothing and dress which were an observable sign of 'favour'; hence the 'wreath of honour' and the 'pendant' (1:9). This should not surprise us, for the story of Joseph (Gen 37:1-4) tells us something very similar; Joseph's 'favour' was demonstrated by the privilege of wearing a 'multi-coloured coat'!

God is moral and he sees all things The second half of the parable takes up most of the verses of our passage (1:10-18), and again, the social setting is strange to us. What is described is the gathering together of a band of youths who would pool their resources and use their local knowledge to set ambushes for passing tradesmen and camel trains carrying through their territory. Such attacks were a well documented part of life in Israel, for the country contained highly significant trade routes connecting the rich Empires of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and 'highway robbery' was an easy path for some to get rich very quickly. However, in order to sustain their attacks, they needed to make sure that no-one was left alive to tell the tale; it was a bloody and brutal way to live (1:12). The argument against this given by Proverbs is essentially moral, and based on the all-seeing power of God. In verse 17, the idea is that the activities of the robbers (throwing a net to set a trap) do not escape the gaze of God, and consequently, their sins will rebound on them (1:18). The parable concludes with a concise proverb; 'This is the end result for all who become wealthy through violence. It destroys the soul of those who do it'.

Clearly, such activities were a great problem in ancient Israel, which is why it has this place in the teaching of the book of Proverbs. But it is only a starting place for what follows. The importance of morality and the presence of God in His Creation will be subjects we return to many times over in the rest of the book. If we understand the points made, we can consider what activities parallel 'highway robbery' today, and pose a similar threat to the moral and religious fabric of society.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss what social circumstances might be equivalent to that described in this passage.
2. Does ill-gotten gain always destroy those who obtain it? Why does it seem that some people gain at other people's expense; is this fair?
3. Do you think it is right to reward good moral behaviour through visible means?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

It is easy for some to dismiss the Scriptures because in passages such as this, we find ourselves trying to cross a cultural divide between an ancient civilisation and our own. This can be hard to do. The moral teaching of this passage also relies on an understanding of parenthood and family life that is frequently not the experience of people today. We must therefore take care to consider how we might make the same moral point using relevant examples, and also avoid references to parenthood that might not be understood.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Read through a newspaper of current affairs article online. What are the serious moral issues in the world today? Banking? War? Pollution? How can Christian people make a serious difference to how these things are dealt with today?*
- *Pray for wisdom. Pray that wisdom will become the touchstone of good moral leadership within the church today. Pray that just as evangelism is seen to be importance, so it will be seen to be important to help those who come to faith to know what Christian morality is and what God is saying about the important moral issues of our day.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, in those difficult times when life feels numb and love seems far away, come gently, we pray. Bring a word, a touch, a sense of Your presence; and place within us the seeds of hope and renewal. Then, with every day that passes, may we increasingly know Your graciousness and care and rejoice in the transforming power of Your love. Thank You Lord Jesus; AMEN