

5. Wisdom presents her credentials

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to Proverbs chapter 8 again, page 532. And I'd like to take this chapter of Proverbs tonight under the title Wisdom Presents Her Credentials.

And then next week I trust we'll be able to take a safari into chapter 9. Now, if you can, set your eyes on both chapter 8 and chapter 9 simultaneously.

That might stretch your eyes a little bit, but let me point something out here. In chapters 8 and 9. Chapter 8 introduces wisdom, you'll see in verse 1, and personifies her.

In other words, presents her to us as a noble and dignified woman. And you'll see she begins to speak at chapter 8, verse 4. And then the whole of the rest of chapter 8 is taken up with her speech, that rather long passage that I read.

It's all wisdom personified as a woman speaking. Then chapter 9, verses 1, 2, and 3 presented to us again in a slightly different way. And then she starts to speak again at chapter 9, verse 4.

[1 : 07] And this time she has a rather shorter speech, which ends probably in verse 12. And then finally, at chapter 9, verse 13, another woman is introduced.

And she is called folly. The opposite of wisdom. Wisdom's foil. And as verse 13 of chapter 9 puts it, she is a loud, seductive, know-nothing person.

She has far less to say than wisdom. In fact, she only speaks, you'll see, in verses 16 and 17 briefly. And then a decisive judgment is pronounced against her in the final verse of chapter 9.

So what's happening here is that the two chapters together are presenting us with these two women. Wisdom and folly. And we are bound to ask, what is going on here?

Is it a fable? Is it an allegory? Is it a bird? Is it a plane? How are we supposed to react to this and understand it? Well, the answer, I think, is this. That the author of Proverbs is saying to all his readers, every day we are faced with choices.

[2 : 12] We have to choose between wise behavior and foolish behavior. In fact, many times a day we come to moral crossroads. Some of them are big moral crossroads.

Many of them are quite small. But we have to make choices every day between, well, wise words to say to other people or foolish words to say to others. Wise use of our time or foolish use of it.

Wise ways of relating to other people or foolish ways of relating to other people. I imagine that every person who is in this building tonight has spoken or acted foolishly at least once today already.

I won't ask you to put up your hands. Hopefully there have been wise words and wise thoughts as well. But there's been a mixture, hasn't there, in our lives. But every time, every time we're faced with a moral choice, it's as though wisdom says to us, choose my way.

You know it's the way that will lead to happy relationships and peace and harmony and good order. But at the very moment when wisdom is telling us what to do, folly pops up from behind the settee.

[3 : 19] And she says, Ha! Don't you listen to silly old wisdom, the silly old frump. I've got a much better idea for you. I'll just whisper it into your ear. Isn't that a terrific idea?

Isn't that deliciously disruptive? Won't that cause havoc if you say that or behave like that? Let's do it. Let's run amok. Am I the only person here who listens to the simultaneous calls of wisdom and folly?

I don't think I am. Your faces betray the fact that you're just in the same boat as me. This is the reality, isn't it, of what goes on inside our heads dozens of times every day.

We're faced with choices. So these two chapters in Proverbs are teaching us in a rather dramatic way how to make good moral choices and how to avoid making bad ones.

The voice of wisdom, in the end, of course, proves to be the voice of God. It's God's wisdom that calls to our hearts. And the voice of folly, in the end, proves to be the voice of the devil.

[4 : 24] And we know that because Proverbs often insists that to follow wisdom is to find the road to life and blessing, whereas to follow folly is to find the road to death.

Let me put this in a slightly different way. The Bible is a book that teaches us that the human race has only two ways to live.

There are only two ways. There's no third alternative. One way is to submit gladly to the Lord, to follow him, to accept the gospel, to love him and trust him. That's the way to life.

But the other way is to reject the Lord, to reject the wisdom of the Bible and to end up in eternal death and ruin. So everything is at stake here.

We mustn't underestimate the noble lady wisdom or the disreputable woman folly. These are not cartoon characters like Marge Simpson, whom we can just take with a pinch of salt.

[5 : 20] We're dealing here with something very important. We're dealing here with the road to life and the road to death. Let me raise one more question before we get into the text.

Somebody might ask, what is the relationship between Old Testament wisdom, the kind of wisdom that's taught in the book of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes or Job, what's the relationship between Old Testament wisdom and New Testament godliness?

