

## Prayer

Within everything else I do today, Lord Jesus, give me the courage to carve out the time and space I need to honour You and listen to your voice. Calm me down, give me peace, free my spirit, clear my mind, and let me take a spiritual breath of fresh air from every moment spent with You. Hour by hour, Lord Jesus, change me for the better by the power of Your Holy Spirit: AMEN

## Other Prayer Suggestions

### Weekly Theme: Finance

*Pray for those who cannot obtain the finances necessary to run their businesses. Ask the Lord to expose wrongdoing and encourage good practice in small business finance.*

### On-going prayers

- *Ask the Lord to bless research into clean energy sources*
- *Give thanks to God for the gift of love and those who love you*
- *Pray for Great Britain and its current political instability*

## Meditation

Be careful, fellow believers ...

With the best of intentions, we lose our way  
For the world is full of sin and temptation.

Be wise, fellow believers ...

There is always more to learn about faith  
So allow God's Spirit to teach you all wisdom.

Be diligent, fellow believers ...

Do not be casual in reading God's Word  
For Satan delights in ignorance of the truth.

Be positive, fellow believers ...

Our God has a plan for the world's salvation,  
And he will achieve it against all the odds!

Be content, fellow believers ...

For everything is possible through Christ our Saviour,  
Our victory has been won, and our future secured!

## Bible Study - Hebrews 13:18-25

<sup>18</sup> *Pray for us; we are confident that our consciences are clear, and we have sought to do what is right in everything.* <sup>19</sup> *I urge you to do this all the more, so that I may be restored to you quickly.*

<sup>20</sup> *Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus our Lord, by the blood of the eternal covenant,* <sup>21</sup> *put you right in every good thing so that you may do his will, doing amongst us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

<sup>22</sup> *Friends, I appeal to you to accept my word of exhortation with patience, for I have written to you somewhat briefly.* <sup>23</sup> *You should know that our brother Timothy has been released; and if he arrives in time, he will be with me when I see you.* <sup>24</sup> *Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy send you greetings.* <sup>25</sup> *Grace be with you all.*

## Review

At the end of this great letter, the writer of Hebrews says farewell. From beginning to end, the writer has not identified himself, and the only hint of personal information comes at the very end in which he indicates a personal friendship with Timothy. In addition, the last but one verse indicates that the letter may have been written in Italy. Given all we know about the movements of the early apostles and all the people they knew, these could indicate that the letter was written by Paul whilst in Rome, or even Peter or Barnabas. Nothing is conclusive. It is very clear, however, that the letter is an appeal to Jewish Christians to accept that their own heritage points towards Jesus Christ as God's Messiah and Saviour. The whole letter can be summarised in this way: Jesus is superior to all people and angels (1:1 to 3:6) and His sacrifice is greater than the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament (4:14 to 7:28), making Jesus the supreme 'High Priest' through whom God has brought salvation (8:1-10:39).

Most people regard the letter as difficult, requiring a detailed knowledge of the sacrificial laws of Leviticus and God's covenant relationship with His people in the Old Testament. Despite our own problems with such things, the author comes across as positive and assured, and it is no surprise therefore to hear him say; 'we are confident that our consciences are clear, and we have sought to do what is right in everything.' (13:18). And then, as with a number of Paul's letters, the author speaks of wanting to visit those to whom he writes (13:19,23). Against this backdrop, however, this final passage has two important features, firstly the wonderful blessing found in verses 20 and 21, which admirably summarises the letter's appeal. Secondly, it contains an intriguing appeal to its recipients to accept the letter 'with patience' (13:22).

The author knows full well that his letter must be read carefully, but it seems strange that he should say his work is brief (13:22)! Most people accept that this letter is one of the most theologically demanding letters in the New Testament, so by what measure could this letter be described as 'brief'? The only longer letters in the New Testament are Romans and the two letters of Paul to the Corinthians! We cannot be sure, but it is possible that this comment reflects a growing sense of need in the late first century church for people to delve more deeply into the meaning of the life of Christ. Around that time a movement of the Spirit gave rise to the first great thinkers and scholars of the church, people like Justin Martyr (100 – 165 AD) and Tertullian (160 – 220 AD).

The blessing found in verses 20 and 21 is one of those great affirmations of the faith of God's people which deserve regular use; 'Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead the great Shepherd of the Sheep ...' (13:20,21). The whole blessing is not Trinitarian in nature (that is, it does not specifically mention God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit) because it does not mention the Holy Spirit, and for this reason many churches refrain from using it as a blessing. We should not be pedantic, though, because God does not lay down rules about how He should be addressed; He simply works amongst us, and reveals Himself as 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit', and He delights in our praise in whatever way He is addressed. So, this great and ancient blessing, possibly in use even before it was included in this letter, summarises our faith in Christ in remarkable and helpful ways. It speaks of the incredible blessings of the resurrection of the dead which have been won for us by the death (or 'the blood') of 'the great shepherd of the sheep, Jesus our Lord' (13:20),

according to the covenant purposes and will of God. This same Jesus, our great High Priest who has died for us, puts us right with God (13:21) so that we are able to do His will, and by His help we are able to see the fruits of the Kingdom amongst us. This is the One we worship, 'Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever, and ever ...' (13:21)

The words of this blessing are simple yet profound, both memorable and also capable of feeding the soul. If, perhaps, you have found the study of Hebrews a little difficult, then I suggest that by learning and using this blessing at home and in the church, you will feed your soul with all the goodness God is able to give us through this great letter of the New Testament.

## Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In the first two verses, the writer urges his readers to pray for Him. How does praying for people help them?
2. How does the 'blood of the eternal covenant' (13:20) put us right with God?
3. Having read through Hebrews and studied it, discuss in your group who the author may have been.

## Discipleship

### Personal comment:

*The blessing at the end of Hebrews has always fascinated me, not just because it speaks so strongly about the resurrection, but because of its description of what the work of Christ achieves in us. The phrase 'put right in every good thing so that you may do His will' expresses most neatly what so many of us want to see happen because of our faith. We would like what we do to be 'right', and in accord with God's will, and we certainly hope that our deeds will give glory to God. For this reason, this blessing deserves more use than it is given.*

### Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Have a go at learning by memory the words of the blessing in Hebrews (13:20,21). If you have the opportunity, try using it at church; perhaps by volunteering to say a final prayer and blessing at the end of a meeting, for example.*
- *Pray in your own words for the blessing of the whole church and for the grace of God to be shown in your midst in mutual love and care.*

## Final Prayer

We praise You, Jesus Christ of Nazareth. You have defeated all the powers of darkness and established the Kingdom of God, where love, truth, goodness and righteousness are found! You have done all this for us even though we are not worthy of Your love, and we thank You, Lord Jesus: AMEN