

Prayer

Great and Mighty God, we love the world You have made; the truth of Your love which is there for all to discover, the beauty of creation in its finest detail and magnificent splendour, and the integrity of natural moral justice based on right and wrong which is woven into the fabric of Your world. May we treasure this world and journey within it with You according to Your will and purpose; in Jesus' name; AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Faith's journey

This week we will pray around the theme 'faith's journey'. Each of us are called to journey with the risen Lord through the life He has given. Pray for His leading throughout your life.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who face legal prosecution and are innocent*
- *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*

Meditation

All around us, people mock religion and God:
But You made everything, Lord God, You will not be mocked,
And we delight in knowing You, despite what others may say.

All around us, people revel in sin and wickedness:
But You have given us morals and the universal rules of life,
So we rejoice in Your laws, because we are saved by faith!

All around us, our planet is stripped of its resources:
But You hold its certain destiny in the palm of Your hand,
And we, Your people, know that You will remake it all in glory.

All around us, the enemy draws people away from God:
But You have authority over all evil in this world by Your Spirit,
And we have the power in Christ, through the Gospel of Hope.

All around us there appears to be trouble and strife:
But You have changed the whole world for ever, in Christ,
And we are privileged to be agents of His truth and His love.

Bible Study - Proverbs 2:9-15

⁹ *This is the way you will understand what is right and just, what is fair, and what are the good paths to follow.* ¹⁰ *Wisdom will come into your heart and your knowledge will give you pleasure;* ¹¹ *good sense and understanding will be your protection,* ¹² *and save you from the path of evil and those who speak with ignorant defiance.* ¹³ *Those who have abandoned the path of an upright life to walk in the darkness of evil,* ¹⁴ *finding pleasure in doing wrong and enjoying senseless wickedness;* ¹⁵ *their ways are warped and twisted.*

Review

This passage follows on directly from yesterday's reading, which explains that wisdom is found by earnestly seeking it and accepting it from those who are able to pass it on (2:1-4). The path of finding wisdom is one that requires total commitment, truth and honesty, and a respect for those in whom it is already to be found, who walk an upright path, protected by God Himself (2:5-8). In this passage, we are now told the consequences of finding wisdom. In short, the seeker will discover 'the good paths to follow' (2:9), will find 'pleasure' in understanding wisdom (2:10), and the 'good sense' (2:11) they obtain will protect them from the 'path of evil' (2:12). Then, like so much of the wisdom literature that is in the Bible, a comparison is made between the wonderful consequences of finding wisdom and the dire results of abandoning the quest for wisdom (2:13-15), which include finding pleasure in 'doing wrong' (2:14) and becoming devious (2:15).

Wisdom embedded in history

So many individual proverbs found later on in the Book of Proverbs make comparisons like this, so it is not surprising to find this in the introductory chapters. We are reminded that although Israel possessed the laws of God and His revelation through their history, many individuals made their own choices to do as they wished rather than keep to the wisdom that had been handed down to them throughout the generations. 'Those who speak with ignorant defiance' (2:12) were not pagans living outside the world of the land of Israel; they were Israelites themselves who chose to reject God. For example, King Ahab of Israel chose to ignore God's rules for the ownership of land when he acquired a vineyard by killing its owner and taking it from his family inheritance (1 Kings 21f.). The citizens of Gibeah in Benjamin (Judges 19:16f.) chose to rape and murder a woman rather than extend to her and her husband the expected hospitality of an Israelite community. These and many other stories in Scripture were deeply embedded in the Israelite's understanding of their own history and culture, and many proverbs were written to warn future generations of the consequences of sins that had happened in the past.

Learning the lessons of wisdom within the church

When we look today at the wholesome qualities of gaining wisdom as mentioned in our passage (2:9-11), and the evil and troublesome consequences of rebellion against such wisdom (2:12-15), it is easy to point the finger outside of the church and look at the evil 'out there' in the world. Now, it is indeed important that we observe the evils of the world, and seek to address them with our evangelistic message (for example, see today's meditation above). However, there is also a message here about how we learn and grow within the body of God's people, the church. We must engage with the way in which God's people sometimes abandon the 'upright path' and accept instead the 'darkness of evil' (2:13). This was the concern of those who first wrote the Proverbs, and we should apply it in this way today.

Using wisdom in the church

I, like you, have wept at decisions made that have destroyed the good heritage of God's people within the church; these are often decisions made by those who place financial considerations above spiritual matters. I have seen people and churches spend years in darkness, turning this way and that (see 2:15) before coming to realise that the only sure heritage of faith lies in Christ and the wisdom of God is found in the heart not the balance sheet, and blessing comes when money serves Kingdom, not the other way round. Frankly, we can probably all give examples of where we believe that godly wisdom has been cast aside in the interests of other cultural issues. The important thing for us is to remain faithful to the 'path of an upright life' (2:13) and treasure and respect the wisdom and faith of those who have passed God's ways on to us. The sure sign that wisdom has been abandoned comes when individuals restructure the church and take authority to

themselves to pursue their own agendas. I have seen it too often, and it is the very antithesis of godly wisdom, and utterly foreign to the godly and faithful work of those who have served the church by building it up using the Scriptural models that have served to bring the Gospel to the whole world in the last two thousand years.

Each of us must make our judgements about what we see happening within the church today, whether it be the church local or national. The path of wisdom outlined for us in the book of Proverbs is a powerful reminder of what is of God, and what is not.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss whether you think the general concerns expressed within this study are true to your experience.
2. How can we apply the good things told us about wisdom in this passage of Scripture?
3. Where can you recognise godly wisdom in the life of the church today? How can people be encouraged to pursue wisdom today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Take some time to think about the life of the church and the people you know. Assess what has happened according to the general description of the consequences of wisdom, and the abandoning of it found within today's passage. It is my hope that as you think about this, you will identify some things that clearly demonstrate God's wisdom, and I suspect you will find that some things, and the actions of some people, that do not. Be careful to use Scripture to make such judgements and not your own natural or normal opinions. All of us need to exercise an ability to observe and assess what is wise and of God, and what is not; it is the beginning of true discernment.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Have you been caught up in any path of evil that has made it hard for you to pursue what you know is right and good? It is hard to accept that we have done what may be wrong, but deep inside, we know when we have gone along with others and done this. Offer such instances to the Lord and seek His help and forgiveness.*
- *Pray for all who are faced with dilemmas, particularly financial ones that appear to determine the future of the church. Pray for wisdom and godly leadership.*

Final Prayer

Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the revelation of Your love in every part of life. Forgive us when we forget that You are there in everything we do, and help us to turn to You, as many times as is necessary, so that we may never reach the end of a day without having come to You in peace, accepting Your forgiveness. Thank You Lord Jesus: AMEN.