

Serving The Brethren Through Prayer

Prayer is a Gift and a Duty

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Back in January of this year, I gave a sermon titled "A Band of Christian Brothers." And in that sermon, I was drawing from the example of a mini-series, *Band of Brothers*, which aired on HBO. I spoke about how our Christian life is a spiritual battlefield where faith, obedience, and discipline are essential for our survival and our victory and that we are fighting this spiritual battle together. And today, I want to build on that thought.

So please turn to Romans chapter 12, verses 9 and 10. We all know the very first verse that is very famous. And I have written in here, Christian Living Chapter, so I think this fits very well.

Romans 12:9-10 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.

Brotherly love is not merely a warm, passive feeling, but it is a deliberate act rooted in our obedience to God's commandments. And when we have love for one another, it transforms us and it builds on our relationship with our spiritual family because our love for one another is a direct reflection on God Himself. When we come to know God through our obedience to Him and keep His commandments, one of the ways that we show that we are of God, and that God can see us growing, is through our love and giving preference to one another.

Let us turn to John chapter 13, please, verses 34 and 35.

John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this you will know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another."

I think this may be one of the most powerful statements in the Bible. It says, "By this we will know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another." Have you ever wondered if you have God's Spirit? If you are living this way, one way to judge that very quickly: Do you love the brethren? We carry a very unique, divinely-ordained responsibility in the church of God. And these verses stress the importance of loving one another. And our love for one another is the very proof that we are disciples of Christ, the proof that we are being disciples, followers of Christ. And if we do not love one another, dare I say, are we really and truly Christians at all?

And so when we are commanded to serve and love one another, it is not merely a suggestion. It is not an optional ministry for a select few, but it is the very heartbeat of the Christian life and a defining mark of the true church. Yes, we walk with Christ and we focus our personal relationship on growing with our heavenly Father and with Jesus Christ, and that is our primary source of spiritual growth. But it is also essential in our personal spiritual growth on how we love and serve one another. And the New Testament relentlessly reminds us that we are a part of a body, a household, a brotherhood. Paul spends a lot of time on this subject.

We are called of God, and when we repent and we admit our transgressions to God, we are baptized, and then we are given God's Holy Spirit. And at that time our life changed, because we are adopted into God's heavenly Family. And from that moment forward, we have a responsibility to the Body and to Jesus Christ as the Head of that spiritual Body, and to each part of that Body.

Please turn to I Corinthians chapter 12. These are going to be very obvious and well-known scriptures today. Now, you know, some think that they can walk this path alone, that they do not need a church, they do not need any fellowship, they do not need the other members. I think Paul makes it pretty clear here that we do need each other greatly.

I Corinthians 12:20-27 But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be the weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be

less honorable, on those we bestow greater honor; and the unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ and members individually.

We have our place in the Body of Christ. Paul uses the metaphor of the body to illustrate the unity, the interdependence that we have in the church. And each member of the church has its part to contribute to the whole. He stresses that the gifts are necessary and should be valued regardless of their perceived importance, and that the focus should be on serving the Body rather than seeking personal glory. I find it interesting that the chapter that follows this one immediately is the Love Chapter, because if love does not accompany the gifts that we are given, what good are they? What are the gifts if they are corrupted by selfishness and pride?

We are given gifts by God that we may enhance through our personal abilities to serve the church and to grow closer together. And in the very next chapter, I just want to read a few of these verses in chapter 13, which is often called the Love Chapter.

I Corinthians 13:1-3 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass and a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

If you have God's Holy Spirit, then love will be the motivation, and it will be the very foundation behind anything that we do, because God is love.

I Corinthians 13:4-8 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave

rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

Each one of the members of the Body of Christ has an important part to fulfill. It does not matter how great that position is or how small that role is in your eyes. We all have a function, every single one of us, and we must believe that because the Scriptures say that. And I know there are many that feel that they go unnoticed, because their contribution is not seen. But it does not go unseen. It may be done behind the scenes, but the one thing to understand, it does not go unnoticed by God. And that is all that really matters, is that He sees the contribution that you are making.

As we get older, our body begins to break down. And this point has been becoming clearer and clearer to me. And there are parts of the body you never think of until you get older. For me, you notice, I limp around a lot sometimes. And when I walk off the stage today, it is going to be very obvious from standing in this one position for so long. And know, please know that it is God who allows me to stand up here for 40 to 45 minutes or so, because I could not do it on my own. I have bad knees, bone on bone. And I understand clearly now how vital cartilage is to the body. That protective cartilage wears down. When it wears down completely, then the end of the femur and the tibia, they start to grind together. And it typically causes sharp pain, stiffness, and reduces your mobility like it is right now. So I greatly appreciate cartilage. It may not have the glory of the eyes or the ears, but these days, I really respect cartilage. And if I had an opportunity to choose my spiritual place in the body right now, I choose cartilage, because it can help give comfort to others. It helps cease pain and suffering.

