

Final Prayer

Keep me honest, Lord God, I pray. Show me how to live in a way that reflects truth and integrity before others; not so that I might claim any virtue myself, but so that I might demonstrate the benefits of doing what is right according to Your will. I ask this in Jesus' name, AMEN

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for the precious gift of this day. Lead us, we pray, through its joys and its troubles, and may we continue to praise You throughout the whole day. May we grow stronger in faith as we learn more about how to deal in a loving and godly way with the many different things that happen to us. We praise You, Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Hope

It may seem strange to suggest 'hope' as a subject for prayer. However, hope has been lost in so many situations, yet Christ can show the way. Pray for one that you know about.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for victims of rape, and for justice for the abused*
- *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*

Meditation

Come, my friend, and worship the Lord:

For He will accept you just as you are.

Bring your life and confess all your sins:

For the Lord will hear your heart and forgive.

Bring your hopes and your precious dreams:

For the Lord will fulfil His purposes in You.

Bring your songs and be released in praise:

For the Lord will be glorified in His heaven.

Bring your ears to attend to His Word:

For the Lord will lead You into all truth.

Bring your prayers for yourself and for others:

For the Lord will give you His answers in love.

Bring your desire to follow in His ways:

For the Lord will bless each step you take.

Go, my friend, having worshipped the Lord:

For the He will be with you wherever you go.

Bible Study - Proverbs 1:24-33

²⁴ *But I called and you dismissed me,
I stretched out my hand and no
one took notice.*

²⁵ *So because you have neglected all
my advice
and rejected my warnings,*

²⁶ *I will laugh at your misfortune,
and will mock you when panic
overcomes you;*

²⁷ *When terror strikes you like a storm,
and your dismay batters you like
a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish
overpower you.*

²⁸ *That is when they will call to me, but
I will not answer,
and they will hunt for me, but not
find me.*

²⁹ For they hated knowledge
and did not choose to fear the
LORD,

³⁰ they have ignored my advice,
and dismissed all my criticism,

³¹ So now they will have to eat the fruit
of their own way
and be stuffed with their own way
of doing things.

³² For wilful disobedience kills the
simple,
and the smugness of fools
destroys them;

³³ but those who listen to me will live in
security;
at ease, and without fear of
disaster."

Bible Study

In yesterday's passage, Wisdom raised her voice to shout above the hubbub of the streets, the town squares and the city gates, and claim a right to be heard. Remarkably, Wisdom is a woman, and the Bible uses the literary technique of 'personified' as a way of teaching God's truth. Her dramatic entrance onto the scene of everyday life came with a prophetic promise that she would reward all those who listened to her; she said, 'I will pour out my spirit on you and make my words known to you!' (1:23). This is a remarkable promise because it directs us forwards in time to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost when God empowered the disciples to preach the Gospel and commence the work of evangelism by which God has been made known in the world through His visible 'church'. However, in the passage we have read today, Wisdom dramatically addresses those who have gathered to hear her speak, and delivers a stunning address.

Wisdom gives a warning Wisdom begins by giving a warning typical of many prophets in the Old Testament. She complains immediately that she has been available to help God's people but they have not paid her attention (1:24,25). As a consequence she will have no sympathy for them when trouble strikes as a direct result of their folly (1:26,27). From this point onwards, she identifies the fruit of this folly and the consequence of rejecting wisdom; and she muses about the fate of those she has spoken to; 'they hated knowledge ... they have ignored my advice' (1:29,30) she says, so 'they will have to eat the fruit of their own way and be stuffed with their own way of doing things' (1:31)!

The offer of free information Wisdom is utterly dismissive of all those who have chosen to reject her promises. Her offer of what is morally good and right has been given in good faith, but has been rejected. It is not said in so many words, but Scripture paints a picture of Wisdom shouting out and making her free offer in the same way that today we might hand out free information on the streets wherever people gather. Many of us know what it is like to try and hand out Christian literature on the streets, for example, and be rejected over and over again as people walk by. In verse 26, Wisdom responds to those who have rejected her offer; 'I will laugh at your misfortune' she says, 'and mock you when panic overcomes you'. These words are highly dismissive, and they make us wonder whether this really is the way that God reacts to the rejection of what He has to offer. Does all this truly reflect our God and His morality?

Wisdom, God's agent We must be careful; Wisdom herself is not God, she is the agent and representative of morality and good teaching. If you have been in the place where trouble has come on you after you rejected good advice, then you will know that inner feeling of 'I told you so', which no-one needs to say, but sits heavily on your mind. Indeed, if someone says this, it feels like adding insult to injury, because the truth is already obvious to us. This is the general sense of the first part of our passage, and Wisdom acts like a voice inside us, warning us that once good teaching and advice has been rejected, it can be very hard to take hold of it again (1:28). There is much more in this passage, but this is an important cautionary note, and it illustrates how 'Wisdom' works.

The lessons of rejection As Wisdom turns to those she is tutoring as a teacher, she draws out the lessons of her offer and the rejection of it (1:29,30). If you read verse 31 in most translations of the Bible, you will find phrases that are a little obscure, such as this from the New Revised Standard Version 'they will eat the fruit of their own way and be sated with their own devices' (1:31). This is something most people would find hard to understand except in the most general sense. However, the picture is really very simple; for those who reject good teaching become so full of their own ideas and schemes that there is nothing left for anything else and they cannot see the good within anything other than their own ideas. How tragic!. Every society has a colloquial phrase for people like this, but I have tried to express the Hebrew clearly with a hint of a dismissive tone such as that we might use for those who are full of themselves; they are 'stuffed ...' (1:31).

At the end, Wisdom does not offer salvation or restoration of a relationship with Almighty God or any escape from the troubles of the world, because she is not the Saviour of the world! However, she does offer security in faith, and freedom from the fear of disaster. It is not an offer that should be turned down.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group what it feels like to have done something wrong after obtaining good advice, and how you deal with such feelings.
2. What does this passage of Scripture say about God's attitude towards those who reject the moral truth of Wisdom?
3. What examples can you give from real life of verse 31? How can God help someone who is 'full of themselves'?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Within this Scripture I hear echoes of so many conversations I have had with people who have decided to reject the things of God and go their own way. They have all the arguments to enable them to turn away from external advice and prefer their own judgement. One of the biggest concerns I have is that some of these conversations have been had with Christians. I find it disturbing when I speak to those who profess faith and yet reject almost all the classic doctrines of the church and even the doctrine of salvation itself. There are clergy in the church who do not believe in salvation! I dread to think not so much of what they might make of a passage such as this (because I know they will regard it as of literary interest), but of what will happen to them when the truth of this Scripture begins to dawn on them, and I pray that they will not be too late to turn again to the Saviour!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Can you take criticism? Who can you take it from, and who can you not take it from? This may sound very 'random', but the more you think about this, the more you will realise that it gets to the heart of much of your faith and how it works out in practice. All of us need to be able to take the Lord's criticism (1:30)*
- *Pray for those who are full of themselves and who have neither the confidence to trust others nor the spiritual depth to trust God. Pray that they may be so challenged by the Lord that they will face the inadequacies of their own ways and be forced to consider that they must look for wisdom outside of themselves.*