

## Final Prayer

Bless us this day, Lord God, through the knowledge that we have been saved by Christ. May we know that there is nothing to fear in this life, may we feel the touch of Your hand on all we do, and may we always return in our thoughts to You who sustains us every hour of the day. Bless us we pray, Lord God, bless us. AMEN

## Prayer

So many people have misunderstood You for so long, Lord Jesus, because our witness to you is often fragile and ineffectual. Forgive our silence when we should speak about You clearly, our timidity when faced with challenges that demand courage, our hesitancy when asked to give an account of our faith. Renew us each day by the power of Your Holy Spirit, and grant us the bravery to stand out as Your people in this troubled world. AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Finance

*Pray for the financial systems of the world, and pray that after recent events, higher standards of probity and integrity will prevail throughout the world, for the sake of all.*

### On-going prayers

- *Pray for those planning ahead for the potential flu pandemic*
- *Give thanks for the people that you meet during the day*
- *Pray for Europe as the results of its elections are declared*

## Meditation

Have you noticed the enormous difference  
Between the two great halves of the Word of God,  
The Testaments of our Bible, Old and New?

There is no difference in the God we find in each,  
No difference in His character, His love or justice, and also  
No great change within the type of people, good and bad.

The one great difference there for all to see, is this;

The God who worked through ancient Kings and prophets  
Never reached His goal by working down from top to bottom  
Salvation never came to all despite the earth's best leaders.

Instead, with Jesus, the Lord God started from the bottom,  
Reaching all through One so human that His life and death,  
And life again, affected individual people, one by one:

So now,

Salvation comes because Christ's love is touchable by all,  
And faith works face to face, for God is found in people.

## Bible Study - Proverbs 8:1-11

- <sup>1</sup> *Does not Wisdom cry out,  
Does not understanding raise her voice?*
- <sup>2</sup> *On the hill-tops alongside the roadway,  
and at the side of the road she takes her stand;*
- <sup>3</sup> *Beside the entrance gates into the town,  
And at the places of access she cries out:*
- <sup>4</sup> *'I call to you, to everyone,*

- and my summons is to all people.
- <sup>5</sup> You who are simple, get prudence;  
Take hold of common sense, you fools.
- <sup>6</sup> Listen, for I will speak things of utmost importance,  
and from my lips will come what is right;
- <sup>7</sup> for what my mouth speaks is truth;  
And wickedness is repugnant to my lips.
- <sup>8</sup> All the words of my mouth are righteous;  
None of them are twisted or perverse.
- <sup>9</sup> They are all straight to one who is discerning  
and right to those who attempt to learn.
- <sup>10</sup> Take my discipline instead of silver,  
and knowledge rather than pure gold;
- <sup>11</sup> for wisdom is better than jewels,  
And nothing you desire can equal her.

## Review

*(To regular readers of the weekend studies, I have omitted chapter 7. It is a long and colourful warning against adultery, which adds little to our studies now. Later studies will include this.)*

Today's passage is a most exquisite piece of poetry, and it is probably one of the best known passages in Proverbs, along with the following verses in the rest of chapter eight. Enigmatically, the writer describes how Wisdom's common sense and right knowledge is accessible to all those who are prepared to receive it, because it is there within the world God has made. The knowledge of the difference between good and evil is available to all who will pay attention to the voice of Wisdom, and more than this, Wisdom is of greater value than anything else, and is something to be sought and treasured, more than gold, silver, jewels of anything else (8:10,11).

We should make note of the fact that here in Scripture, Wisdom is generally available, and not only to intellectuals or to those who are gifted, as explained so poetically in the first few verses of this passage. Wisdom and truth are available to everyone; 'on the hill-tops ... at the side of the road' (8:2). Then, in verse 3, we read that Wisdom stands in the 'entrance gates' of a city, the natural meeting place for the local courts of Israel that dispensed natural justice according to God's laws; everyone is summoned (8:4), and Wisdom is also available to the 'simple' (8:5) so that their lives may benefit from 'common sense' (8:5). The message is that God may be found through His Wisdom and truth available within the world God has made and in which we all live.

But more than this, God is not waiting passively for us to find Him. Through 'Wisdom', He is energetically shouting out to us, eagerly seeking our attention! The whole passage is full of active phrases, which give a description of what Wisdom is doing. She 'raises her voice' (8:1), 'cries out' (8:3), and says 'I call to you' (8:4). The rest of this passage then continues by describing God's great challenge to listen to what He says. Wisdom acts like a divine 'tap on the shoulder', and a spiritual call from the Lord that urges people to listen and pay attention; 'Listen, I will speak things of utmost importance' (8:6), then, 'all the words of my mouth are righteous' (8:8). Finally, He challenges us to treat everything He would teach us through creation with the highest of respect and honour, so that we value it more highly than even gold or silver (8:10,11).

It is important that Christian people work out what this means in terms of their faith, for although what we have said is fascinating and interesting, how does it connect to our faith in Jesus Christ? Firstly, this is not the only place in the Bible where we are presented with

the idea that God's wisdom is available to everyone if they will only look for it with discernment. It is found in the story of God's judgement of the world at the time of Noah (Genesis 6), and in Romans, Paul argues strongly that God may be found within the natural world if people the natural world if people are willing to look for Him (Romans 1:18-25). Christians must not forget that God is always to be found in His world and is active within it, sometimes seeking people out and challenging them to respond. Many have become Christians and then discovered a great deal about God and Jesus Himself through the goodness, beauty and truth of the natural world all around.

However, Wisdom only reveals a small part of the salvation plan of God. Beautiful as this passage is, it does not tell us about the tragedy of what happens when people reject what God has done; when they value evil more than goodness, lies more than truth, or silver more than goodness, for example. Within the text however, the persistent and challenging voice of Wisdom is like the mercy of God, which pursues humanity continually. In real history, God was merciful to the whole world through Jesus Christ, but the writer of Proverbs did not know this would happen and did not prophesy it specifically. He spoke of the eternal character of God that is good and right regardless of the human response. For the writer (or writers) of Proverbs, the fact that Christians can now respond to God in faith through Jesus, would be a fulfilment of everything he wrote about Wisdom.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss in your group the ways in which we can find goodness and truth within the created world in which we live?
2. Is our notion of 'Wisdom' today is based too much on learning and 'academia'? How can ordinary people access 'Wisdom'?
3. What do people today value more highly than Wisdom, and why? Start with silver, gold and jewels, and go from there.

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*Some of the greatest of evangelists have helped people discover that God is there with them and they did not know it! How can you and I do this for people today? The great blessing of having the book of Proverbs in the Bible is that by and large, it does not purport to delve into great spiritual depths (though we will find that it does, from time to time). It speaks to what we can see and observe all around us. People learning, and the incidents of natural life from which we all make judgements about what is right and what is wrong. Some find the book difficult because it rarely leads us to spiritual heights. However, there is something profoundly important about the message that God is indeed to be found everywhere within His creation!*

### Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *In a few moments of reflection pause to think about what you are able to see around you in the natural world. What does it teach you about God? What can you learn about your faith from looking at what God has placed all around you?*
- *Pray for those who feel that they have no real knowledge or intelligence, and are inwardly concerned that they have little education. Pray that the church of God may never belittle people on such grounds.*