

Prayer

We do not know Your plans for the world, Lord God, and we do not know how You are able to do so much for so many people. Nevertheless, we praise You for Your salvation, always available for the countless billions of people for whom you care; and we praise You for the control You have of time and the eternal destiny of our world. Bring all things to their proper conclusion in Your time, we pray, and save all those who have placed their trust in You. Thank you, Lord God, AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Light

Pray today that God will bring the light of His truth into the world in every possible way; the truth of the Gospel, and the truth about life, the world and eternity. Pray for His blessing.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for Burma, and the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi*
- *Pray for people who will today be told they have cancer*
- *Give thanks for the many blessings given to you by the Lord*

Meditation

Distress colours the mind and distracts the soul;

It becomes hard to know what to do and where to look:

But the peace of Christ absorbs the colours of pain

Restoring poise to the mind, the soul, the spirit.

Anxiety distorts our sense of time and perspective;

It becomes hard to be patient, trusting or positive:

But the love of Jesus soaks up painful experiences

Through the spiritual empathy of His followers.

The pain of suffering is never far from anyone;

We cannot avoid the reality of life in a fallen world:

But the saving work of Christ is no sham, no stunt,

For God loves all, and longs to help us in our trials.

So let us not turn from Him in our distress; He holds the answer.

Bible Study - Proverbs 5:1-6

¹ *My child, pay attention to my wisdom,
and listen carefully to my knowledge;*

² *so that you maintain good judgement,
And guard knowledge with your speech.*

³ *For the speech of an adulteress drips with honey,
And her mouth is smoother than oil;*

⁴ *but in the end she is as bitter as gall
Sharp as a double-edged sword.*

⁵ *Her feet go down to death,
And her steps mark the track to Hell!*

⁶ *Lest she discover the straight path of life,
She wanders about in ignorance.*

Review

In this plain and concise passage, the teacher continues to urge the pupil on, so that true wisdom and knowledge might be grasped and then passed on. In the past as well as today, the temptations of the world have always been there to draw young people away from what they have learned, and this passage contrasts the plain speaking of the teacher of wisdom with the seductive temptations of the word that hold no hope for those who wish to lead a wholesome and happy life.

Scripture continues to insist upon the merits of attaining God's knowledge as an important part of the spiritual life. It is important that this Biblical truth be accepted, because in emphasising the importance of faith, some have wrongly implied that knowledge is not important. The result is that too many Christian people today have become disempowered, because they lack the clear knowledge of their faith and are consequently unable to grow as God's people. This is not a matter of what the Old Testament says, different from the New, for Paul says the same thing in the first few verses of Romans 12. It is vital for God's people to learn more and more about what He has done through Christ, and also how He can be found within the world He has made. This will make them fruitful witnesses, and enable them to live at peace with God in His world.

The teacher in this part of the book of proverbs tells us plainly that wisdom and knowledge are part of God's way of helping us maintain 'good judgement', and 'guard knowledge with ... speech' (5:2). The first of these points is relatively obvious, for discernment and good judgement are clearly related to how much someone knows; putting this the other way around, we can hardly expect to make good judgements about things we know nothing about! We need God's help to make good judgement as well, but it is somewhat presumptive of us to expect Him to spoon-feed us with this if we have not cared to gain in knowledge and understanding ourselves. The second half of verse 2 is less clear. The Hebrew is not straightforward because a literal translation would read 'your lips guard knowledge', and the idea behind this seems to be that what we choose to say can affect the knowledge we possess. This is true insofar as we can certainly damage both our knowledge and our judgement if we have the habit of speaking loosely and without discernment. This is a strong warning to us, for the Bible has several significant texts that speak of the importance of controlling our speech for the good of our faith and the good of all (e.g. James 1:26, 3:1f.)

Temptation exists all around us to abandon God's path of wisdom and sound judgement. In this passage, we are introduced for the first time to the powerful image of an adulteress who stands in opposition to 'Wisdom', and remember that Wisdom was introduced to us earlier, characterised as a woman (3:13-18). There is a timeless quality to the description of sexual worldly temptations in verses 3 and 4, and they apply to modern pornography just as well as adultery. Sexual temptation draws a person's mind away from what it should be doing and occupies it with lust, and the power of lust is not just what it leads to, but its ability to consume the mind and the heart to the exclusion of all else. In addition, lust can draw the human soul into physical desire for another person, and where this leads to sex, the consequences are not merely physical they are spiritual as well. This is because God made sex to be the spiritual seal of a covenant relationship between one man and one woman, and if lust draws someone to have sex outside of marriage, possibly with a number of partners over a period of time, the prospect of a sexually complete and satisfying marriage is placed in grave danger. This is the 'two-edged sword' that leads to the bitterness spoken of in this passage (5:4).

Much learning takes place in a young person's life at the same time they are growing sexually, and the pattern of choices made can determine much that consequently happens. If anything, this passage warns the Christian church of the importance of keeping close to growing young people, to help them make choices about faith and life that will stand them in good stead for the future. Proverbs continues with this theme in the verses that follow, as we will find out in coming studies.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what way does knowledge support faith, and faith support knowledge? Is one of these more dependent upon the other?
2. In what ways do you see Jesus revealed within this passage, if at all? What is His teaching about sex and marriage?
3. Discuss the main temptations that draw young people away from faith in today's world.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

This passage speaks about two things, wisdom and knowledge, and sex. Both of them are potential minefields for the Christian! As Proverbs points out, the two are connected, and certainly, the point in time when young people are supposed to be learning at their highest rate is the same time that they are learning about themselves as sexual beings, and beginning to explore what this means. Certainly, this must surely be born in mind when the church attempts to work with young people. Does this not teach us of the urgency of teaching young people about God's purpose for sex and sexual gratification whilst they are in their teenage years, both learning and also exploring the world?

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *In what ways are the decisions you take today a reflection of what you learned as you were growing up? What patterns of behaviour did you learn as a youngster which have remained with you ever since? Reflect on these questions, and ask the Lord to help you with the consequences.*
- *Pray for the young people you know at your church or in your family. We mostly refrain from thinking about how they are growing sexually, but we should be aware of this and pray for them. Their lives depend on this!*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, give us eyes for You and You alone. Through the many temptations that the world has to offer, help us avoid them all through our single-minded focus upon You and Your Kingdom. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ: AMEN