

A Plea for Prayer

Hebrews 13:18-19

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 13, 2023

Good morning, everyone. If you are joining us for the first time today, we are coming toward the end of our study on the book of Hebrews. This is not the last sermon, but it's almost the last sermon. Our last sermon will be next week, and if you're wondering what we're doing after that, we are going to start a series entitled "The Christian and Civil Disobedience." It's going to be on the subject of is it okay for a Christian to disobey the governing authorities? The answer to the question, I'll go and tell you the answer. The answer is yes. The Bible does provide opportunities to do that. But it's not as simple as just going, "Oh, I can do whatever I want." There are parameters to the discussion. Okay. There are biblical examples to follow. There's the things to consider such as, okay, well, if you can disobey the government, does that mean you don't submit to anything? Well, that's not exactly the way it works. There's churches that have disobeyed the government, but at the same time, they pay their taxes. And at the same time, they follow fire codes for the building, and they follow parking lot codes, and they do all kinds of things where they are still putting themselves under the government. But it's a discussion that needs some consideration. I don't even think I really need to tell you why we should talk about that. It's on everybody's mind, right? It's something that's been going on for some time, if you want to go back and look online, we did talk about the government three years ago as a church. I did a series called "The Christian and the Government," I think it was called; it's online. But we didn't go into the issue of disobedience in defiance at that time; we didn't go into a theological consideration of that. But we're going to do that starting at the end of the month of August. So if you want to put that on your calendars, we'd love for you to be part of that with you with us. We're going to shepherd you through these discussions a little bit; talk about them from different angles of Scripture.

But for this morning, we are in the book of Hebrews. So if you open your Bible there with me, we're going to look at Hebrews chapter 13, starting in verse 18. So Hebrews chapter 13, starting in verse 18, in here, the word of God says this, it says,

Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things. And I urge *you* all the more to do this, so that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

But I urge you, brethren, bear with this word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. Take notice that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom, if he comes soon, I will see you. Greet all of your leaders and all the saints. Those from Italy greet you.

Grace be with you all.

And we will end the reading there because as you can see in your Bibles, that is the last verse in the book of Hebrews. After this, the author has nothing more to say, so he does what most New Testament writers do at the end of a letter. And that is to turn to the audience and make some personal remarks. He's been giving good doctrine and theology and talking about salvation and the gospel in Christ. Now he's going to talk about some intimate things. So for example, verse 23, he says, "Our brother Timothy has been released." That's a personal friend, presumably of these people. Then he says in verse 24, "those from Italy, greet you." That's where he's writing from, he's in Italy, or possibly Rome. And as he does that, right in the midst of these things, he says something interesting in verse 18, this is our focus for today. He says, "Pray for us."

Why does he say that? Of all the things to put it into the letter. why would he ask for prayer? Well, I guess he needed it. It's one reason you ask for prayer. Ministry is hard. The work of a pastor is difficult. He's struggling with this. He's wrestling with all the duties of shepherding and preaching and helping lost souls but it's probably more to it as well. Not only is ministry hard, can we just say life is hard, amen. Being Christian is hard. Living in a broken fallen world where there's evil everywhere, it's hard. That's why you need prayer. There's a desperate longing for God in the soul of every man. The author of Hebrews knows that. He says, "What can you do without prayer?" Nothing. How do you make it without God's help? You can't, so you have to pray. I don't care who you are, the pastor, layperson, brand new Christian, old Christian. Prayer is the secret behind every believer's life. Even though it's not a public thing, and it's not out in the open typically, prayer is the furnace room of the church. It's where the power is generated.

And the fact is that God is sovereign, and He's in control of the affairs of men, which means God does what He wants, when He wants with whoever He wants. Amen? We're going to be "amening" a lot this morning, just so you know. But at the same time, that sovereign God over the universe listens to you. Can you believe that? It's one of the great mysteries of the universe, that through the blood of Jesus Christ, His death on the cross the power of the gospel, you can go to Him now and He hears you. And when He does, He unleashes the forces of heaven on your behalf, but the reality is that when you don't pray, He doesn't. And when you refuse to do it because you're too busy or too tired or too distracted, He leaves you alone. Not in a salvific sense, but just in a helpful sense. That's why this is so important.

When I read this verse for this week, and I was studying, I had to tell you, as a pastor, we will fail as a church, if you don't pray. Grace Fellowship Church won't make it if we as a body don't take the time to go to the Lord on our behalf. Because if God leaves us alone, we just won't make it. It's not possible.

