

Prayer

Almighty, gracious Lord and God; sometimes it seems as if things happen to us which are not a part of Your purpose for us, and we struggle to stay close to what is right and true. Take these dark moments and transform them by the power of Your Holy Spirit, and may the suffering we endure be turned into the defeat of Satan for the sake of Your Kingdom. All praise to You, our Lord and God: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Education

Education is an essential part of life, for God made us all as children who need to learn, and to some extent, the learning never stops. Pray and ask the Lord to be your 'teacher'!

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for your liberty; pray that freedom in this world will grow
- Pray for Burma, and the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi
- Pray for people who will today be told they have cancer

Meditation

Stay beside me, Lord, I pray. You have given me every blessing.

Lord of direction, go with me wherever I go;

Lord of protection, surround me with Your love;

Lord of purity, clean the pollution in my mind;

Lord of security, protect my family from all evil;

Lord of faithfulness, show me Yourself in others;

Lord of authority, guide the decisions I make;

Lord of wholeness, invigorate me while I rest;

Lord of creation, restore me even while I sleep;

Be with me every day, when I awake, so I may abide with You forever.

Bible Study - Proverbs 5:7-14

⁷ So now, my child, listen to me

and do not turn aside from what I say:

⁸ Keep a distance between your path and hers,

And do not go near the door of her house;

⁹ Lest you give your best to others,

And your time to one who is malicious:

¹⁰ Lest strangers take what they want of your wealth,

And your hard won pay to the house of a foreigner.

¹¹ Then at the end of your life you will complain;

When your vitality and bodily strength are all spent.

¹² And you will say: 'Why did I so hate discipline?

And why did I reject all correction?

¹³ Why did I not listen to the voice of my teachers

*Or pay attention to those who taught me?
14 I am on the brink of utter ruin,
Before the courts and in public.'*

Review

Here is a message to all to keep clear of sexual temptation because the consequences are not only substantial, they affect the whole of life, forever. This is an important message, because this is God's Word and He understands the nature of temptations, especially sexual temptation. The truth of what is said in this passage (especially verses 12 and 13) lie in the fact that what the Old Testament says here is heard on the lips of people to this day!

Yesterday's passage contains a strong warning to young people to pay attention to the wisdom of what they are taught and avoid getting caught up in sexual misdemeanour whilst they are young (5:1-6). In general, Proverbs paints a picture that contrasts Wisdom with an adulterous woman (3:13-18). Wisdom is a righteous woman worthy of marriage, and the anonymous adulterous woman (in some translations, a prostitute) tempts young people away from Wisdom with sex. Whilst the main theme of our passage remains the importance of keeping close to Wisdom, the aim of the text is to encourage young people not to turn aside from Wisdom by intertwining the themes of wisdom, knowledge and future prospects, with sexual misdemeanour, perversion and ultimate failure.

Throughout the text, the Hebrew words are difficult to translate because they have sexual references which some would find difficult in Scripture. For example, in verse 9, the phrase 'lest you give your best to others' might be translated more literally 'lest you give your vigour to others', where the word 'vigour' may be best understood as sex. In addition, the word 'others' suggests that by giving in to one 'adulteress' the individual is led to further sexual experiences. Another example is in verse 11, which I have translated 'when your vitality and bodily strength are all spent'; it is fairly clear that one of the words in the phrase is a common reference to the male sexual organ, but it would be crude to translate it in this way. All in all, this passage warns against what some people call 'sowing your wild oats'. People speak about this even today as if it is something that can be done with no harm or consequence. However, too many young people discover that through their casual sex a child is born, and the consequences affect the whole of life. A woman's life is changed forever, and a man will have to accept a responsibility he never thought about. It is a shock, and in later years, people become bitter, knowing that they cannot enjoy the fruits of their own hard won labour because of their early foolishness. People end up bitter about life, cursing their own foolishness for not following the path of Wisdom from an early age. Proverbs observed this pattern of life millennia ago!

Yet the text is not all about sex; this is only half the story. Proverbs uses this powerful theme to teach young people about their general prospects in life, for the rest of the passage (5:10-14) clearly refers to failure in commercial enterprise and later regrets. The lesson is that just as someone is easily led astray sexually, the one who refuses to listen to wisdom and learn from a teacher will quickly 'get into bed' with undesirables in other areas of life such as finance or property. Later on in life, the man who has been foolish and lives with regrets because he played with prostitutes when he was young will probably be the same as one who ends up regretting the stupidity of his commercial and other dealings because of his early stupidity. He has ignored wisdom and been led astray!

It is remarkable that scripture talks about sex and future job prospects almost in the same breath! Certainly, if this is a teaching method for young men, possibly teenagers, then it is certainly bound to grab their attention! Today, we might call it multidisciplinary teaching, whereby one subject is taught off the back of another, like schools or colleges today that

specialise in one subject and by so doing encourage learning about others. In Proverbs, the constant theme of sex both hammers home the message that messing about with it will bring ruin, and it draws attention to the message to 'pay attention' to wisdom. You might say that we are not yet getting much teaching that is actually 'wisdom'; what should someone do? How should someone behave? This, of course, is coming later on in Proverbs. These early chapters are all about persuading people, young people in particular, to be prepared to get to grips with what they will soon be required to learn!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss the nature of the society in which you live. Is there a connection between sexual behaviour and people's prospects in life?
2. How can we best help young people come to terms with the truth of this passage?
3. How can the church minister to older people who know that their own lives have been compromised by their sexual behaviour?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Serious questions arise from this study, and people do not find it easy to face. Often the church has to pick up the consequences of people who have grown up in a permissive society and eventually reaped the benefits of some difficult live choices, especially when they have become a Christian. General praying about things is of course helpful, but I find that it is best to address these issues head on. If people are helped to confess what they know to be wrong and yet have kept back in their hearts, a start can be made to help people become clean again, and spiritually ready to face 'new life'.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Do you feel successful in life in general? This is a difficult question. However, our deeper feeling about how things have gone since we were younger will often affect the present subconsciously. Seek the Lord about any relevant issues raised by this study.*
- *Pray for people who struggle with their own sense of failure, and spend their lives pursuing the healing of their souls with little success. Seek the Lord for what He would say about how the church may help such people.*

Final Prayer

Almighty Father, give us humility, in the face of the great truths of the Gospel. May we handle them with dignity and care, and always remember that we are dependent upon You for everything, including our wisdom and understanding. Guide us into all truth, Almighty Father; AMEN