

## Prayer

Bring us happiness today, Lord Jesus! Lift our hearts to sing our songs of faith with joy, to listen to Your Word with care, to receive Your challenge with zeal, to share the fellowship of Your people with love, and to work with Your church on earth with commitment. May this be a glorious day of love, peace and action, O Lord; AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Light

*We take light for granted, yet it is essential to life. This week we will focus our prayers on how we use light. Pray today for the poor who have to rely completely on the sun for light.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray about the growing conflict in some regions of Pakistan*
- *Pray for the key political issues in your country at the moment*
- *Give thanks for the love and care shown to you by other people*

## Meditation

He is the Lord, He is Christ our Saviour.

He is the Righteous Judge to whom we appeal for mercy,  
who knows that truth will set us free.

He is the Counsellor whose caring support lasts forever;  
who knows our mind, soul and spirit.

He is the Father who remembers His love for His children,  
who places us in fellowship with others.

He is the Guide whose pathway and guidance is sure;  
who is with us as we pass through trials.

He is the Covenant Lord, who loves us more than we know;  
who knows our beginning and our end.

He is the God of power whose strength is always with us,  
who constantly fights our enemies for us.

He is the Lord, He is Christ our Saviour.

## Bible Study - Proverbs 4:20-27

<sup>20</sup> *My child, pay attention to what I say  
and listen carefully to my words;*      *and keep a distance from devious  
speech.*

<sup>21</sup> *do not let them escape your notice;  
keep them within your heart.*      <sup>25</sup> *Let your eyes look forward  
and fix your gaze straight ahead.*

<sup>22</sup> *For they are life to those who find  
them,  
and healing to the whole body.*      <sup>26</sup> *Make sure you walk on the level,  
and all your paths will be firm.*

<sup>23</sup> *Above all things guard your heart;  
for it contains the source of life.*      <sup>27</sup> *Do not turn either to the right or the  
left,  
and walk away from evil.*

<sup>24</sup> *Put away all dishonest talk,*

## Review

Wisdom continues her appeal to the learning child, and this passage has a general purpose, which is to summarise some basic truths about how to live in a godly and moral way. We could read this as if it applied merely to children alone; but surely all of us who accept the privilege of being God's children know that we too must pay attention to maintaining the basic truths of God's moral order; for unless we know the basics, it will be impossible for us to handle more complex issues. All the advice of this passage is worth our attention, however 'old' we are in faith or however far we think of ourselves as having travelled on the Christian journey.

The first thing we must do is to give proper value to the wisdom we have already been taught (4:20), whether directly from the Bible, or by teachers of the church or through our reading. Yet because we rarely hear sermons or Bible teaching on Wisdom in church today, most of us will have to read God's Wisdom from the Bible ourselves, straight from the book of Proverbs. Moral Wisdom is highly valued by God and should be by us, and we are asked to keep it close within our hearts (4:21). In Hebrew, the heart is one of those words that describes people in general, but particularly our ability to decide; so the 'heart' may be said to be the seat of our 'will', not our emotions! Certainly, this passage does not ask us to keep Wisdom close to our hearts for sentimental reasons! This understanding of what we mean by the 'heart' is confirmed two verses further on, where the heart is described as containing the 'source of life' (4:23). No explanation of this is given, but it is obvious that Proverbs sees the heart as working like a filter which decides what to do with the information received, determining what is good or bad, and what to do about it; incidentally, this is rather like how we think a brain works today. Therefore, the first thing we have learned is that God has given us 'a heart' so that we can make moral choices, and we must exercise this ability.

Moral wisdom is then described as 'life' and 'healing' (4:22); but this not a healing we can apply to people like a prayer, after which we might say, 'you should feel better now'. Wisdom brings healing to the whole body because when we have sought it and done all in our power to live by it in the power of the Holy Spirit, our bodies will benefit physically from the spiritual rest and emotional peace we can enjoy. The healing ministry is an important part of the life of the church, but it is helpful when those involved in the healing ministry recognise that God's 'wholeness' (shalom) of every kind of physical and spiritual healing may be found by pursuing and living by God's Wisdom. Deeply hurt people can be brought to a place of peace, sometimes, simply through the application of Wisdom. The wisdom and truth of Christ can give the right perspective to help people order their lives, and find healing and peace.

Next, we are told to keep a distance from evil (4:24), because it pollutes our minds and diverts us away from valuing what is good and right. This is an important message. All of us live in a world in which it is impossible to avoid coming across sexual images, foul speech, lying and corruption, for example. However, this passage suggests that we make it our business to keep our distance from these things and avert our eyes; but not just our eyes and our ears, our minds as well. Temptation is always at hand; 'let your eyes look forward, and fix your gaze straight ahead.' (4:25)

The final piece of advice concerns our 'pathway' (4:26), meaning the general direction of life. Essentially, two things are said. Firstly, we should ensure that the pathway on which we walk is firm. The Christian pathway is that set out for us by Jesus; it is a narrow path that leads to eternal life, and this is the only path of life that is 'sure', or 'firm' according to God's Word; all other tempting paths of life will distract us from what is ultimately true. Then, the last piece of advice is that if we see evil, we should 'walk away' from it (4:27).

Evil's intent, however presented to us whether through a person, a picture, music, substances or circumstance, is to draw us in by a subtle and repeated invitation, to hold the temptation in our minds until it becomes irresistible, and until we fall. Genesis 3 clearly explains how evil works through temptation, and the only way to deal with it is to present it to Jesus and ask Him to take it out of our minds.

All this may appear straightforward, but the best thing we can do is to confess to the Lord that keeping on track with even these basics of morality is no easy matter, and we need God's help, the help of Jesus to enable us to be victorious, and wise, in all we do.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Which pieces of advice here in this passage do you find easy to act upon, and which are difficult?
2. What do we mean by the 'heart' today? How does this compare with what we find in the Bible?
3. Discuss any practical illustrations you can give of how to 'look forward and fix your gaze straight ahead' (4:25). Is this helpful?

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*Sometimes, the Christian disciple can feel bombarded by what different passages of Scripture say and what different preachers say about how to live the Christian life. Trying to prioritise what is important when trying to live a Godly life can be profoundly difficult. Nevertheless, we all have to work out what we believe is important, and there are words of wisdom in this passage that we do well to give attention to. All of us have to learn how to let the Holy Spirit help us apply what the Spirit brings to our attention.*

### Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Quite separate from reading this passage, write out a list of the priorities that determine the Christian life you live. Afterwards, compare this with our passage today and see what it might have to offer.*
- *Think and pray about what it means to identify the 'heart' as the centre of our ability to decide. Think about how your own heart functions to direct the things that you do. Are you on automatic all the time, or do you work out many of the details of life as you go along? All this is to do with the way the heart works.*

## Final Prayer

We offer You our love, Heavenly Father, for you have loved us with a love that is beyond our understanding. Cleanse our impurities and make us worthy of everything You have done for us, and continue to do this for us day by day. Accept our thanks, today and every day, and guide us into all truth. Thank You heavenly Father; AMEN