There's just too much to do here. And what I mean is on any given Sunday, there are more needs than we could possibly get to. There are spiritual needs, physical needs, personal needs among the congregation. There's job needs, economic needs, financial needs being handed to us all the time from people. There are people who need to be encouraged. People need to be rebuked. People who need to be warned. People who need to be saved. People who need to be built up and encouraged because they're lonely. It's just needs, needs everywhere. This is why there's no way to make it on your own. You don't have the strength. You don't have the resources; you need the Lord and the power of God. There's only one person, one person only who can help the church and that is Christ. But He only helps you if you go to Him; you have to pray. It's been said that God disposes, Prayer proposes, because prayer is your lifeline to God. It's the one avenue you have to pour your souls out to Him, but the way it works is that you have to take advantage of it, or it won't do you any good.

Some of you do this very well, by the way. We have some prayer warriors in this church. I know because you come up to me almost every Sunday, you tell me "We're praying for you, Pastor Jeremy." When we have prayer times, you're there; you make this a regular habit in your life. But for others, it's a struggle because you feel like you're too busy to pray. You have time to talk to your friends, time to talk to your family, time to go on Facebook and talk to stranger after stranger after stranger there, but you don't have time to talk to God. And it shouldn't be that way. We all need to be praying here. Our church doesn't need one person do it. We need everybody doing it, and we need hundreds of prayers going up. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

Our sermon this morning is called "A Plea for Prayer." But I think we could call it a passionate plea for prayer, or a desperate plea. We don't need prayer a little, we need prayer a lot. And so if you're taking notes, here are three reasons why the author of Hebrews asked these people to pray for him. So we're going to use him as an example in our own personal lives of what this should look like for us. But if you're taking notes, this is the outline three reasons why this man asked for prayer. The first one and these are all very simple, but from the text is that he needed it.

The first reason why the author of Hebrews asked for prayer at the end of this letter is because he acknowledges that he needed it. Now that's interesting. This man is an author of Scripture, we don't know who he is, his identity is not given to us, but presumably he's an apostle, which means he's a very godly man. He's the top of the food chain in a sense, and he says, "I need your prayer." He doesn't say, "Prayer is for you guys while we don't need it. And prayers for the normal people down there in the church while the apostles can get along fine without it." They're super spiritual. He says this is something that applies to every person. Listen, if this guy needs prayer, how much more do we?

If you look in verse 18, he says it this way, when he says, "Pray, pray, pray for us." Even though that verse is short, there's a world of meaning behind it because the word "pray" here, it's a general word used for prayer in the Bible that embraces everything you would think of when you hear this term. But there's more to it than that. Like a lot of words, in the Bible, if you dig into here, you find there's a lot of

information you can get from one word because there's a prefix added to it in the beginning in Greek, which intensifies it. It is the prefix *pros*, P R O S *pros*, and it means in the face of something; or face to face, where you're here and they're here, and you're having a very intimate conversation. So when he says, "Pray for us," he's not saying do it from a distance half-heartedly, apathetically. going through the motions and checking off a box. He's saying, "I want you to pray like you're in the face of God. And I want you to do it as if you're as close to Him as you possibly can be." Pour your heart into it. He says. Do this with a passion. Lay your guts out there. Listen, you guys understand there's prayer. And then there's prayer, right? There's worship, and then there's worship that comes from the bottom of your heart, when you're down on your knees, head to the floor. That's what this is talking about.

Also, when he says, "Pray for us," that's an imperative in the Greek, which means this is a command. It's not an optional thing. He's not saying pray for us if the spirit moves you. Pray for us if you can get around to it, pray for us if you have the time. He says no, make the time. The Spirit is moving you now. Do it. It's not about your feelings. If you're gonna wait and pray just when you feel like it, let me tell you some you're not gonna pray that much. One of the Puritans said, "There are days when I would rather die than pray." You guys know what that's like. But this says you pray anyway. And you trust the Lord to move your emotions to fit the will of God as you do it.

One more thing to point out here, this verse, it's in the present tense in Greek, so it's continual. The author's not telling you to pray once and that's it. And he's not asking you to do it one day a week when you're in this room between the hours of 9:30 and 11:30 on Sunday morning. He's telling you do this repeatedly. Pray over and over again every chance you get so that your prayer becomes a lifestyle. Not because you stop whatever you're doing, and you go down on your knees in the office or something like that. I think we all understand that to be kind of hard thing to do. But prayer is just always on your mind. Prayer is always kind of oozing out of you a little bit. You're going throughout the day, if you're at work, you're praying for people, at home you're praying for people, on vacation you're praying for people, when you come back, you're praying for people. We've all whispered, the prayer, "Help me, Lord. Your will be done. Can you work here and do something?"

