

Prayer

We thank You, O Lord, for all the good things in the world. Save us from being ungrateful, and prevent us from making too much of our troubles and forgetting our blessings. Give us the strength of spirit to live as those who trust in the promises of God, fulfilled in Jesus Christ our Saviour; and reassure us by Your Holy Spirit that love will conquer all in Your Kingdom of grace. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Finance

The world continues to go through uncertain times with respect to its financial affairs, and consequently, many people are still suffering. Pray for honesty and integrity in finance.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for Great Britain and its current political instability*
- *Lift up to God in prayer the plight of those affected by drought*
- *Give thanks for God's protection for you and your family*

Meditation

Be sensitive, my spirit, like the Lord who listens;
And seeks the truth before He judges. He is the One

Who hears the cry of the lonely;
Who feels the anguish of the bereaved;
Who bears the anger of a wounded soul;
Who knows the damage that words can do;
Who attends to the cry of the downcast;
Who takes heed of those who search;
Who understands the pain of the unloved;
Who takes notice of all who cry out to Him;

Be sensitive, my spirit, and let the Lord show you
What to do with what you know.

Bible Study - Proverbs 6:20-24

²⁰ *My child, keep your father's commandment,
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*

²¹ *Bind them on your heart for ever;
tie them around your neck.*

²² *As you go on your way, they will lead you;
when you lie down, they will watch over you;
and when you awake, they will talk with you.*

²³ *For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching, a light,
and the way of life is through the reproofs of discipline.*

²⁴ *They save you from the evil woman,
from the smooth tongue of the adulteress.*

Review

Here is an urgent plea presented as from a father and mother to their child. Although 'child' is the normal translation, it is likely that this word refers to an older child or perhaps a young teenager. So, this passage is a general plea to young people to accept the teaching they have received and not throw it away, tempted by the call of someone described in this text as an 'evil woman', or adulteress (6:24).

In many books about Proverbs, this passage is reckoned to be the beginning of a longer section which comments on sexual temptation and adultery (6:20 - 7:27), however, Proverbs says more to us in these passages than a mere warning against adultery. All through the book of Proverbs, Wisdom is presented as a righteous woman seeking to offer the growing youngster all that is good and right by way of instruction for a good and godly life (3:13-18); and the adulterous, evil woman represents all that tempts a youngster away from what is right (5:1-6). The whole book is a straightforward contrast between good learning, and evil ways.

It is within this general context that the two characters of Wisdom and the evil woman are also used to illustrate good and bad in sexual matters, as in the verses that follow our passage today. However, the advice that is given is very important because it is both about sex and also about learning in general. Young people, in whatever society and at whatever time in history, tend to discover themselves sexually at the same time as they are being taught about every aspect of life through their education. For many, the drive to explore sex and sexuality is strong and very powerful; it is a fascinating new part of life that draws young people away from their learning. The characterisation of Wisdom as a good woman and evil as a prostitute or adulteress, integrates learning about life with moral teaching and advice about sex and relationships. This combination is specifically designed to counter the temptations of evil, and sexual evils in particular, because unless sexual interests and desires are placed in a moral context early in life, unhelpful attitudes towards sex are learned that can persist throughout life.

In today's world, sex is regarded as being in a separate compartment of life from other forms of learning, so this connection is not often made within the educational system as such. Indeed, 'sex education' is given as a separate subject, doing a great disservice to many. However, it is obvious to anyone who works with young people that sex and sexual attractions play a crucial role in their development, not just physically and emotionally but socially and educationally as well.

The appeal at the beginning of this passage is strongly worded. Both father and mother stand united in calling the young to hold on to the advice about life they have been given. The unity of parents is a powerful and godly example which stands against the wayward sexual temptations of an adulteress. They appeal for good teaching to be retained as the young person continues in life and grows up into the world of adulthood. For example, within the Old Testament stories of Genesis, you can almost imagine Isaac and Rebecca speaking in this way to the young and devious Jacob as they send him off to northern Mesopotamia to find a wife, concerned lest the trauma of what had happened in the family begin to lead him astray (Gen 28:1f.).

Our text suggests that doing something practical, like having a necklace or wearing a special piece of clothing will help us to remember what we have been taught (6:21). We know from Jewish tradition and from archaeology that people did sew into their clothes pieces of the written 'Law' for example, or place similar objects in small boxes worn around the head or the neck (for example, phylacteries – see Matt 23:5, ref. Ex 13:9, Deut 6:8, 11:18). All this seems very strange to us, but quite reasonably, the emphasis is on means of remembering things in an age without books, computers and all the means of recording

and communication at our disposal today. All of us need some means of help so that our lives will be enlightened by the godly things we have learned (6:23 – see Psalm 119:105). The advice to find practical ways to remember what is good is wise.

This text appeals to young people, and through them, to us, not merely to avoid 'the adulteress' but to avoid all evil by following the Godly paths of faith that have been taught and passed on to us. This is what will shine a light on our way ahead in a darkened world.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. How can we copy the ancient example of 'binding' God's Word to our hearts today?
2. In what ways can we to bind to our hearts the good teaching we have received since we became Christians?
3. How can 'Sunday School' best serve growing young people today, and teach them how to keep close to God in an age of sexual temptation?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The things we learn whilst we are young stay with us for a long time, and sometimes we need to question what we have learned so that we are not dominated by them. What is good must be retained of course, and what is evil must be put to one side, but most of all, we must do this assessment. We have all met people who appear to have changed little in their attitudes and manner since they were young, and this becomes a trap for them from which they cannot escape. One of the important things about the life of the church is that it should be a community that through Christ, offers constant challenge.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- Consider whether there are any practical ways in which you can remind yourself of what you have learned about God in your Christian life. Choose, perhaps, a passage of Scripture which the Lord has used to change your life, and use it to make a poster, using standard image processing software available on most computers.
- Pray for the young people you know who are growing and developing now both in their learning and also in self awareness both sexually and socially.

Final Prayer

Heavenly Father, Your majesty shines through all You have done; so give us eyes to see the glory of the Cross and all Christ has done for us. Then, may we accept this gift of our salvation and walk with confidence into the future You have planned for those who do Your will. Make our joy complete as we live to praise Your Name. AMEN