Is the wisdom of the Old Testament exactly the same thing as the godliness of the New Testament? Well, I would say that they are first cousins rather than identical twins.

There's a lot of overlap, but they're still rather different. You'll find many of the same themes being taught. So, for example, the Apostle Paul teaches Christians to speak the truth.

And wisdom, here in Proverbs chapter 8, also insists that she is truthful. So she says here in verse 6, here, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right, for my mouth will utter truth.

[6 : 28] Or to give another example, the Apostle Paul insists that sexual immorality has no place in the Christian life. And we saw that last week from Proverbs chapter 5, exactly the same message coming in this Old Testament book of wisdom.

And you could multiply examples where the teaching of Proverbs overlaps with the moral instructions of the New Testament letters and the Gospels. But, there is a different flavour to the book of Proverbs.

In fact, reading Proverbs is a little bit like biting into a lemon. You're struck by a sudden sharpness and you simply have to notice it. Proverbs comes at you from unexpected angles.

It suddenly whips the rug out from under your feet. And look, for example, at chapter 9, verse 18, which is about the foolish young man who listens to folly and goes into her house.

What does he think he's doing when he observes her command? Well, he thinks, no doubt, that he's having a little bit of harmless fun. But the reality there, the truth, is shocking.

[7 : 35] Because that final verse 18 tells us that the people who go into Folly's house are the dead. Her guests are already deep in the heart of Sheol, the place of the dead.

Now, the Apostle Paul tells us similar things. He tells us that those who don't belong to Christ are dead in their trespasses and sins. It's the same thing. But Proverbs has this ability to surprise us suddenly.

It lulls us, as it were, into a false sense of security. It feeds us, you might say, with a few digestive biscuits. And then suddenly, there's a slice of lemon. It makes your lips purse up.

It has sharp angles to it. Proverbs gives us sudden shafts of humour, sarcasm. It is determined to get under our radar. Sometimes it does this by being frankly crude.

So, for example, like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly. Now you think, yuck! Yuck!

[8 : 38] But the point is made. It's the yuck factor that forces you to think. That's how Proverbs works. Well now, let's get into chapter 8, which is also forcing us to think.

And of course, thinking can be an alien occupation for us. I speak at least for myself. And this is why wisdom, lady wisdom, has to call out loud in verse 1.

And if you look at verse 1 also, she has to raise her voice. she has to cry aloud in verse 3 because she knows that a low, gentle, sleepy, lulling, conversational voice is not going to penetrate our thick skulls.

So she has to raise her voice. And look at her first words there in verse 4. To you, O men, I call. The human race. I'm not calling to cats and dogs.

They're blessed with sharp hearing. They're always listening. My cry, verse 4, is to the children of man. The human race. Now she has to raise her voice to us because we're rather hard of hearing. [9 : 41] Do you remember Jesus' words? He who has ears to hear, let him hear. The implication is that many ears are dull, simply satisfied with where they're up to in life.

But wisdom, like Jesus, wakens our ears. And let's notice where she is as she commands our attention. You'll see on verse 2 that she's on the heights beside the way. She's taking her stand at the crossroads. And in verse 3 she's beside the gates in front of the town and at the entrance of the portals. Think of it in Glasgow terms.

She's in George Square. She's mounted up on a big stage in the middle. Or she's at the top of the tron spire, speaking to the whole town through a very big loud speaker system.

The point is that she is speaking to everybody in public. She's not having a quiet fireside chat in private with people who think they're religious. Her message is for everybody.

[10 : 42] Listening to the wisdom of God is not just for the religious, whoever they might be. We all need to listen because all of us are by nature up to our necks in folly.

It may be there are some here tonight who are not Christians. I very much hope so. If you are, you're most welcome and we hope you'll come again. But if that's your position, then the voice of God's wisdom calls out to you and commands your attention.

You'd be wise to listen. And foolish to turn a deaf ear because the voice of wisdom is the voice of God and the voice of folly in the end is the voice of the devil.

Well now, why should we listen to God's wisdom, pictured here as this noble lady? The purpose of chapter 8 is to persuade us that we must listen to her.