In fact, if you're wondering what this looks like when it says, "Pray for us," in the context, the term "us" is referring to the same group of people that are mentioned in verse 17. If you look there in your Bibles, when it says, "obey your leaders." That's who "us" is. So the author's asking you to pray for the leaders of the church or the ones responsible for overseeing. It means you pray for pastors and elders and shepherds. You pray for preachers and teachers and ministers, those who serve either full time or in a voluntary capacity.

But personally, I really think this could even mean more than that. I don't think you need to stop there. How many of you have ever been blessed by the ministry of a pastor on the internet? Everybody's hand go up in the room, we all have, right? Pray for that person. How many of you have been helped by someone who wrote a book? A pastor preacher who wrote a book, our hands could go up there, and pray

for that person. This could refer to your church, other churches, that could mean a lot of things. I think this also relates to the missionaries. You should be asking the Lord to help men who are pastoring churches in the Ukraine right now, have you done that? They're pastoring them in bunkers right now. Pray for those in North Korea and China who were in fear of getting arrested. Pray for those who are shepherding in Africa, in Asia and the Middle East in the midst of Muslim countries. In fact, we're putting together Mission's Program here at Grace. And we're kind of in the early stages of formulating that, and we had a meeting on Wednesday night, where we talked to a missionary from Africa, who told us that the average lifespan in the country that he's serving is 55 years old. And when he said that you can hear the air go out of the room, because we all wanted to pray for him. That's what this is talking about. You don't pray for those people because you have to, and you don't do it because someone's twisting your arm and guilt tripping you. You just can't help it. When you hear how people are dying in a place like Sierra Leone, it should drive you to pray. If you don't, you are a hard-hearted individual.

By the way, I think we're not done yet. I think this verse could go further because when he says, "Pray for us," I mean, this really should serve as a reminder that you should pray for everybody really. Not just missionaries, not just pastors and elders, there's a biblical principle of praying for every single person you can think of. The Bible doesn't limit it to those and leadership. So you can pray for your friends. Pray for your family. Pray for strangers you've never met before. Pray for deacons and ushers and greeters. Pray for the worship team, hospitality team evangelism team, pray for those who serve in the nursery. Pray for those who served with the youth. You can pray for them twice because they had a busy weekend. You guys didn't sleep last night, did you? Pray for them. Pray for everybody. But whatever you do, the key idea here is others. If you notice in the verse, the author doesn't say pray for yourself, he says pray for us pray for others. Don't ask for your needs to be met, first. We'll talk about that in a moment; there's a place for that. But put your thoughts on those around you. I heard one pastor say when you pray, you should use the acrostic JOY, which stands for Jesus Others, and then You. See the order there? He comes first, others come second, and we're down at the bottom. And that's a humbling thing to think about. And I mean, I don't know about you, but when I pray, I start listing off all my needs right off the bat. And say, "I need this, and I need that. And God, can you do this? And God, can you do that." And all that's true. That's fine. You can pray that way. You need things from the Lord, but the author is saying that it doesn't need to just stay there. Your prayers need to be others focused.

When God saved you, He didn't save you to be alone. When the Lord brought you into the family of God, He didn't do it so you could be by yourself, so you don't pray that way. When you think about this theologically, Jesus died for the sheep plural. Not just singular; plural, many sheep, lots of sheep. He died for a kingdom with many subjects. He died for the world. He died for a family with many members, a vine with many branches, a building with many stones, a lamp with many lampstands, a priesthood with many priests, but it wasn't just about us. So we can't think that way about this issue. We can't think that way about the Christian life. There's more going on in the mind of God than just our little things. This is why you pray for people in Africa because you know that Jesus didn't just die for you. He died

for the people in Africa. And He didn't just save those who live in Chilliwack and are part of Canada. He saved those who live thousands of miles away. They're part of His plan, and so we pray for them.

The story is told of the time someone approached G. Campbell Morgan, the pastor of Westminster Chapel in London, England, he proceeded Martyn Lloyd Jones there. And they asked him, "Dr. Morgan, is anything too small to ask God?" And Dr. Morgan thought about a minute, and he said, "My dear friend, is anything too big for God? Everything is small to God. And so you can pray for whatever you want, and He'll answer it." And he's right.

