

## Prayer

Lord God Almighty, You have made a truly magnificent world, and You have given us the pleasure of living in it! Give us a heart that always sees its beauty and offers praise, always seeks its truth and offers thanks, and always pursues its good and fights the wrong. With all Your people throughout the world, we give You praise and glory; Hallelujah! AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Food

*We will pray this week for the subject of food, and there are far more issues here than we can cover. Pray today for the food industry in general, and let the Holy Spirit lead you.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who face journeys through difficult territory*
- *Pray for celebrities who are in the public eye at the moment*
- *Give thanks to God for the joy and beauty of gardens and flowers*

## Meditation

Let us worship the Lord our God in every way possible!  
Let us sing songs of faith and joy which lift our hearts in praise!  
Let us confess our faith with enthusiasm, confidence and love;  
Let us then confess sins with honest and heartfelt repentance;  
Let us hear the words of grace that say; 'Your sins are forgiven!'  
Let us read psalms together, with generations of the faithful;  
Let us pray in intercession, as we are bidden by Scripture;  
Let us sing great hymns of faith, and declare what we believe;  
Let us hear the Words of Scripture, Old Testament and New;  
Let us listen to a sermon, the prophetic Word of God for all;  
Let us share bread and wine in thanksgiving for our salvation;  
Let us bless each other with the grace, and bind ourselves in love.  
Let us never fail to meet with regularity and worship the Lord;  
Thanks be to God for the gift of worship!

## Bible Study - Proverbs 3:1-8

<sup>1</sup> My child, do not forget my teaching, and keep my commandments in your heart; <sup>2</sup> for they will give you a full life and long life, and true peace. <sup>3</sup> Never let go of loyalty and faithfulness; bind them around your neck, and write them on the tablet of your heart. <sup>4</sup> You will then find favour and have a good reputation in the sight of God and of people. <sup>5</sup> Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own intellect. <sup>6</sup> Acknowledge him in everything you do, and he will make your paths straight. <sup>7</sup> Do not let yourself become wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and shun evil. <sup>8</sup> This will bring healing to your flesh and renewed strength to your body.

## Review

This is a powerful piece of Scripture. It is one of many passages within Proverbs that describes the common sense of doing what is right, in order to be at peace with God and with others. However, the true Christian knows that we cannot just do what this passage says and achieve the desired results, because sin stands in the way to divert us from our objective. The endemic nature of sin and evil in the world means that no-one can 'do what is right' all the time and find peace with God and fulfilment in life. These results are only to be found by faith, because our true liberty is obtained by the grace of God through Jesus, not through His laws and commandments (see Romans 3:21f. 5:1f.) However, this does not mean that we should cast such wisdom aside or neglect the truth of God's commandments and ways. Now that Christ has died for us, true wisdom and the teaching of Almighty God (as in verse 1) tells us firstly to place our trust in Him, and we will then be able to follow the teaching of this text through His power, and go on to discover the benefits of peace with God and with others.

### **Strong teaching**

All this is true for the entire teaching and wisdom of the Old Testament, but it is important for us to start with this Gospel truth today because this text (especially verses 5-8) is well known and frequently used as a basis for preaching. The whole passage contains a strong call for personal discipline and worthy action, and holds out the promise of all for which we could wish. However, outside of the salvation we find alone in Jesus Christ, the fulfilment of this passage remains a pious hope that is unachievable. So, with a prior understanding of the Gospel, we can begin to appreciate the simplicity and directness of this teaching. It has a simple structure; on four occasions, we are told what to do before the benefits are explained; moreover, the first two instructions are closely linked, as are the second two.

### **Instructions 1 and 2**

The first instruction tells us to remember God's wisdom and commands, as they are the secret of having fulfilment in life (3:1,2), and the second tells us not to lose sight of 'loyalty and faithfulness' by having physical and spiritual reminders of them (3:3) so that we may be well regarded by God and others (3:4). This sounds like the teaching of the Pharisees in Jesus' day, who wore pieces of the Law sewn into their garments! However, we also benefit from having disciplines that help us to remember both our faith and the moral teaching of God. For many, a daily quiet time performs this function, but the passage hints at the value of memorising Scripture or wearing reminders of our faith, both of which can help us demonstrate that what God has revealed to us is 'written on our hearts' (3:3). It is unfortunately true that if we ignore such simple disciplines then we easily forget the truth of the Gospel and fall into sin. We are not saved by doing these things or by 'doing good', but surely our aim as Christians is to be people who are known as being close to God because we maintain high standards of personal integrity and morality.

### **Instructions 3 and 4**

The third instruction warns us to 'trust the Lord' rather than our own intellect so that God can keep us on a 'straight path' (3:5,6), and the fourth similarly warns us not to become confident in our own wisdom. It is very interesting to read that these two instructions bring us healing and strength, and this connection is not some mysterious spiritual rule, it is God's 'common sense'. When we remain focussed on the Lord rather than our own strength and abilities, then He is able to bless us with all manner of healing and spiritual refreshment simply because the channels of communication are open between ourselves and our Lord. As soon as we prefer to work to our own perceived strengths and abilities, then these links are broken; the world cannot easily perceive this spiritual logic, but it makes perfect sense within God's order. It is of great importance for us to observe that healing, described in this passage of Proverbs as wholeness and fulfilment (3:2,8), is not

some kind of magic that is attached to the Gospel, it is the obvious consequence of keeping close to the Lord throughout life.

There is much more that can be found in this powerful passage, but if we approach it with the Gospel in mind, there will always be more to find!

## **Questions** *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group the different ways that we might use to remember and keep close to God's ways and His laws.
2. Is it important to 'find favour and have a good reputation' in the sight of God and others?
3. How easy is it to 'trust in the Lord' (3:5) in the various circumstances of life? At what point does this become hard and why.

## **Discipleship**

### **Personal comment:**

*I find this passage so full of good advice. But I realise that this is yet another passage of scripture (found whilst doing these studies) that appeals to me as the text for a sermon. My own difficulty is that I come across such passages and then promptly forget them. However, if I were to set up a file and jot down both the text and one or two lines about what has inspired me, then I could find this later and quickly recall the spiritual context of what could be a good sermon. I am always making suggestions to people about what to do in order to follow through the consequences of reading the Bible, and I know I should do this myself!*

### **Ideas for discipleship programme**

- *Consider taking one of the four wise spiritual suggestions within this passage (v1,3,5,7) and spending a few days thinking about how you might put this into practice in your life. It may seem rather abstract to think about how you might 'trust in the Lord' (3:5), for example, but unless we put such words into action, their spiritual truth is never fully realised in our lives.*
- *Pray for those who find it hard to understand God's healing because they feel that it does not apply to them; their experience is that God does not heal, and they have come to disbelieve rather than believe in God's healing power.*

## **Final Prayer**

Thank You, Lord God, for the little things of life which make our day and give us security in what we do: the love of those who are close to us, the things we do each day for others, and what they do for us, the food we eat, the drinks we enjoy, and the conversations we share each day. May we never stop praising You for the little things that make life good.  
AMEN