

Prayer

Speak to me Lord Jesus in the quiet moments of this day;
Touch me when I need to be reminded to follow in Your way;
Encourage me to exercise the gifts and graces You have given me;
Inspire me to do greater things for You than I have ever done before;
Walk beside me, and may Your wisdom be with me in all I do and say;
AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Education

Pray for those you know who are parents of children at school. Much happens to families in the school years, so support them prayerfully as their children grow year by year.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks to God for your health, and His power to heal
- Pray about the serious threat to world peace posed by N. Korea
- Lift to the Lord your prayers for this world and the planet's future

Meditation

Jesus,

Your birth was foretold by kings and prophets;
And accepted by those who could hear Your voice.
Your teaching took the old and made it anew;
And was understood by those who kept close to You.
Your power to heal changed the lives of the sick;
And You commissioned Your disciples to do the same.
Your mercy was given to both men and women;
And all those You met were treated with equality.
Your death was a tragedy of evil and misjudgement;
And You bled for our sins without cursing our souls.
Your resurrection frightened those first in Your tomb;
And yet this is now our greatest joy and salvation.
You ascended to the Father to release Your Spirit,
And we have been blessed by Your gifts and graces.
You have done everything according to Your Father's will;

Alleluia!

Bible Study - Proverbs 5:15-23

¹⁵ Drink water from your own cistern,
running water from your own well.

¹⁶ Should your springs be scattered around,
streams of water in the streets?

¹⁷ Keep them for yourself alone,

- and not share them with strangers.*
- ¹⁸ *Let your fountain be blessed,
and rejoice in the wife of your youth,*
- ¹⁹ *a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
May her breasts always satisfy you;
may you be intoxicated always by her love.*
- ²⁰ *Why, my son, should you be intoxicated by another woman
and cling to the bosom of an adulteress?*
- ²¹ *For our ways are all seen by the LORD,
and he examines every path we take.*
- ²² *The youthful sins of the wicked ensnare them,
and they are entrapped by the ropes of their sin.*
- ²³ *They die for lack of discipline,
and because of their great folly they are lost.*

Review

Following the theme of this part of the book of Proverbs, this passage is about marriage and sex. The advice is stunningly simple and straightforward; men and women are most fulfilled in their relations with each other if they have given themselves to each other exclusively, and preferably from 'youth' (5:18). The passage begins with warnings about sexual excess written in the typically dry style of wisdom literature (5:15-17) and then slips into far more expansive and beautiful poetry to describe the wonders of a marriage when two people are committed exclusively to each other in their sexual relationship (5:18-20). The last three verses add further moral and spiritual comment on the sexual activities of people, including the advice that God sees everything (5:21-23)!

Every age and generation has its own way of talking about sexual matters in a somewhat indirect way, and it is not difficult to spot the obvious, which is that drinking 'from your own cistern' and 'running water from your own well' in verse 15 means keeping your sexual activity within your own marriage. If you follow this understanding into the next verse (5:16), we are presented next with a sordid picture of sexual excess; 'springs scattered around', and 'streams of water in the streets'. There is distain within the writer's words that is clearly intended. These verses remind us that our newspapers and television programmes are full of the gossip of infidelity, which is all presented to us as if it were normal behaviour. It is not, and it is even more dangerous when God's people merely accept this to be the nature of their society rather than challenge it for the good of all.

There are powerful ties created between people by means of sexual contact, and when this is within the exclusive arena of marriage, God rejoices at every expression of sexual feeling and intimacy. They are the full expression of the unity of spirit that He intends for a man and a woman, and this is celebrated in the wonderful central section of this passage 'rejoice in the wife of your youth ... may her breasts always satisfy you' (5:18,19). The passage goes on to talk about being unashamedly intoxicated with the sexual love of a partner in marriage.

For those who discover such a relationship, this treasure can never be worth risking. Nevertheless, many people feel trapped because the breakdown of sexual relationships within their marriages has torn them apart. They have not experienced the 'perfection' of a relationship under God, and find it painful to be reminded of their failure by a passage of Scripture such as this. Two things should be said about this. Firstly, it is not beyond the power of God to heal the broken spirit, even a spirit that has been broken because of the breakdown of a sexual relationship and marriage itself; but restoration will only be found when sin is confessed and forgiveness is offered, for that is God's path of love and healing.

Secondly, if Christians fail to witness to the importance of exclusive sexual relationships within marriage, then they fail in their duty both to God and to the world. People will always rebel against what is right and true, but unless Christians help set the moral tone of society, too many people will suffer.

The final verses (5:21-23) are a warning that God sees all things. It is the greatest lie of all that we are able to 'keep things to ourselves', particularly sexual sin or excess. Sin makes for its own entrapment (5:22), and much of it starts with ill-discipline and the rebelliousness of youth. Scripture is unrelenting in its presentation of this truth and its consequences; but the power of its description of a right sexual relationship within marriage here is powerful.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Does the church give a consistent message to young people today about the importance of sex within marriage?
2. Is it right or wrong to talk about how people express themselves sexually? How do you respond to verse 19?
3. How can the church minister to those who have not experienced the best of sexual relationships?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

God sees everything we do including our sexual behaviour. This thought may well be what we should keep in mind. Whilst some people find that it is easy to remain exclusive in their affections, some do not; and for such people, a reminder of God's all-seeing power may prove to be helpful and important. Certainly, young people need to know about passages of scripture such as these. Much is taught in school these days about sex and relationships, but what is being said about God's ways?

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Whether you are married or single, I suggest spending some time in prayer, bringing your own feelings about sexual matters to Him. He will understand and help.*
- *Pray for the world and the country in which you live, and pray about the sexual excesses present on television and other media.*

Final Prayer

This day, Lord God, is Your precious gift. We ask You to keep us from falling and fulfil Your purposes in us each day and throughout our lives. Bring us to the end of the day rejoicing, and may we be glad to be Your servants, who praise You throughout everything we do and say. AMEN