That brings you to another reason here why the author of Hebrews is asking for prayer. First one because he needed it. Second, because he had a good conscience. And this one will take a little explaining and that's fine. We are going to work through it a little bit, but if you want to write it down, the second reason why the author of Hebrews asked these people to pray for him is because he had a good conscience and he conducted himself honorably. Which means that he asked for prayer because he had shown himself to be trustworthy.

The way this is written here, it's going to sound like he's defending himself. If you look at the verse, the author says this, he says, "Pray for us for," the word "for" it's a preposition of purpose. This is the purpose or reason why he's asking for prayer. "Pray for us for we are sure we have a good conscience." Now if you kind of read between the lines here, it seems like he's saying this because he's vindicating himself. Someone has infiltrated the church these people attended, and they are criticizing him and saying, "Did you hear what Brother so and so did? Did you hear what he said? It was awful. He's a bad pastor, you need to fire him, find somebody else?" And he says, "No, you shouldn't because we are sure we have a good conscience." There's a lot behind all this that we don't know in the text. But there's no other reason to relate to your conscience unless you're having something like that going on.

Now, what is the conscience? You guys ever wondered that before? It's a very biblical term. It's a Greek word *syneidēsis*. It's a compound word from *syn* or with and *eidesis* knowledge. It refers to the part of your soul that has the knowledge of God stamped on it. It's a part of you that helps to identify right from wrong, weigh your motives, make moral evaluations of them. I'll say a little bit more about it in a moment, but it's something we all have. You have a conscience; I have a conscience. Christians have one; lost people have one, their conscience is not awakened to the things of God. It's a dead conscience, but they have a conscience. Well, the author's saying here is that I'm on good terms with my conscience, so you have no reason to turn me away as your pastor. My conscience is telling me I haven't done anything wrong. Now, that's not to say that the author of Hebrews is perfect, and he never did anything wrong. It just means when he did, he addressed it and made it right with God. That's the idea of what he's saying.

And if you notice, that's not the only thing that he says in this passage is he's defending himself. It's one thing to have a clear conscience, it's another thing to prove it. So if you read on in the verse, he says,

“Pray for us for we're sure that we have a good conscience, desiring to conduct ourselves honorably in all things.” And the word “desiring” here it connects to the previous thought, in a way that demonstrates this is how he's proving he has a good conscience, and that is by his conduct. Conscience, conduct, they go together like a hand in glove. If you have a good conscience, you will have a good conduct. If you don't, you won't. I've met people, you probably have too, and they say, “I have a good conscience.” You say, “You should not.” Your actions have to match it. This man is an example of that. He practiced what he preached. He didn't just talk the talk, but he walked the walk. He didn't act one way on Sunday morning, and another way on Monday morning; it was the same guy in both places. You can look at his man's life and see that he acted honorably in all things, everything. This was an honorable man at work. He was an honorable man at home. He was honorable at church, honorable with his family, honorable with his wife, honorable with his friends, honorable, honorable, honorable. And I think the lesson here if we're putting this part of the verse with the first part of the verse, is that this man is telling you are telling the audience here, I'm making it easy for you to pray for me. I'm not making it hard for you to bring my name before the throne of God.” He just told these people to intercede on his behalf, and go to the Lord with their prayers, and ask Him for help. But at the same time, he's showing them I'm doing my best not to frustrate you in the attempt. There is nothing more frustrating than praying for someone and watching them fall into sin. And there's nothing more discouraging for a church or a Christian than to bring someone's name before the throne, and then watch them disqualify themselves from ministry. And what the author of Hebrews is saying is that we haven't done that.

The word “we” again is talking about the leaders in verse 17, that the leaders of the church, that they were a part of wherever it may have been, were not acting that way. Now, as you hear that, you may be wondering, “What does that have to do with me? I'm not a pastor. And how does that relate to my life? Pastor Jeremy, I'm not in leadership.” Well, the answer is that you may not be but I'm guessing you have someone praying for you right now. If you're a Christian in this room, and a believer in the body of Christ, there is someone bringing your name before the throne. You may not know who they are, you may not be aware of it, but you want to do your best not to frustrate them either by giving into sin. We're supposed to be praying for each other, but as part of that prayer ministry, we hold each other accountable. And we got to remember what you do impacts others. So when you get into sin, you impact someone in the church. And when they get into sin, it impacts your life. You don't just drag your name through the mud as a Christian when you disobey God. You drag someone else's name too because they say, “Oh, what church do you go to? Oh, Grace Fellowship Church? Oh. Who are some of the people there? Oh.” We're a family; where one of us goes, we all go. Some people ignore this because they say when they sin, they say, “I haven't done anything wrong. I'm not hurting anybody.” That's not true. We trusted you; the church trusted you. You always hurt someone.

