

Prayer

God, my Father and my delight, You are the unsearchable source of peace and security in a world which knows You not. Save me by the riches of Your grace and the touch of Your kindness, and make me a child of quietness and peace in a world of strife and war. God, my Father, stay close, I pray, stay close. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: The Human Spirit

Pray, and call upon the Lord to breathe His Spirit anew into tired lives. Ask the Lord to bless His Church with Revival, to heal the sick, and to release those in bondage to the enemy or to sin. Pray for the Church to be inspired by the life and work of Jesus, the perfect example of the work of the Holy Spirit in this world; and achieve their goal of preaching the Gospel to all.

Meditation

(a meditation based upon a 16th century prayer)

Lord Jesus;

Take my mind and think through me;
Take my hands and bless through me;
Take my feet and walk through me;
Take my eyes and see through me;
Take my mouth and speak through me;
Take my feelings and feel through me;
Take my heart and inspire through me;
Take my life and live through me;

And above all, Lord Jesus;

Take my spirit and pray through me;
So that it is You who move and have Your being
Through me.

Bible Study - Hebrews 6:9-12

⁹ Even though we speak like this, dear friends, in your case we are sure of better things concerning salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust, and He will not overlook your work and the love you shown Him in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we eagerly want each of you to show the same zeal for the assurance of hope until the end; ¹² so that you may not become lazy, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

Review

With these words, the writer of Hebrews stands back from his previous harsh warning (6:1-8) about those who treat faith like a lifestyle choice. He assures his readers that he understands the integrity of their good work in Jesus' name (6:10) and is certain that they have a firmer grasp of the things of salvation (6:9) than those he previously criticised for abandoning the Christian faith (6:4-6). We do not know the constitution of the church to which he wrote, but later passages of Hebrews speak of a church community that had endured its fair share of suffering; 'recall those earlier days ... when you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being exposed to public abuse and persecution ...' (10:32,33). Maybe some people decided to 'jump ship' when this happened and later on expected to be allowed back into fellowship after others had suffered. However, in our passage today, Hebrews recognises and commends those who have been faithful, as proved by their devotion in deeds of service.

This is not a Gospel of works. Hebrews agrees with the rest of the New Testament that our salvation is won for us through Jesus Christ and Christ alone. However, it is also in line with

Jesus' teaching and that of other letters such as James, which tell us that the true evidence of people who have been saved is that they love others. Abstract love is meaningless, of course, because we only know that love exists when people do things which demonstrate it; and this is what Hebrews praises by saying 'God ... will not overlook your work and the love you show Him in serving ...' (6:10). This simple sentence also explains the principles of Christian service. In the Greek of the New Testament text, it is clear that the 'Him' in this sentence is Jesus Christ; which means that deeds of service are pleasing to God when they are prompted by our love of Jesus. Now, Jesus Himself taught us to love others, and if we respond to this by doing deeds of love for others, then God is pleased, because this gives evidence to the world that God is a God of love. He is pleased by acts of devotion done not for personal gain or gratification, but out of a genuine response to Jesus' love. This is reassuring; but Hebrews has to say more.

As I suggested above, it is strongly implied within Hebrews that some people from the church to which it was written abandoned faith after early difficulties, and the writer appears to be concerned about lethargy creeping into the life of the church, sometimes referring to 'laziness' amongst God's people as a real problem (5:11, 6:12), and speaking a word of warning about it in today's passage. However, the second half of this text is not about love, but the importance of confidence and hope in the future victory of our Lord over all sin and death. Hebrews says; 'we ... want each of you to show the same zeal for the assurance of hope until the end' (6:11). This is equivalent to Paul's words 'press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.' (Phil 3:14). Hope in God is essential for the church to survive.

The final verse of this passage, after the warning not to become lazy, is a magnificent appeal to God's people to persist, and become 'imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised' (6:12). This great verse focuses our attention on the way in which others before us have persisted through difficult times to gain the promises of God. Those who have followed the series of studies on Genesis which currently accompanies this study in Hebrews will immediately think of the figure of Jacob, whose story takes up half of Genesis and who was led by God through countless extraordinary experiences, good and bad, before he reached the end of his journeys and died in peace (Gen 49,50). Whilst that example may have been in the mind of the writer of Hebrews, we may have in mind some of the great missionaries and saints of more recent times, or of people we know who have persisted in faith through profoundly difficult times.

Love and hope are the clues to this great passage of Scripture, and they are always essential ingredient to Christian discipleship.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. To what extent is doing good deeds used as an excuse for faith, and as an expression of faith within the church today?
2. Have you known people who have found it hard to sustain faith when times have been hard? What is their real problem with faith?
3. In what ways can we imitate the people who have shown us an example of true faith?

Discipleship

Start by taking the last of the questions above, and reflecting upon those who have been an inspiration to you in the past; what is it about them that has influenced you? Is this Scriptural in any way? Now think of the people of the Bible whose stories have inspired you; what is it about them that has influenced you? It is by following through such thoughts that we begin to lay the foundation for imitating the good example of others. It is well worth doing.

Final Prayer

O Lord my God, take away from me all that blocks my way to You; give me all that speeds me towards You; rescue me from myself, and give me as Your own, to Yourself. Through Jesus Christ, AMEN *(Nicholas von Flue)*