

Prayers

Opening prayer

We praise You, Almighty Lord, for You take situations which seem unimportant, or perhaps impossible or unsustainable, and You make great things out of them. We praise You for the work of Your Holy Spirit, who sees more than we can see, who understands more than we understand, and who is stronger than any strength we can muster. For great things are done when the Holy Spirit does within us those things You want, Lord God, even if we do not perceive them! AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: BUILDING

1. For yourself

Within your life there are a number of 'small things' that will grow as you live by faith. Pray about them ...

2. For your friends and family

Pray that seeds will be sown within your family that grow spiritual fruits of a hundredfold and more ...

3. For the church and its work

In your church there is an enormous and untapped potential for good. Why is this so? Pray that this will be unleashed to the praise of His Name ...

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray for the young people in your country who need to be envisioned and encouraged to do great things

Meditation

If my people would listen to me, says the Lord,
Then they would know that I answer their prayers.

If my people would return to me, says the Lord,
Then they would find that I have always loved them.

If my people would read my Word, says the Lord,
Then they would not suffer any lack of knowledge.

If my people would love their neighbours, says the Lord,
Then they would find their own lives would be enriched.

If my people would do what I say, says the Lord,
Then they would discover that I am faithful to my word.

If my people would pursue the truth, says the Lord,
Then they would find themselves with me, in my Kingdom.

Life is a challenge for everyone, says the Lord,
And there is peace for those who respond to my call.

Bible Study

Bible passage – Proverbs 1:1-7

¹ *The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:*

- ² *To know about wisdom and instruction,*
- *to understand words of knowledge,*
- ³ *to receive discipline in wise conduct, in righteousness, justice, and honesty;*
- ⁴ *to teach sound judgement to the simple, and knowledge and direction to the young.*

⁵ *And let the wise also hear and continue to learn, and the discerning receive counsel* ⁶ *to understand proverbs and sayings, the words of the wise and the mysteries they pose.*

⁷ *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*

Review

The book of Proverbs begins with a forthright statement about the meaning of wisdom. It is addressed to the young, and also to all who seek the Lord, for whom, 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge ...' (1:7)

This is the wonderful beginning of the great book of Proverbs which comes after the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. Together with the book of Ecclesiastes and possibly the books of Job and the 'Song of Solomon', it provides Scripture with what is called 'wisdom' literature. These books seem to have been collated in the centuries before Christ, but contain work that goes back much further. Many people regard Solomon as the author of the book, because his name is attributed in verse 1. However, as we read through Proverbs we will find that they were written by a far wider group of people, and the book contains a number of 'headings' with ascriptions to various people, including Solomon (1:1, 10:1, 25:1), Hezekiah (25:1), Agur (30:1) and a certain King Lemuel (31:1). Solomon was undoubtedly a major figure in wisdom literature, but he was not the only one to be able to speak 'wise sayings'! Proverbs itself speaks of wisdom as being collected 'by the elders' (4:1-4), and gathered from experience (6:6-11).

The book of Proverbs falls into a simple structure. After the introduction found in today's reading, it continues with a long poem made up of a multitude of wise sayings, all put together as a book of instruction for a young man, lasting from chapter 1 to chapter 9. Some reckon that this part was used to teach the children of kings, and others think that it was used as an educational tool for many more people. Perhaps throughout history it was used at different times for both, and more. Certainly, a 'young man' is spoken to in the first verses of chapters 2 through to 7. One famous part of this teaching poem is the powerful description of 'Wisdom', personified as a desirable woman, found in chapter 8, which also contains a dramatic description of Creation;

*The Lord created me (Wisdom)
at the beginning of His work
The first of His acts long ago
'Ages ago I was set up,
At the first
Before the beginning of the earth ... (8:22,23)*

After this, the bulk of the book of Proverbs (chapters 9 to 29) contains typical Hebrew 'proverbs' or wise sayings, found in brief two line verses and with no apparent logical order or common theme, sometimes even in the same sentence! Many of these sayings are famous whilst others remain unknown, and the whole book of Proverbs is itself a collection of works (see 1:1, 10:1, 25:1, 30:1, 31:1f.). There is an enormous pool of wisdom in these chapters, but there is no doubt that it can be hard to sustain our reading effort through what appear to be chapters and chapters of unconnected verses.

The most powerful verse in our reading today, and some would argue within the whole of Proverbs, is verse 7; *'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.'* Now we might have expected to be told that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of 'wisdom', but instead, it says 'knowledge'. This is because wisdom and the instruction that flows from it are built upon what is known. For an Israelite who worshipped God, 'knowing' the Lord meant acknowledging Him as Creator and living as one of His creatures dependent upon His wisdom and knowledge, so 'wisdom' is the art of applying the knowledge of God to everyday life.

Now today, we like to think that what we experience of life is uniquely different from people in the past, so the wisdom we need now is different from that for past generations. This is a basic mistake, and true 'wisdom' sayings span the gap between peoples of different cultures and times. As we will see, they focus largely on the dynamics of human relationships and of the experience of 'good and evil' and of God. We cannot therefore turn this wisdom aside, for it is as true today as ever.

All this becomes very evident in the first few verses of Proverbs. Here, 'wisdom' is defined as being instruction about 'wise conduct ... righteousness, justice and honesty ... judgement ... direction for the

young' (1:3-4). But more than this, wisdom is not merely required by the 'simple' and the 'young' (1:4), those who are wise are said to be those who are willing to continue to learn and receive counsel from others (1:5,6). These verses are a good starting point for a Biblical form of what we might call 'Continuing Professional Development'

There is no doubt that although the book of Proverbs is a book of 'wisdom', the whole Bible is also God's wisdom, and deserves to be read and consumed in order to learn of God and be 'wise'. Such a task is never ending, but brings great rewards. Wisdom is not something we can ever come to know completely; it always has mysteries which take us further into God's Word (1:6). There is much more to come!

Discipleship

Questions for groups

1. Discuss what we mean by the word 'wisdom' today, and how close or how different it is to the definition of wisdom here in Proverbs.
2. Identify the key qualities of godly human relationship within this text. How does your own society measure up to these standards?
3. Discuss how 'fear of the Lord' can indeed be 'the beginning of knowledge'; or, how does knowledge grow out of knowing God?

Discipleship challenges

- *Ponder the question of how your life measures against such principles as 'discipline in wise conduct ... honesty ... sound judgement' etc (1:3,4). You may feel you fall short somewhere in this list of godliness, so pray about what can be done about it.*
 - *Seek the Lord prayerfully to find out what His wisdom is saying to us today about the world in which we live and what is happening within it. Share your reflections with others.*
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Final Prayer

Bless those we love this day, Lord Jesus; keep them in Your care and protect them from all evil. If there are problems between us, may we be humble enough to let you heal us; and if we need to face challenges together, may we help each other with unfaltering love and persistence. Lord Jesus, we give You the glory, for You have given us each other. AMEN