And before we move on from this verse, I actually want to pause for a moment and say a few words about this term conscience because I don't think we hear about it a lot today. It's a subject that's just not mentioned that much in our world because we live in a world where people are so afraid of guilt and shame. Nobody talks about the conscience anymore. It's a word that's almost disappeared from a lot of

people's vocabulary. But they shouldn't do that. You need to talk about it because the Bible says guilt is your friend if it lets you know you're doing something wrong. And shame is your ally if it shows you that there's sin going on. And the area where that takes place in your life is in the conscience. It doesn't take place in your hand. It doesn't take place in your foot or your ear. It takes place in your conscience. The conscience is like a smoke alarm that doesn't do anything if there's no trouble, no fire, and it doesn't make noise if there's no sin, but the second thing there is sin, it goes off. And the moment that it sees something wrong, it starts flashing and saying "Danger, danger, danger, Warning, warning, warning." Wake up and pay attention. Get out of bed and do something. God is mad at this. That's a good thing. You have smoke alarms in your house because it's a good thing. You don't want to perish in the fire. Romans 2:14 says God has even written His moral law on the conscience, and He scribbled it in here for all to know. So even if you've never heard all the law of God before, God has nevertheless placed something of the knowledge of it in your soul. Everybody knows it's wrong to tell a lie. Most everybody anyway, it's hard to find too many people who don't. They don't mind if they lie to you; they just don't want you to lie to them. And they don't mind if they covet your stuff; they just don't want you to steal theirs. They understand there's an issue there. Just like there's two great voices speaking inside our heads. There's the Word of God and there's this. There's the Bible and there's this other noise saying "stop" when you're in sin. Knock it off when you're wrong. Cut it out when you break the law.

Now to be clear, the conscience is not perfect. Only the Word of God is perfect. It's not infallible, it can make mistakes, but when you grow to know the Bible better, this is what the Word of God does. It sharpens your conscience. And it trains your conscience and it helps it to see what God sees. We've all, I think, had the experience of someone coming to us and asking forgiveness for something that we didn't even remember. And the reason they did that is because they've been sitting under the Word of God learning it, and it's strengthened their conscience so that the smallest offense against God drove them crazy. On the other hand, we've had people who have offended us in horrible ways, and they've never asked forgiveness because they're not sitting under the Word. Their conscience has become paralyzed; it's numb. It's like a desensitized thing.

One principle to draw from this text is you want to keep your conscience clean in the eyes of God. There's no way to pray if you don't do that. The Lord has set things up in such a way, it's not possible for you to cry out to Him, and have a relationship with Him, and have His listening ear if you're wrestling with your conscience all week and ignoring it. There is a connection between God and this inner voice inside your soul. So, if you want to keep the doorway to heaven open, pay attention to it.

One commentator said, "When God made man, he made him not only a physical creature, but a spiritual one as well. So that just as man has certain physical muscles, so he has spiritual ones. And the greatest of these is the conscience. The conscience can only help you if it's alive and alert and awake to the things of God, so you have to keep it that way." I remember the time a man told me that he couldn't figure out why God never answered his prayers, until someone else told him it was because he was living with a woman he was not married to. And then it clicked, and he repented, gave his life to Christ

moved out of that home. And the moment he did, he said, all of a sudden, the veil that stood between me and God was open, and the intimacy and fellowship of prayer was restored. That's the way it works. We all have to be sensitive to our conscience today.

And that brings us to this final reason why the author of Hebrews is asking for prayer here. To review these other ones, the first one is because he needed it. He tells them there was nothing he could do without prayer, which is an understatement. I don't think he can emphasize that enough. What can you do without prayer? Nothing. You can stand up here and preach sermons from now until eternity, there will not be one sinner saved without prayer. And you can serve in this church from now until however long you want to, it'll just be a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal if you don't ask God to move. God has to move. Nothing happens without Him moving. Another reason why the author asked for this is because he had a good conscience, which is something you have got to consider as well, because when it concerns the issue of prayer, there's really nothing more important than your conscience. You can stub your toe and pray; you can't hurt your conscience and pray. You can cut your arm off and pray; can't do that if there's issues going on in your soul. I wish every pulpit in Canada would start preaching that again. If we fail anywhere, there's so many churches and Christians that don't even talk about the conscience. They say you can pray no matter what and God will hear it even if you're in sin. That's not true. If you want your prayers to be heard by God, you keep your conscience clean. Which brings it to a final reason why this author is asking these people for prayer. And that is because he wants to be restored to them.