What this chapter is doing in the Bible is giving us a number of powerful reasons for listening to God's wisdom. We do need to be persuaded because naturally we're sluggish and complacent and self-satisfied.

[11 : 48] So in this chapter, wisdom is presenting us with her credentials. She's laying them out for our inspection so that eventually, by the time we get to the end of the chapter, we should look up into her face and say to her, yes, madam, I'm ready now to listen.

I'm sorry I've been so deaf. Please speak to me now. I need to have you teach me. So let's look at these credentials she presents for us and let's see if she can persuade us.

She gives us five credentials quite briefly in verses 6 to 21 and then one slightly longer one from verses 22 to 31. So let's look at them together.

Well, here's the first. She deals in truth. Verses 6 to 9. Look at verse 6. Here. Why?

For I will speak noble things and from my lips will come what is right for my mouth will utter truth. And then verse 8. All the words of my mouth are righteous.

[12 : 50] There is nothing twisted or crooked in them. People sometimes speak of spin as though it were a modern invention. As though perhaps even Alistair Campbell invented spin.

But spin has always been around. men and women, us, we naturally want to make ourselves appear rather better than we actually are. We take sows ears and we turn them into silk purses so as to make ourselves look better.

Now this goes on in almost every walk of life and we know this. We're aware of it. So for example, if you're wanting to buy a house, you'll go to the estate agents and the estate agent will show you some lovely pictures of a beautiful house.

The pictures look terrific, don't they? But when you go and look at the house, it never looks quite as good as the pictures suggest that it's supposed to look. There's a bit of spin there, isn't there?

Advertising.

The whole of advertising really is the art of making sows ears look like silk purses. Or here's another example. The telephone rings one day and you pick it up and a bright voice says, somehow she or he has discovered your name.

[13 : 58] But the bright voice says, Mr. Lobb, you have been specially selected as a prize winner in our £500,000 prize draw. Will you put the phone down immediately, don't you, if you're wise? You know it's not true.

You know it. Scams and lies. Well, let me give you a rather more serious example. A British general, an army general, fighting in Afghanistan, comes onto the radio.

This has happened recently. And he says, the strategies we now have in place are proving successful. Now he may be, he probably is, a man of real integrity.

But you still have to ask yourself whether there may be an element of spin in what he says. We live in a world of fabrications. And the fabrication factory is our own hearts.

But God's wisdom says in verse 8, all the words of my mouth are righteous. There is nothing twisted or crooked in them. Now friends, isn't it worth listening to the truth?

[15:00] The truth about God and about man that only the Bible tells. Christianity is all about truth. Christianity is right and good, not because it makes us feel better, but because it's true.

Our hearts were made for truth, to receive it and to be satisfied by it. Jesus once spoke about truth to Pontius Pilate just before the crucifixion.

and Pontius Pilate looked at him scornfully and said, what is truth? That's what a man says when his heart has become hardened beyond repair.

So isn't this a great reason to listen to God's wisdom that in a world of half-truths and many lies, she tells the truth? That's her first credential. Her second is that she is better than money.

We're in verses 10 and 11 now. Just look at verses 10 and 11. Verse 10 says that silver isn't a patch on godly instruction.

[16:03] Choice gold can't match up to godly knowledge. Verse 11 says that diamonds are not a girl's best friend after all. And then you have this sweeping and glorious statement, all that you may desire in terms of material possessions cannot compare with wisdom.

Now friends, I want to ask, do we really believe that? Let me put it like this. Which would you rather have? I want to speak to you as an individual.

Which would you rather have? Would you rather have your great aunt Augusta dying and leaving you a small fortune, a really large sum of money, so large that you didn't have to work another day of your life?

You could spend April to September in Scotland and October to March in the Algarve. You had so much money. You could have a BMW and an Afghan hound and clean sheets on your bed every night as Lady Clementine Churchill used to have.

Would you like to have that? Or God's wisdom gained by diligent search and hard study? Which would you prefer? Remember the old rock song?

[17:15] The Beatles used to sing it but somebody else wrote it I think. The best things in life are free, but you can keep them for the birds and bees. Now give me money. That's what I want, money.

Money or wisdom? How does your heart respond to that question? You might be somebody who's about 20 or 22 years old, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, idealistic.

