

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we accept the disciplines of the life You have given us. Teach us to know and love Your ways, inspire us to walk tall in faith and speak of You with joy, give us the humility to accept the most challenging of calls, and enable us to live in the peace of knowing our salvation. May we rejoice to live the disciplines of faith by which we walk into eternal life with You, our Saviour and our Lord; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Security

Security is a great blessing in our troubled world. Pray that God's people will have the wisdom to understand their godly duties, and do what is right for the security of the world.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the joys of family life and the glory of true love
- Pray for the concerns about pirates around the horn of Africa
- Pray for the upholding of high moral standards in public office

Meditation

O Lord, you told us that life would be tough, and test us,
You promised Your constant presence and guidance.
So when the enemy finds our weaknesses and tempts us,
May we deny his authority and uphold our faith:
When the events of a day shatter our hopes and dreams,
May we stand firm in Your care and trust in Your love:
When the people we work with manipulate us and hurt us,
May we be strong in faith and give our feelings over to You:
When time seems to yields no hope for our anguished prayers
May we accept that Your will lies beyond us for now:
When the rest for which we long lies too far in the distance.
May we refuse to panic and face everything with peace:
O Lord, your Word and Your work are fulfilled in our lives;
And in You, all that happens 'works together for good'.

Bible Study - Proverbs 2:1-8

¹ My child, if you accept what I teach you and keep my instructions firmly within you, ² listening carefully to wisdom in order to understand it in your heart; ³ if you yearn for insight and search openly for knowledge; ⁴ if you search for it as you would for silver, as if exploring for hidden treasure; ⁵ then you will come to know what it means to fear the Lord, and find out the facts about God. ⁶ It is the Lord who gives wisdom, and all knowledge and understanding comes from Him. ⁷ He securely holds wisdom for the righteous, and He protects those who are upright, ⁸ guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of those who are faithful to Him.

Review

These words are those of a teacher to a child about wisdom. It would be wrong of us to set them aside just because they are addressed to children, however, because in ancient Israel, the 'model' of a teacher and a child was a general picture of engagement in learning, just as we would talk about a teacher and a student. In addition, Scripture teaches us that we are all 'children' of the Lord, and in need of His instruction, and this must be the starting point for our learning of wisdom.

Wisdom and the righteous

This passage does not describe wisdom itself, but begins by defining a right attitude towards it (2:1-5). Secondly, it describes the work of God both to give wisdom and protect it in the hearts of those who are 'righteous'. The 'righteous' are those who live in a right relationship with God, and although these words were written during the life and times of God's people before the coming of Jesus as the Messiah, the 'righteous' were God's chosen people who remained obedient to His Covenant, His revelation and His laws. Much of what we read in the book of Proverbs speaks directly to us as Christians because through Jesus, we can see how the description God has given of wisdom can work, and we can therefore have confidence that God will do what He has promised and teach us His ways.

Wisdom, and a culture of learning

The first four verses are an appeal to all who would embrace wisdom to treasure it and value it highly (2:1-4). Wisdom is best understood as God's teaching for everyday life. It is passed down from generation to generation by God's people who have gained it and matured in it through the years, and under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. So it is something that has to be received from those who have first received it themselves, but at the same time, it is equally acknowledged as coming from God, not from human thought and reasoning. Unfortunately, this route of learning is quite different from any model used today, and educationalists do not understand it. Modern cultures frequently create a critical culture and assumes that this will enable positive learning, when it can in fact lead many to personal culture of negative criticism which shows itself in rebellion against the things of the past. Consequently, the idea that the world has accumulated wisdom waiting to be used and advanced is barely significant in today's cultures of learning. This can be most damaging, of course, when it spills over into the realm of theology, especially that of academic theology.

The search for true wisdom

Our passage today appeals to God's people to value to wisdom by taking it into their hearts (2:2). This does not mean that people should feel deeply about it (though they should), because when the Old Testament talks about the heart, it does not consider the heart as the centre of 'feeling', as many people assume today. The Biblical concept for the heart is that it is the very centre of our being, not just our emotions or our thoughts; our heart is where we weigh up what we know and decide what to do and how to live. For example, if something is 'taken to heart' (as we often say), then it becomes the basis for what we do and how we speak and interact with other people. The searching for wisdom described in our passage today (2:4f.) reminds us of Jesus' parable of the merchant who searched for a 'pearl of great price' (Matt 13:45), or the woman who searched for the lost coin (Luke 15:8f.). Wisdom is so valuable that its quest is of great importance, and the reason for this is because the quest will lead us to the 'facts about God' (2:5). Most translations speak of 'knowledge' about God, but the Hebrew at this point is stronger than that, for our quest is not just for knowledge about God in general, but the truth, no less, and the truth and total wisdom of God is that He loves us and redeems us. A search for anything less than this truth about God is surely not worth the time.

Passing on God's wisdom

The Lord, of course, is the source of all wisdom and therefore all else that flows from this wisdom also comes from God (2:6). The last two verses of our passage describe how the Lord 'holds' this wisdom and passes it on to the 'righteous', and the 'paths' and 'ways' described in verse 8 refer quite simply to the route whereby wisdom is passed on from one generation to another. This begs a searching question to us today. How do we pass on God's wisdom about life from one generation to another ourselves? It is a question we cannot and should not avoid.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How may we go about searching for wisdom and knowledge? Is it as important for us as described in this passage?
2. Discuss what you mean by the 'fear of the Lord', and how this relates to wisdom and learning.
3. How easy do you find it to think of yourself as the 'righteous'? Do you think of this as a description of others, or of yourself?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

In this Scripture we find a challenge both to give and receive, and both are important. It is very necessary for us to search for wisdom and do so with the zeal that is described in this passage, but the second half is more about the Lord's provision for those who have the responsibility of passing on the wisdom they have first received! It is easy to see that people tend to be either givers or receivers of wisdom, but the Lord wants us to be both, and demonstrably so. People who appear to be the fount of all wisdom need to show that they search for it, and those who receive, find or clearly have wisdom need to show that they are ready to pass it on.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Would you class yourself as someone who has wisdom, or one who seeks wisdom? Be truthful with yourself, because if you find the question hard, there may be some underlying issues that this passage need to challenge you about. Offer to God the wisdom you have and the wisdom you seek, and He will bless you.*
- *Pray for those who feel that they have no wisdom and need to spend their lives seeking it, whilst never attaining it. Work out by God's help, what you can do to break down such feelings and attitudes.*

Final Prayer

Holy Spirit of God, we do not trust in our own strength, but in the words, the love, the compassion, the understanding, the strength and the truth of Your presence in the world. May we be agents of Your love, ready to accomplish Your will in this world. AMEN