Again, these are all just coming from the verses we can see it just reading the chapter here, but a third reason why he asked for prayer is he wants to be restored, which means he wants him to pray that his suffering will stop so he can be reunited to them again. And when you come to the last verse, you can see this request for prayer is so important that he repeats it. And he says it one more time a different way. If you look in verse 19, this is how it begins. He says, "I urge you." Or I compel you, I beg you. "All the more to do this." All the more to do what? Well, to pray. That's what he's talking about in this section. He's asking them to intercede to the Lord. Again, he does it once in verse 18. Now he's doing it a second time. In case you forgot, he says Let me say it again. He says, "I pray that you would pray that I may be restored to you sooner." That's the request here. He's praying for restoration.

And the term "restored," sheds a little light on what could be happening between him and this church because it's a term that means to heal something that's been broken. Apparently, something had come between the author of Hebrews and this church and broken the relationship and severed the tie between them. It could have been the criticism that we referred to earlier and the fact that there are some in the church that are coming against this man.

But some have even said it could be that this man was in prison when he wrote the letter. Because that was a major problem in the first century. At this time in the history of the church, the church was under such a threat from the authorities that anytime a church was started, the pastors, even the missionaries

that would come into town, you wouldn't go to the hotel to see where you might be staying. You'd probably go to the jailhouse, that's where you're going to end up. They had a target on their back. The authorities knew if you strike the shepherd, the sheep are scattered, so they went after the shepherds. I had been told that in places like China, they do the same thing. They will find someone who's going to a secret church, they will follow him through the streets, but they're not ultimately interested in him. They want the pastor. That will kill the church is the thinking. This is what Timothy experienced because verse 23 says Timothy was in prison at this time. He had just been released, so the police had put him in jail. It makes it sound like the author might have been in the same place. Verse 24 says he was in Italy, that could have been referring to Rome.

But either way, the author's asking that they would pray for him to be freed. Timothy had been freed; now he would like to be free. Timothy got out of prison early before they killed him. He wants the same thing because he has people to visit, souls to shepherd, sinners to reach with the gospel, letters to write, sermons to prepare, all these kinds of things. So he's asking them to help him get out so he can get started in the ministry again. I've never been to jail myself as a pastor, but I know it would be hard to be away from your church if you love them. And this guy loves them. He wants to be back with them again.

And to be honest, you can't say a lot about this passage because it is pretty short. A lot of the details in this verse aren't given to us, but I think it is a touching part of the chapter because it demonstrates the author's shown you very clearly, it is okay to ask people to pray for you. Amen? There is nothing wrong with going to other Christians and asking them for help in this way. That's what he's doing. In verse 18, he says, "Pray for us." But that's not enough because he does it again to say not only pray for me once, pray for me twice. Don't just do it a little bit, do it a lot. It's a very biblical thing to do. Yes, you need to pray for others. And yes, you need to start with them first and have them on your mind, but at the same time, it doesn't end there. You can ask them to return the favour and have them pray on your behalf.

I mention this because I know some people it might be hard for them to do that. They don't want to ask for prayer because they think it might be wrong. It might be shining a spotlight on them, and maybe making them proud or something like that. But it's not. This is something very biblical to do. And just to show you this, I want to mention a few verses, if you want to write these down, that show that this is not the only time someone in the Bible asked for prayer. It happened all the time especially from the pen of the Apostle Paul. Some think that Paul might have wrote the book of Hebrews. Some of you told me that you think he might have been the author. And that could be the case. Paul was imprisoned in Rome and Italy. He did know Timothy personally, and he asked for prayers all the time. So this kind of thing really copied the example of His ministry.

But if you do a survey, the New Testament, let me give you some verses. In Romans 15:30 the apostle Paul says, "Now I urge you" hear that phrase again? Now I urge you or I admonish you, I beg you, "brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your

prayers.” And the word “strive,” it's a Greek word *agōnizomai* from which we get the word agonize. And Paul is telling you to agonize with me in prayer, sweat over it, labor over it, break your back over it. Because prayer is hard work. It's not easy when you pour out your heart for each other, but that's what he's asking you to do. Lay it on the line. Don't hold anything back. This is not a casual, devotional polite time when you just speak to the Lord kind of nonchalantly. There's nothing nonchalant about what he's asking for. This is a gut-wrenching cry. Have you ever prayed like that before? You should. Have you ever called out to God in an agonizing way for someone. This is the kind of prayer that you pray at the funeral home. This is the kind of prayer you make when you're sitting beside someone's hospital bed and you're watching the monitor and you don't know how much time they have left. You got to pray for people that way. Paul is asking them to pray for him that way. Not so he can shine the spotlight on himself, but he just wanted God to be glorified in His ministry.