Look ahead 15 years, maybe 20 years, when you've perhaps got a demanding job, maybe married with a young family to bring up. Will it be money or wisdom that you really want then?

Look again at verses 10 and 11. Wisdom says, kick silver into touch, drop gold into the wheelie bin, don't give a thought to jewels, in fact everything you may desire is of no consequence compared with me.

Don't those two verses challenge our hearts? Don't they undermine so much that western society and eastern society is founded on, which is the love of money?

[18:22] So wisdom's second credential is that she is far better than money. And in that case, we might well say that we don't actually want her.

Now her third credential, verses 12 and 13, 13, is that she hates evil. Notice the words hatred and hate as I read verse 13 again.

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech, I hate. So God's wisdom detests, abominates evil.

And therefore, those who listen to her learn to do the same thing. You don't often hear Christian teaching that insists on Christians learning to be haters. We're often urged to learn to love, and quite rightly so, love for other people, not least our enemies.

That's one of the hallmarks of the Christian life. But the Bible also teaches us to hate what is wrong. In the second half of verse 13, you'll see wisdom tells us about four things that she hates.

[19:33] She hates pride, arrogance, the way of evil, and perverted speech, which means lies and hypocrisy, fair words that disguise foul motives. Wisdom hates these things.

She looks at them all too often, and she turns away in disgust. So let me ask, have we learned yet to be like her? Or do we rather enjoy, for example, looking at television programs that portray lying and cheating and pride and arrogance?

Let's learn to love better, certainly. But we'll only grow in God's wisdom if we also learn to hate the things that God hates. Let's pray, for example, Lord, help me to love others more truly, and help me to hate more clearly the things in human behavior, especially in my own behavior, that you also hate.

Now, wisdom's fourth credential is that she lies behind wise government. This is verses 14 to 16. Let me read verses 15 and 16 again.

By me, by wisdom, kings reign, and rulers decree what is just. By me, princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly. Now, notice the emphasis there is on just government.

[20 : 56] Wisdom is not claiming to be the source of unjust government, but she's saying that when rulers do rule justly, it's she who enables them to do it. This is why we need to pray regularly for kings and presidents, prime ministers and governments, whether they're Christians or not.

Even the best systems of government are flawed with a certain degree of corruption and injustice. But wherever there is justice and better government, verse 16 is teaching us that God's wisdom lies behind it.

And friends, we can be very grateful for that fact. I am so thankful that I live in Britain and not in Somalia, for example, or Burma today.

I'm not saying that we're perfectly governed in this country. We're not. But we don't suffer from pervasive, endemic corruption in the way that so many nations do. When you visit a country that is gripped by endemic corruption, you see how deeply damaging it is to a nation's life.

Money gets siphoned off in huge quantities into the pockets of a very few, very rich, powerful, wicked people. And the ordinary people suffer grinding poverty from which it's almost impossible to escape.

[22 : 11] It's horrible. I was in Nigeria a few months ago and at the conference where I was doing some teaching, I met a young student. He was a tall, fine-looking young African, about six foot two or three.

I had to look up to him to speak to him, straight back. He looked a fine, intelligent young man. And I said to him, what would you like to do with your life? And he said, I'd like to do two things.

He got it well sorted out in his mind. Two things, he said. I'd like to learn to expound and teach the Bible really well. And also, I would like to help my country to be better governed.

So I said to him, do you want to be president of Nigeria? And he immediately said to me, yes, I do. So I said, it could cost you very dearly if you were to stand up firmly against all the corruption.

And he said, I know it would. Of course, the truth is it could easily cost him his life. And I think he knew that. Now, our verses here in Proverbs 8 are teaching us that wherever rulers and governments do their work justly, it's the wisdom of God that gives them their power.

[23 : 22] wisdom's fifth credential comes in verses 17 to 21. And that is that she gives fine fruit or fine rewards to those who love her and seek her out.

In other words, she's a generous benefactress. She greatly enriches the lives of those who seek her and find her. Look at verse 17, for example. I love those who love me and those who seek me diligently find me.

Isn't that a lovely heartwarming verse? Wisdom is promising us that if we seek her seriously, we will find her and we will discover just how good and loving and kind she is to us.