You know, our greatest contributions to the church, again, often go unseen, but they are special. James 5:16 tells us, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." When your brother is suffering, weary, your prayers can provide spiritual strength. When he is facing temptation, your prayers can help him stand firm. So you can see how important it is for each one of us to be faithful in using his or her responsibilities that God has given to them, that we may stand together and be found worthy in receiving this precious gift of everlasting life when Christ returns. We are a family. It is

important for us to remember that always. But we also should think of ourselves in terms of the church. We are not only individuals. We are members of the church, which is the Body of Christ, and we must—*we must*—stand together.

There is a movie that I like. It is called *The Four Feathers*. It was made back in 2002 and it is about a British army that was set back in 1875. And toward the end of the movie, there is an officer who has been blinded in battle, and he gives a speech. And I want to just read a few lines from this speech because it has always impressed me. And I have always talked to David Grabbe about this speech, and I felt this was a nice opportunity for me to fit it in. I am just going to read a few lines from it. His speech goes: "You may be lost, but you are not forgotten. For those who have traveled far to fight in foreign lands, know that the soldier's greatest comfort is to have his friends close at hand." And then toward the end of his speech, he says, "We fight for the man on our left, and we fight for the men on our right."

You see, our fight is a spiritual conflict. Every one of us has a responsibility to serve the brethren. And in my remaining time, I want to focus on one gift, one responsibility, one duty that the church requires of us, and that is *praying for our brethren*. And so right now, quietly, pray for this brother to continue.

It is a part of our service to God, to pray for the brethren. And I believe prayer is a gift from God. I know this because it does not come naturally. And I am sure that you have heard people say, well, I guess all I can do for the church is pray. Well, I understand this. That is something. Prayer is quiet, usually private, quiet. No one else sees you when you are sending up prayers for your brethren, for those that are sick or going through trials. And you may see it as a lesser service than one that speaks or teaches or prophesies. But I want to say to you today, prayer is a crucial means of service that does not go unnoticed by God.

So, why is praying for the brethren so important? Again, because it is brotherly love in action. Praying for the brethren fosters humility. You cannot hold on to bitterness, gossip, or judgment towards someone if you are earnestly praying for that person every day. Prayer changes our hearts and the way we think.

Secondly, praying for the brethren unites the Body. When we bring our struggles and sicknesses and spiritual battles to our brothers and sisters of Christ, it helps us to become more united. We move away from that isolation and into true fellowship.

And third, praying for the brethren invites God's power. I will read this verse again, James 5:16: "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." And when we pray for our brother who is weary and going through so much, your prayer provides strength. And when we are facing temptations, you do really help them stand.

So prayer is a call to action. Brotherly love is not merely a warm, passing feeling. It is an action. It is saying, I see you, I care about you, and I will take your needs before the throne of God.

Please turn to I Peter chapter 4. I guess I should just stay right where I am at.

I Peter 4:7-8 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, "for love will cover a multitude of sins."

And above all things have fervent love for the brethren, for one another. James said to pray fervently, and here it says to love fervently. I think that is not a mistake, because there is a kind of love that God wants us to have within the church, in His Family, because it does cover a multitude of sins. The love that God gives us will be forgiving. He allows us our shortcomings. He allows us to make our mistakes. It does not hold a grudge. And instead of holding things against someone, we have the opportunity even to forgive our brothers ourselves. Praying for our brethren helps us to push past our own selfishness and actively bear one another's burdens and participate in the spiritual unity of the body of Christ.

In his epistles, the love of the apostle Paul to the church comes through consistently in his letters to the saints. And I just want to read a few of these to give you an example.

Philippians 1:3-4 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making requests for you with all joy.

Ephesians 1:16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Colossians 1:3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.

II Thessalonians 1:11 Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling.

And you know, Paul does not always just pray for us. He also asked the saints to pray for him.

Romans 15:30 I beg you, brethren, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.

II Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you.

And then in Ephesians chapter 6, he just got done speaking about the different pieces of the armor of God, and Paul adds another important part to our spiritual battle here, and that is prayer. This is not one of the pieces of the spiritual armor listed here, but it is essential in winning our spiritual battles.

Ephesians 6:18-19 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—and for me [Paul is saying, pray for me], that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.

I am going to read the same verses from The Message Bible. I think it was very effective, and I want to add it here. So this is from the same verses from The Message Bible:

Ephesians 6:18-19 (MSG) In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirit up so no one falls behind or drops out. And don't forget to pray for me. Pray that I'll know what to say and have the courage to say it at the right time, telling the mystery to one and all, the Message that I, jailbird preacher that I am, am responsible for getting out.

I was thinking here, if the great apostle Paul, a giant in the faith, understood that he needed the prayers of the brethren to petition God to give him the strength to speak boldly, especially at a time that he was going through such tremendous trials, and oftentimes even write these letters from prison, brethren, how much greater do we need to petition God on behalf of our brothers and sisters? You know, for us today we need to be bold, and we need to pray for those men that stand behind this podium (or sit). They need your prayers. They need your strength, just as Paul asked for the prayers. Please do not cease from praying for the men that speak and those around the country as well, because we truly need it. And I am a prime example of that.

