

Prayer

Lord God, we offer You our hopes and dreams, our thoughts and feelings, and our faith and deeds. Align each of these with the priorities of Your Kingdom and Your eternal plan, and grant each of us joy and happiness as we live as Your disciples according to Your call. Thank You for calling us and using us, Lord God; may we always serve You according to Your will. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Travel

Pray about your own travel. Ask the Lord to help you decide whether it is all necessary and whether you should look at alternatives or seek to avoid unnecessary travel.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the gift of time and a weekend to use it!
- Pray for the United Nations, for it to help nations work together
- Pray for the success of attempts to build world financial stability

Meditation

Jesus, what do You see when You look at us?

Do you see disciples who are committed to You?

Do you see people who live as if they know

That without Christ, sin holds sway in this world?

Do you see people who read Your Word,

And seek the fullest understanding of Your Gospel?

Do You see people energised by the Spirit

Transformed by the redeeming power of Your love?

Do You see people motivated to do Your work,

Confident You can use them to change the world?

Do you see people who talk to you in prayer,

Who share everything with You, in complete trust?

Do you see people who are completely obedient,

Willing to do whatever You ask, at whatever the cost?

Jesus, what do You see when You look at us?

Tell us the truth, for this, and this alone, can set us free.

Bible Study - Proverbs 1:20-23

²⁰Wisdom calls outside in the streets;
she raises her voice in open
squares.

²¹She cries out above the noisiest
commotion,
and speaks at the entrance of the
city gates:

²²How long, simple people, will you
love being simple?
And how long will mockers delight
in mockery
and fools hate knowledge?

²³If you turn and heed my warning,
then I will pour out my spirit on
you

and make my words known to you.

Review

In this wonderful and expressive passage of Scripture, we are introduced to 'Wisdom', not as an abstract concept, but as a character. What is most fascinating about this description is that Wisdom is described as a woman, and the Hebrew is very clear that Wisdom is definitely female! Where the Bible describes a human characteristic or an abstract idea such as 'Wisdom' as a person, this is called 'personification'; and in this passage, it adds to the drama of the picture presented. Later on in the book of Proverbs, Wisdom's femininity is used to help make a number of very important points, especially to young people, about relationships between men and women (see, for example, Proverbs 5:1-6).

The places where Wisdom speaks In reading this passage however, we hear a powerful story about how wisdom confronts foolish people and invites them to turn, and to hear and receive the things of God. It reads like a small parable, which is a story that tells us a truth about God, and this is undoubtedly how we should read this text and interpret it. However, the 'mini-story' is far more dramatic than we might think, and our understanding of it depends upon whether we recognise the significance of where Wisdom speaks.

Firstly, in verse 20, she speaks in the 'streets'. The Hebrew word for this means 'the outside' and refers to the land area immediately outside of the grouped dwelling places in which extended families lived in the towns and cities of the Old Testament. Secondly, she raises her voice in the 'squares', which were larger open places where people would gather to do business and conduct trade; such open places were regarded as representing the nature and character of the people of that place (see, for example, Nehemiah 8:1). In two famous Old Testament stories the town square was a place of great evil; as it was in Sodom (Gen 19:2) and also in the town of Gibeah in the dreadful story of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19:11f.). Lastly, Wisdom speaks at the city gates. These are mentioned in Scripture generally as places where the elders of a community gathered in order to conduct formal business, decide issues of law, and dispense justice (see Ruth 4:10,11). So, when Amos gave his famous cry for justice amongst God's people, for example, he directed what he said to those 'in the gates' (Amos 5:10f.).

A woman demands to be heard! When we revisit the story with all this in mind, our understanding of it changes remarkably. Wisdom is a woman, someone who would not normally have a right to engage in the business or discussions of a town or city square, or even in the entrance gate! Our parable, or 'mini-story', describes her shouting out above the commotion and bustle of town or city life, and demanding attention! Who is this woman, and why does she demand to be heard in this way? As Wisdom, she is none other than God's agent, come to challenge the culture of popular gossip, loose talk, mockery and foolishness that easily takes hold of people when they get together in larger social groups. Women are often characterised by men as agents of gossip, but God has characterised His Wisdom as a woman!

The offer of Wisdom to give the 'Spirit' More than this, Wisdom makes an extraordinary offer. If anyone is willing to listen, she makes this extraordinary promise: 'I will pour out my spirit on you and make my words known to you'. It is fascinating that the Hebrew word 'ruach' which means 'breath' or 'spirit' is part of this promise, and in this sentence, it means quite specifically the Spirit of wisdom. Acting as God's moral agent, the offer made by Wisdom is prophetic, for it hints at the blessing of the presence of the Holy Spirit, given to those who respond to God's offer of salvation in Christ. Surely the greatest wisdom is to respond to God's work in the world and accept His offer of salvation!

These four verses are a small treasure in the midst of these early chapters of Proverbs. As we go further into the book, we will read much more about Wisdom. We should not make

the mistake of Christians in the early church, however, who equated Wisdom with God. The character of Wisdom in Proverbs is a woman who demonstrates the moral properties of God through the means of story and proverb. She is a personified illustration, used by a teacher of ancient times to convey the morality of God; His Wisdom.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How can wisdom's voice be heard above the clamour of the streets today?
2. Where does Wisdom's voice need to be heard in our own country and your own village, street, town or city?
3. Is wisdom something that people have naturally, or do we need the Spirit of God in order to exercise true wisdom?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The figure of Wisdom does the work of God, and we need to hear what 'she' has to say. Equally, however, we can be God's agents of wisdom in the world today, for through the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives, work of Wisdom is also our work. Wisdom should not be thought of as a very special 'high-brow' gifting, reserved only for the few. This passage of Scripture describes Wisdom as being the opposite of foolishness and simplicity, which is godliness and the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. There is no reason why anyone who knows Christ cannot aspire to using and demonstrating the gift of Wisdom, through the Holy Spirit.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *In what ways has the Holy Spirit worked in your life to demonstrate gifts of wisdom? As you answer this question for yourself, try not to be either spiritually shy or inappropriately bold, but plainly honest. How can you foster that gift of wisdom?*
- *Pray for those who struggle to accept that 'Wisdom' can be a part of God's work in their lives. Pray that they will be encouraged to believe better things about themselves by the power of God's Spirit.*

Final Prayer

Thank You, heavenly Father, for the gift of those we love and cherish. Thank You for the way that they enrich our lives, for the way that a smile can turn our day around, and for the way that we can testify to the joy of living together in peace and harmony. Sustain us in our families we pray; AMEN