She gives us fruit, as verse 19 puts it, and an inheritance, as verse 21 puts it. So to seek for wisdom is not like earnestly seeking the North Pole.

If you earnestly seek the North Pole, your only reward will be polar bears and frostbite. I personally can live very happily without them. But to seek wisdom leads to terrific rewards.

[24 : 32] Verse 18, a secure and honoured lifestyle. Verse 18 is one of those verses in Proverbs that show us a general tendency. It's not a cast-iron guarantee that wisdom will make people wealthy, but it's saying that there will be the fruit of security and honour for those who are bent on learning the Lord's wisdom.

And then verses 19 to 21 speak of wisdom's fruit, wisdom's yield, and the inheritance that she grants to those who prize her, and how she fills their treasuries.

And as verse 19 puts it, this fruit is better than gold, this yield is better than choice silver. The verses don't tell us exactly what this fruit and yield and inheritance are, but in a sense, the whole of the book of Proverbs is telling us what the fruit of wisdom is.

And if I were to try and sum it up in just a few phrases, the answer would be that wisdom yields peace, security, the knowledge of God, a working knowledge of how to get on well with other people, how to use money wisely, how to avoid the moral traps and pitfalls of life, and how to live happily, gladly, under the lordship of God.

To listen to the voice of folly in the end will only bring personal disintegration, confusion, pain, and distress. But to live under the lordship of God is to live human life at its best, and to be best equipped to survive the sufferings and the buffetings of Satan, which will come to all of us.

[26 : 12] So there's wisdom's fifth credential. She gives a yield of fine fruit, fine rewards to those who seek her diligently. Just take a little sip of Billy Bradford's boisterous brew.

Ah, very nice. Thank you, Billy. Well, now sixth, we have a slightly longer section from verses 22 to 31, not that I shall spend very long on it, but in 22 to 31, wisdom presents the credential that she is God's original co-worker.

Now this passage, 22 to 31, it's one of the high points in the book of Proverbs. It's a tremendous piece of poetry, which echoes some of the great passages in the book of Job, the book of Isaiah, and Psalm 90.

In fact, just run your eye again over 22 to 31. My suggestion would be to say it out loud in a big voice by yourself in some resonant building, and then you'll feel the force of it.

Do you ever do that? I mean, for example, go into a cow shed, a good resonant cow shed with a big concrete floor, as long as the cows are not present at the time, and declaim this passage out loud, and you'll be thrilled by it.

[27 : 28] Or if you're a person who's not blessed with your own personal cow shed, why not try the bathroom, again, if there's nobody in it. And I think you will find that the rubber ducks will dance for joy as they hear these wonderful words.

Just look at verses 22 to 31 again. Because at verse 22, it's as though the tectonic plates of chapter 8 begin to move.

We suddenly change gear. Up to verse 22, we've been at the town gates, we've been at the school of truth, we've been in the foyer of the Royal Bank of Scotland, we've been at the seat of government, Holyrood and Westminster, we've been firmly anchored in the domestic and political life of busy men and women.

But at verse 22, we're cast back to Genesis chapter 1. In fact, to a stage even before Genesis 1 was a twinkle in its father's eye.

Look at verse 23. Ages ago, I, wisdom, was set up at the first, before the beginning of the earth. Verse 24.

[28 : 32] When there were no depths, I was brought forth. When there were no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth. Aren't those tremendous verses?

The point that wisdom is making is that she is not some late arrival on the scene. She's always been there. Look at the six whens of verses 27, 28 and 29.

You'll see there are two whens per verse and they're building up to the climax of a great then in verse 30. Let me read from verse 27. Notice the whens and the then. When he, God, when he established the heavens, eye, wisdom, was there.

When he drew a circle on the face of the deep. When he made firm the skies above. When he established the fountains of the deep. Can you sense the crescendo here? When he assigned to the sea its limit so that the waters might not transgress his command.

When he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was beside him like a master workman. And I was daily his delight rejoicing before him always.

[29 : 36] So when all these primeval creative acts took place. Wisdom is saying I was there. And not as some spectator looking on and applauding. But as verse 30 puts it as a master workman.

I was employed by the creator of the world. My skill and power helped him to fashion the oceans and the mountains. To paraphrase verse 29. When he took out his compass and protractor and his ruler and pencil to mark out the boundaries of the oceans and decide where to place the continents and the islands.