So, we as Christians ought to pray for one another, both for our physical and our spiritual needs. Paul's chief concern was always the spiritual welfare and faith of the brethren, but we are also called to worry and be concerned about our physical welfare and the physical needs of others.

Please turn to Job 42. Here is a verse here that I was very excited about when I come across in this context. We know the story of Job. He is a man known for being the ultimate symbol of suffering and profound loss. Job was a wealthy man, a righteous man who honored God. But God allowed Satan to challenge him, to challenge his integrity by stripping him of everything: his wealth, his children, his health, and his dignity. But Job refused to curse God. And then to make matters worse, when his three friends arrived, they should have given him the comfort and support that he needed in his grief. But that is not what happened. Instead, they confidently proclaimed that there must be some type of sin or secret sin or something in your integrity to

bring on this punishment yourself. Even all the while, Job maintained his innocence, growing deeply frustrated with the misguided counsel and the demands that they were making in their explanations. One may say that it would have been understandable if Job would become angry, resentful, and full of bitterness, and build a wall of resentment toward these men especially, or at the very least, demanding an apology from them. But that is not what happened.

Job 42:7-8 And so it was, after the Lord had spoken these words to Job, that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "My wrath is aroused against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has. Now therefore, take for yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you. For I will accept him, lest I deal with you according to your folly; because you have not spoken of Me what is right, as My servant Job has."

And here is the key verse:

Job 42:10 And the Lord restored Job's losses when he prayed for his friends. Indeed the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.

It is interesting, verse 10 here is a turning point in Job's suffering. Job's suffering did not end when he was asking God questions. His relief did not come, but he understood and acknowledged that he understood what God was teaching him. Job's restoration came when he prayed for his friends. The moment he stepped out of himself, of all his sufferings, to pray for someone else, he was rewarded greatly, and he received a double portion of blessing as a result. This is a mighty lesson for us today.

Matthew 5:43-44 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you."

Praying for, blessing our enemies goes against all human nature. You can see why I believe that prayer is a gift. It definitely takes God's Holy Spirit and godly character to have a genuine concern and the ability to pray for those that do you wrong. We have come across situations like this every day, I am sure. And I want to tell you something, this might be the most difficult test that you may have in your conversion. But we see how Job came through it.

In James chapter 5, verse 11, we kind of see here a New Testament commentary on Job in just a few verses here.

James 5:11 Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

James 5:13-16 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

I do not know if you have noticed, but that is the third time I have read that verse. I think it is very important.

No one wants to think about it. There are going to be times the brethren are going to wound you, and deeply. And you will be hurting, and the flesh naturally wants to isolate, complain, and focus totally on our personal survival. We must be like Job, because we have an obligation to intercede in prayer for those that do us wrong. It is easy to pray when life is smooth, but when it is not, we are obligated to hold up our brothers and sisters in faith, even when we are in the deepest valleys. You see, God demands a different mindset of you and me. As I said earlier, praying for others is a gift and the duty that God gives to those that are converted. And if we are not able to pray for our enemies, then we have a problem.

You see, Jesus Christ, at His weakest moment, prayed for His enemies while hanging on the cross, exhausted, bleeding, enduring unbelievable misery and pain. His body was broken and subjected to extreme injustice. But Jesus chose to intercede on the very people that tortured and mocked Him.

Luke 23:34 [Jesus prays] "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

Instead of calling down judgment and expressing anger, He sought mercy for His executors. Our Lord demonstrated the exact standard of love and grace that He wants to embody in each of you and me. Praying for the brethren, is an act of obedience, and it mirrors the heart of Jesus Christ. As He stands at the right hand of our Father, He makes intercession for us constantly every day.

So, prayer is of vital importance and absolutely vital to the success of the Body of Christ and how we mature as Christians. It is a loving duty that strengthens the church and supports spiritual growth. Praying for our brethren is not merely a polite gesture, but a powerful, essential act that connects our brothers and sisters to the grace of God and demonstrates our love for God. Let us commit ourselves to be people of prayer. Let us lift up those that are weak and forgive those that trespass against us. In doing so, we will be fulfilling that sacred obligation that we have been given.

One last scripture I want to read, I Peter chapter 3, verse 8 through 12.

I Peter 3:8-12 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers."

Remember, brethren, praying for one another is a vital act of love. Praying for one another promotes spiritual unity within the Body of Christ. Prayer invites divine intervention for healing and support. Prayer reflects God's compassionate heart, because we share in the burdens of others. Praying for the brethren strengthens our physical relationships and our spiritual relationships with our Father, and it fosters empathy.

Let us be a church that is devoted to one another, not only in word, but in action. And in doing so, we will fulfill the law of Christ and demonstrate to the world that we are His disciples.