

Prayer

We are grateful, Lord God, for the privilege of being touched by Your love. You have been gracious to us and pursued us in love. You have taught us right from wrong and brought us to a place of repentance. May we never turn away from this touch of Your love, which has proved to be our healing, our empowerment, and our encouragement. Bring us safely through the trials of life, we pray, to our home in glory; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Houses

Houses are important to each of us. We need to have not just a shelter, but a space we can feel is 'ours'. Ask God's blessing on your own home and those who share it with you.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for what the Lord God has done to bless you today
- Pray about the example set to the young by sports personalities
- Pray for people whose governments do not represent them

Meditation

We have been created for love

So let us demonstrate care for one another

We have been created for passion

So let us experience life to the full

We have been created for fellowship

So let us value each other's company

We have been created to be fruitful

So let us use the gifts we have been given

We have been created for fulfilment

So let us live our lives with purpose

We have been created to be productive

So let us be dynamic and fully employed

We have been created to be spiritual

So let us give ourselves for the purposes of God.

Bible Study - Proverbs 3:19-26

¹⁹ The LORD founded the world by wisdom, and set up the heavens by understanding; ²⁰ through his knowledge the deep waters broke apart, and the clouds let dew form on the ground. ²¹ My child, do not let these things slip from your view: keep sound wisdom and discretion, ²² and they will be life for your soul, like graceful jewellery. ²³ Then you will go on your way in safety and your feet will not stumble. ²⁴ When you go to bed, you need not be afraid, for when you fall asleep you will have pleasant slumber. ²⁵ Do not be afraid of sudden terror, or disaster that comes upon the wicked; ²⁶ for you will be confident in the LORD and He will prevent your foot from being trapped.

Review

The book of Proverbs offers us some truly wonderful word pictures. This passage uses imagery that reminds us of the first chapter of Genesis to tell us that wisdom was part of the very foundation of the world. However, it goes on to talk about wisdom in a very homely and personal way, describing it as like jewellery (3:22), a sure pathway (3:23) and something that will enable us to sleep well at nights (3:24). Putting the majestic glory of wisdom alongside its personal value encapsulates the wonder and the glory of God, who is far greater than anything we can grasp or comprehend, but is also known to us personally and supremely through Jesus Christ our friend and our Saviour.

It is no wonder that early Christians thought the character of 'wisdom' in the Old Testament was something to be very closely identified with Jesus. This is a very helpful idea, for most of what is said about the personal value of wisdom in this passage is very true to what we would want to say about the presence of Christ in our lives as Saviour and Lord. The parallels are clear; although Jesus is God, and He was present at the very beginning of the creation of the world (3:19, and see John 1:1-5), He is our Saviour. He leads us in safety and security, He protects us whilst we sleep, and we turn to Him in the face of danger; we place our trust in Him so that we are not trapped by the works of the enemy! (3:22-26). In the very last verse of this passage, the writer concludes by saying that wisdom will keep us close to 'the Lord', using the sacred four letter word for God; JHWH ('Jahweh') to indicate the holiness of wisdom. However, Jesus alone who grants people access to God (Romans 5:1f.).

Some early Christians were carried away with the parallels between wisdom and Jesus, and they claimed that the two were one and the same 'person'. The whole matter became difficult because verse 19 was put together with a later passage from Proverbs which speaks about wisdom with these words; 'The Lord created me at the beginning of His work, the first of His acts long ago ... I was set up ... at the beginning of the earth' (8:22,23). I will explain this passage in greater depth when we come to it later in these studies, and I will show how this passage describes wisdom as part of God's character, not all of it, and wisdom here in Proverbs is certainly not identical with Jesus. However, it is easy to see how the confusion arose, and it was not long scholars pointed out that wisdom was described in the Old Testament as a woman (see the preceding verses 11-18, and 1:20f.) but Jesus was clearly a man! So to say that Jesus and 'wisdom' are identical is obviously wrong! By reading letters and document that have survived from the second and third centuries AD, we can trace the way the church came to the conclusion that 'wisdom' was not the same character as Jesus, the Saviour. The character of wisdom had the same purpose as other stories and characters in the Old Testament such as David, and the story of the prophet Jonah. All of these point towards Jesus, but none of them can be said to be the same as the Messiah Himself.

None of this should distract us from the power of these words in giving us a description of the greatest mystery of the Universe, which is the fact that on the one hand, God is majestic and beyond our understanding, and at the same time, He is through Jesus as close to us as jewellery and sleep. We should not forget the warning that comes with this great revelation, though. We must not 'let these things slip from view' (3:21) by which the writer means we should not let the teaching about God that wisdom affords slip out of view. Without it, we will not be 'confident in the Lord' as this passage describes and as our Lord God intends (3:26). We all need the security of being able to trust the Lord in the midst of our troubles, but we are advised to make sure that we keep close to Him at all times if we are to obtain and retain this priceless treasure.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Look up the first ten verses of Genesis 1 and compare it with verses 19 and 20. What parallels do you find, and what do they mean?
2. In what ways do you experience the closeness of the Lord?
3. Share any testimony you may have of when the Lord has kept you safe in the midst of trouble.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Some people like to go walking to gain a sense of the greatness and wonder of God, looking into the distance and watching the clouds, gazing out to sea or looking at the sweeping hills or mountains. But there is still the ground and the plants and insects under our feet that are as much a part of the world, and still very close to us. I find that anywhere I look, even at concrete or steel, God is there and to be found. The more I look, the more I see! I thank God that He has given me this gift, and I hope that other people are so blessed as well!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What do you do to try to gain a greater picture of the glorious majesty of God? Do take whatever opportunities present themselves to you to explore the presence of God in the world, and make contact with the Lord God through His world all around you!*
- *Pray for this planet and this world, for it is on the one hand a beautiful creation of God and on the other hand a fragile thing in the hands of humanity because of the abuse it receives from us.*

Final Prayer

Teach me, great Lord and Master, all that I need to learn in order to serve You properly. Show me the things I need to learn, the things I need to explore, the things I need to work at, and the things I need to ask You about. Be my teacher, and encourage me in my learning, I pray; AMEN