Let me give you another verse here. Another one is found in 2 Corinthians chapter one, which was written to the church in Corinth, which was an interesting place to write a book of the Bible too, because if anybody needed prayer, it was them. Everybody should have been praying for them. The city of Corinth was a mess. It was the Las Vegas of the first century, entirely steeped in sin, but Paul plants a church there. And he tells them in 2 Corinthians 1:10-12 that He on whom we have set our hope, will yet deliver us. Why? And I'm summarizing here, “because you have prayed for us.” Paul was confident he would be delivered from his trials because the Corinthians went to the Lord on His behalf, and God answered. And I think we all pick on the Corinthians because it was a messy church, but I think it says a lot about these people that they prayed. Before you beat up on the Corinthians here, how many churches in North America don't pray anymore? They did. And they didn't pray, “God have mercy on us.” They said, “God, help Paul. God, do a work through Paul, God deliver Paul from his trials.” And Paul said, “Keep it up. I don't want you to stop.”

Another verse here is Philippians 1:12. There it says, “I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment and the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard.” And then down in verse 19. He says, “For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayers.” And that may sound a little bit hard to follow, but what Paul is saying is, for the first time in history, possibly, God has dropped a Christian right in the midst of the Praetorian Guard, the Emperor's own bodyguard. He has dropped a missionary right on Caesar's doorstep because of their prayers. This is a man armed only with prayer, and he's taken on the world. This is a man who only has the power of God with him, and he's going to seize his doorstep. It didn't happen because of their money. Those kinds of miracles did not occur because of their power and influence. They didn't have any of that. It happened because they prayed. When Paul was arrested in Jerusalem, I bet he might have wondered what in the world is going on? You know what God was doing? He was sending him to Rome, and the Romans were paying for it on a ship, so he could be a missionary. Prayer does that. Only the will of God,

Do you have time for one more? You do because you're sitting in here and we're not done yet. I have one more Second Thessalonians 3:1, it says, "Finally, brethren, pray for us." There's that phrase again, pray for us, "so that the word of the Lord will spread rapidly." And I love that one because Paul says, "Pray for us." Not so we'll be safe. Not so we'll be protected. Not so we'll be comfortable and have peace of mind. He says, "Pray for us" that the word of God would spread. That's the priority here. That's the goal, the Gospel to reach the nations; the word to go out to the world. Paul says, "I'll stay in prison, that's fine, but the Bible will not be imprisoned; it will go out."

And I know that we've stepped aside from our text for a moment, but I did that because I want you to see that in just about every book of the New Testament, you read about someone doing this. It's a major theme of the Bible. And that is when a letter was going out to Rome, or Ephesus, or Philippi, or Thessalonica, the apostles asked for prayer. And I would say you should do the same thing. Listen, if the apostles needed prayer, how much more do you need it? That's the greatest of Christians. Can you think of a greater Christian than the apostle Paul, I mean, I know you can't compare those things, but he did more than any of us could ever do. And if he asked for prayer, how much more should we?

This is an urgent thing. This word "urge" in Hebrews 13:19, it's not a nice word. It's not a polite word. It's a very blunt word, where the author is like grabbing you by the arm and saying, "Please." And he's pulling out your shirt, and he's saying, "Pray with all your mind for me." That word is in the continuous tense. Pray again, pray again, pray again. He knows he can't accomplish anything on his own.

You know, I've been at our church for several years now, I've been in other churches before coming here, and I would say this, this is something most churches need to work on because we do a good job serving each other. You guys are great servants. You do so much, but I know prayer is difficult, at least I think it is because every time we have a Bible study and asks for prayer, everybody just zips. And we do a good job talking during the Bible study and being transparent and working through things in the scriptures, but when the prayer time comes, we just bottle up. It shouldn't be that way. When someone asks if you need prayer, you should say, "Oh, do I ever? How much time do you have, brother? Yes, yes, yes and a thousand times, yes. Take out your pen, it's gonna take four pages." Write this down. The greatest thing anybody could ever do is pray for you.

