

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Your presence makes this day special, for each day spent with You is a day that points to heaven, to glory and eternal life! Move my heart, I pray, to dwell in Your presence during every moment of my life; not so that I do nothing else, but so that Your presence enriches everything I do. This is my heart's deep desire; AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Secularism

Pray for those Christian organisations that face pressures to become 'secular' in order to maintain their appeal (e.g. the Y.M.C.A). Pray for Christians who feel marginalised at work.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for the blessing of life that God has given you
- Pray for the leaders of your country
- Ask God to save us from all irresponsible use of the world He has given us

Meditation

Speak to us with words of prophecy, Lord God,
So we may discern the truth of Your will

Speak to us with words of trial and challenge
So we may be tested to our limits

Speak to us with words of blessing and support
So we may be empowered for action

Speak to us with words of wisdom and revelation
So we may be fed by them, day and night

Speak to us with words of faith and sound teaching
So we may accept the Word of God

Speak to us with words of love and comfort
So we may have a blessing in a troubled world

Speak to us with words of power and meaning
So we may grasp them now, and never let them go

Bible Study - Proverbs 8:12-21

¹² *I, wisdom, live with good judgement,
and I have found knowledge and discretion.*

¹³ *The fear of the LORD is to hate what is evil:
I hate pride and arrogance,
evil ways, and twisted speech.*

¹⁴ *I have advice which leads to success;
I possess insight, and strength.*

¹⁵ *Kings reign through me,
and rulers declare what is just;*

¹⁶ *Rulers govern by my help,*

- princes, and all who govern properly.*
- ¹⁷ *I love those who love me,
and whoever looks hard for me will find me.*
- ¹⁸ *Riches and honour are with me,
lasting wealth and prosperity.*
- ¹⁹ *My gifts are superior to refined gold,
and my revenue, than choice silver.*
- ²⁰ *I walk in the way of righteousness,
And in the paths of justice,*
- ²¹ *giving wealth to those who love me,
and filling up their reserves.*

Review

The magnificent poem of Proverbs 8 proclaims God's wisdom. It describes those to whom wisdom is available, what it is, where it is to be found, where it comes from, and its ultimate consequences. Within the great poetry of the piece, all these themes overlap to a greater or lesser extent. In the previous passage, 8:1-11, the poem told us where wisdom was to be found and who could benefit from it, and it also explained its priceless value to those who found it.

Throughout Proverbs, we must also remember that wisdom is characterised as a woman (3:13-18), offering what is both godly and good to those who are prepared to learn. This does not mean to say that we must think of wisdom as some feminine 'bit' of God. It is a literary device to make the appeal of wisdom more direct, and in the past, this helped to make sure that God's wisdom was presented in a non-sexist way to both men and women; for in the Book of Proverbs the one teaching is generally male and wisdom herself is female.

The text we read today is written as a direct appeal from wisdom asking for people to appreciate her qualities. The passage is fascinating because it is written in the language of personal appeal or testimony, which is rare in the Bible. This is also found in the Psalms, where many great poems are written in the first person and speak about personal issues such as pain, love, laughter and sadness; but here in Proverbs we are reading the appeal and testimony of God Himself, brought to us through the character of 'wisdom'. As a whole, the text asks us to consider whether we have truly appreciate the wisdom of God and what He says to us through the world He has created, through morality (8:12,13), through the individual life He has given us (8:14,17f.), for example.

Here, wisdom is associated with good justice and the fear of the One true God (8:12,13); and as a consequence, judgement must be made against what is evil and twisted (8:13). Wisdom is given by God as a gift to kings and rulers which enables them to reign (8:15,16). In this, the Israelite model is the great King Solomon who was renowned as the builder of the Temple in Jerusalem and for his wisdom (he is named as the writer of parts of Proverbs – 1:1, 10:1, 25:1). Interestingly, this is similar to what Paul says about authority ('there is no authority except that which is given by God' - Rom 13:1) when setting the standard of Christian respect for the rule of law, which is based on the assumption that this rule is benevolent to people and tolerant of belief in God.

Verse 17 is interesting because it says something that reminds us of Jesus' important and memorable teaching about Himself and the Kingdom of God; 'seek and you will find ...' (Matt 7:7). Certainly, it is very possible that Jesus knew this famous passage from Proverbs and shaped it so that it spoke about Himself rather than wisdom. The rest of the passage (8:18-21) continues the comparison of wisdom with superior quality riches and

wealth, and this also reminds us of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven, which was so valuable it was a 'pearl of great value' (Matt 13:45,46 see also Luke 15:8).

There are many themes connecting this passage with the teachings of Jesus, and it is little wonder that early Christians associated Jesus with wisdom (but not with the fact that wisdom was female!). Most of the words of our passage today are beautiful and enlightening in themselves, but they speak prophetically of a time when what was promised by wisdom would come true; and now, we know it has all been fulfilled in Christ. We can therefore now look back and see how God's Word has remained consistent throughout time; from Old Testament wisdom, to its fulfilment in Christ, and its timeless value for us now, in every detail.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Discuss verse 13 in your group. In what ways can we put what is suggested by this text into practice today?
2. Why should God give authority to certain people to be rulers? Does this feel like favouritism, and why might we think of it as favouritism?
3. What everlastingly rich qualities of faith are you able to celebrate in your own life?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I find this passage immensely encouraging, because it speaks of God as someone who is integrally involved with the world and what happens in it. Sometimes, we are tempted to feel that God is very remote, but Wisdom is God present in ordinary things such as 'good judgement'! The passage helps me to look at things that happen around me and perceive something of what God is doing in the world, and given thanks.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Read through this passage of scripture carefully and write down any part of it that is a blessing to you. Use the list through the next few days as a means of giving thanks to God for the blessings He has given you.*
- *Pray that the riches of the world will be shared out amongst people and that God's blessing may be poured out on all who call on Him.*

Final Prayer

When there are troubles all around us, Lord God, give us the gift of peace. When there is happiness to be enjoyed, Lord God, give us the gift of joy. When there are things that need your touch, Lord God, give us the gift of prayer, so that we may minister Your will to this world; AMEN.