I was there beside him. And just look at the heavenly joy in verse 30. I was daily his delight rejoicing before him always. So to create the universe filled the Lord with utter delight and joy.

Genesis chapter 1 tells us that each day he stopped and looked at his handiwork and saw that it was very good. But these verses tell us as Genesis 1 does not of how delighted and joyful God was as he made the continents and the oceans.

Just imagine his delight here as he moulded the cairn gorms. Imagine his joy as he made the beautiful island of sky. As he prized open the walls of the great glen and Loch Ness and filled it with monsters.

[31 : 02] As he opened the waters of the river Clyde and filled the river with salmon. Now wisdom is nothing less than the mind of God.

She personifies his ability, his capacity, his astonishing creative power. And, and this is the wonder of it all, she, wisdom, speaks with us.

She shares herself with us. She doesn't remain locked up in the Godhead. She presents herself to the human race and she showers us with gifts and blessings if we are prepared to seek her out.

Now friends, the real thrust of this chapter comes in its final five verses. In the first 31 verses, wisdom is making a case for herself.

She's forcing us to look at her qualities. She's presenting her credentials. So she's telling us that she deals in truth. She's better by far than money. She hates evil.

[32 : 02] She lies behind wise government. She gives fine rewards. And she is God's co-worker in the creation of everything. But she doesn't stop there at verse 31.

How could she? There is an inevitable consequence of all this. And it's for our benefit. But she presses it home in these final few verses. And this is the consequence in verse 32.

In fact, verse 32 is the central command of the whole chapter. And now, oh sons, listen to me. Listen. That's what she's saying.

Just think of the voices, the many voices that clamor for our attention today. There are so many of them that ask us to listen to them. Mr. Cameron. Mr. Miliband.

Mr. Salmond. President Obama. Simon Cowell. Very influential. Richard Dawkins. J.K. Rowling. Jermaine Greer.

[33 : 01] Perhaps a generation back, but still powerful. Even the ghosts of Marx and Lenin are still shuffling about in the dust. Who do we listen to? Who's going to shape our minds and form our convictions?

God's wisdom says to us, listen to me. And you see two great Old Testament beatitudes here. Verse 32. Blessed are those.

Blessed by God are those who keep my ways. And then verse 34. Blessed by God is the one who listens to me. Now for us to listen to God means that our Bible will always be our number one book. We'll have to buy a new copy of the Bible every five years because the old one keeps falling apart. But the wisdom of God is not just contained in the book of Proverbs. It's contained throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

And look how verse 34 focuses the issue for us. Blessed is the one who listens to me watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

[34 : 06] In other words, every day going to the source of truth and life. Our temptation will always be to be dull and sluggish and complacent with our own life as it is.

Yes, we might say I'm a Christian, but I'm rather settled in a rather comfortable spot. Don't wake me up. Don't challenge me to move or to grow or to make progress. I'm okay as I am.

As though wisdom might say to me, Edward, you wuss, wake up. Listen to me. Wisdom won't allow us to sit in our sluggishness. She shakes us. Listen to my voice.

There is so much more to learn about God and about the Lord Jesus. In fact, if you and I had 500 years on earth, we still wouldn't know our Bibles fully. Listen to me, you sons of men, she says.

Why? Verse 35. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favour from the Lord.

[35 : 04] But he who fails to find me injures himself. All who hate me love death. So to close our ears to the voice of wisdom is to embrace death and ruin.

If you leave this building tonight, determined not to listen to God, to his wisdom, determined to keep your Bible shut, it's like embracing death.

But to watch daily at wisdom's gates, to wait beside her doors. That is to find life and to obtain favour, blessing from the Lord.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray together. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

How we thank you for this great word of blessing, this promise of blessing, dear Father, to the one who listens to the voice of your wisdom, daily watching, waiting, with ears open and hearts soft and tender and ready to hear your promptings.

[36 : 29] How we pray, dear Father, that you'll have mercy upon each of us. We confess that we are sluggish by nature and it's much easier to do other things. But we thank you for this promise of blessing and we pray indeed that you'll bring us to a growing maturity, a growing understanding of you and of the Lord Jesus and of the Gospel as we listen to your voice.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.