If you're wondering what to ask for? Well, it's simple, really. There's lots of things you could ask for prayer for. Just to name some, you could ask for strength. You could pray for wisdom. Could ask them to pray for peace, boldness, and patience, humility, gentleness, and kindness, all the fruits of the Spirit. You could ask for prayer that you would live honorably like this text says and have good conduct and maintain a clear conscience. But whatever it is, if it's found in the Bible, ask people to pray for it for you. Some people have asked the question, well Pastor Jeremy what else is there to pray for because I'm new to this whole thing, and I don't really know what to do? The concept of prayer is pretty strange. Where do I begin? Well, open up the Bible and pray for the things that it says to pray for in there. Turn to something like the Psalms and read the Psalms out loud and make that your prayer to God. The

Psalms are prayers; they're petitions. So it's almost like they're a guidepost, helping your mind to understand what it looks like to pray. Turn to the Old Testament and you can read a prayer like Nehemiah's prayer in that book, and you could use that as a template to help you. Turn to the New Testament, find Paul's prayers there and do the same thing. But there's lots of examples. Go to Matthew six where the disciples say, "Lord, how do we pray?" And He gives them the Lord's Prayer. "Our Father who art in heaven," that's a template as well. There's lots of other ones.

Other ones say "Well, okay, if I do that, how do I know God will answer me?" That's a great question too. "How do I know He'll listen to my prayers? I don't want to pray something He's not going to answer." Well, I can help you with that with just one verse. If you want to write this down. First John 5:14 says, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." Not that He might hear you. Not that He will think about hearing you. Not that He could hear you if you are good enough, worked hard enough, He hears you.

The key phrase is "according to His will." That means if you pray according to His will, that is found in the Bible in the Word of God in Scripture, God hears you. So if you want your prayers to be effective, learn the book, read the book, study the book. It's been said, God talks to us in Scripture, we talk to Him in prayer, but there's a reciprocal relationship there. Because the Word of God is supposed to go in and then it goes out of you in prayer. And the Scripture flows through your heart through preaching, worship, music, all these things, and then it flows out of you like this. But it can't flow out if it didn't own in. It's gotta go in.

I think this is why the author of Hebrews ends the letter on this note. He's been talking about God and Christ in the gospel all throughout this letter. But now, he says, "Pray to Him." Don't just read about God, pray to God. Don't just talk about Him and make these doctrinal things that you learn, go to Him because you have a responsibility to do that. Listen, friends, a church will never rise above its success in this area, and it will never go past its emphasis on this ministry. Without prayer, I can't say this enough. All this is nothing. Your songs are nothing, your services are nothing, and the worship is nothing without prayer. Our preaching is useless, our teaching is useless, and the discipleship is the same way. Prayer is the power that makes it go with God. If God is not in it, it will all fall apart.

Listen, right after the service, I'm not going to go to the back, I often do that, but I'm going to stay up here at the front. If anyone would like to come up here and join me in prayer. You're in church right now, and that means if you can't pray here, I don't know where you can pray. And if it won't happen in this place, it just won't happen anywhere. So let's make it a habit to do that. Please come join me if the Lord is leading you. I know a lot of you have other things you have to do after the service and that's fine. We also have a prayer time on Sunday mornings before the service. It starts at nine o'clock to 9:15 ish around that time up there in the prayer room. I was gonna say the sweat room. It's pretty warm in there sometimes, but you can pour out your heart to the Lord and sweat over it, literally, at the same time,

hopefully, but we pray there. But go home and pray. Whatever you do, make this a priority. And now we've said a lot about prayer, but let's go to our Lord and pray to Him this morning.

Heavenly Father, God, we thank You for these words here. They are sobering reminder of what's really important in the Christian life, and that is our relationship with You. Father, the thing to You the God of heaven, the Creator of heavens and Earth, would want a relationship with us just boggles the mind. We are sinful people. We have broken Your law. We have failed against You. Our consciences declare it and yet through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and His death on the cross, forgiveness has been offered. The relationship has been restored and reconciled, and so there is nothing that should keep us from praying. Thank You for this Father.

Thank You for the communion time we're about to have where we remember how this relationship with You was restored through the cross. Lord, communion should remind us to pray; all these things should do that.

Lord, thank You for the prayers of this church. I know I've challenged our people some, but some of them, they do so well pray, and I just pray this would be an encouragement. For those of us who struggling with this, may these words not be a discouragement but just an exhortation to remember to pursue You with all our hearts.

Thank You for this time, Lord, may we walk out of here more inclined to focus on You in these things and we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.