

Hebrews 13 (Part 2) :15–25 • May the God of peace equip you

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We're picking it up in verse 15 and reading through the end of the chapter. So Hebrews chapter 13, verse 15. Here we go. Follow along as I read,

“¹⁵Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. ¹⁶Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

¹⁸Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things. ¹⁹I urge you the more earnestly to do this in order that I may be restored to you the sooner.

²⁰Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

²²I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. ²³You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. ²⁴Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. ²⁵Grace be with all of you.” (ESV)

Let's pray. Father, thank you. Thank you, Lord for your word. Thank you for the message that is given us here in these verses. And I pray that as we just talk about them and meditate a little bit on what they say that you would speak to our hearts and bring insight and understanding.

And help us, Lord, to know how to follow you and equip us, Lord, to follow you because we confess to you this morning that we don't have the power or the

ability in and of ourselves, but it is through your spirit, through your power that we walk uprightly. So strengthen us, we ask in Jesus' precious name, amen. Amen.

Did you notice the first couple of verses talked about sacrifices as we kind of looked at verse 15 and so forth? Over the whole course of this letter, the author has been talking about and comparing the old covenant with the new covenant.

And of course, in the old covenant, there are all the sacrifices that go along with the sacrificial system that was given to Israel and so forth and all the blood sacrifice. And the Old Testament is kind of a bloody thing. The old covenant is a bloody covenant. It's full of blood, it's full of a lot of yuck to be completely honest with you.

And we come to the New Testament, and we find that we still talk about sacrifices. There are still sacrifices that need to be made but they're not blood sacrifices because Jesus has already come along and given, as we talked about in communion, that one perfect sacrifice once and for all. So there's no need for any longer, any blood sacrifices.

But there are sacrifices that we make today. I want you to notice and there are many ways, he's not going to talk about all the ways. He's just going to talk about some, look at verse 15 again he says, *“Through him then let us continually offer up (and here it is) a sacrifice of praise to God...”* And he defines that, he says, *“that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”*

So the first way that we're talking about sacrificing to God is with the fruit of our lips and its praise. And we spent a little time doing that this morning in song. It's one of the reasons that we start our church services with worship and praise. We come to the Lord, and we want to create a connection between you and the Lord. That's why worship is very important.

We're not just singing songs. It's not like, we're going to make a fire, a campfire, sit around and sing Kumbaya and oh that, oh, hey, do you guys know that one song? No, that's not what we're doing here.

When we come together in worship, we're talking to God. We're focusing on Him, and our praise is very important. And sometimes it's a sacrifice of praise. It's thoroughly biblical that we would praise the Lord. Let me show you an exhortation from the Psalm. Psalm chapter 95 on the screen.

Psalm 95:1-2 (ESV)

Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

“¹Oh, come let us sing to the Lord. Let us make a joyful noise...” I know some of you can't carry a tune. Joyful noise is all you can do. That's okay, you're good. He says, *“let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.”*² *Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving...*” That's mentioned elsewhere in the word entering his gates with thanksgiving. And then he says, *“let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise.”*

Now, here's a question for you. “How easy or difficult do you find it to praise the Lord?”

Because I've noticed that it seems to kind of go along with personality types sometimes or how connected we are to our feelings, that sort of thing.

I think most of us, if we're honest, we would say that, “you know when things are going well in life, when things are, when I'm doing okay, it's not that hard to kind of praise, praise the Lord and that sort of thing.”

But you might have noticed that this verse doesn't encourage us to praise the Lord in the good times or just in the good times? Look again, the first few words of verse 15, it says, *“Through him, then let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise.”*

Wow, let me tell you, we just raised the bar on this thing, didn't we? We're not just talking about praise. Now we're talking about continually praising. We're talking about keeping that praise going.

Well, listen, the biblical writers know that you have a bad day from time to time. The biblical writers know that everybody gets discouraged or depressed or disappointed and yet, we're told to continually offer that word of praise. And guys, that's where this becomes a sacrifice. And that's where the word sacrifice really comes into play. Let me show you on the screen the definition that I found of sacrifice. This is great.

Sacrifice

an act of giving up something valued for the sake of something else regarded as more important or worthy.

You see, when we offer praise to God in the bad times when we don't feel like it, we're doing just what that definition says. We are giving up something that we value.

Do you know what I value when I'm going through a hard time? I value my pity party. Oh, I could, I value it very highly. Don't reign on my pity party because I'm having a good time, in this party of one.

But what if God's calling me to sacrifice it? What if God is calling me to sacrifice my disappointment? What if God is calling me to sacrifice my anger? Have you ever come into church, just kind of angry? Have you ever been on your way to church?

It's funny, it's interesting if couples are going to have a fight, it's going to be Sunday morning on the way to church. I mean, just enough to make you feel like a scumbag when you're walking in the door and you, it's like everybody can tell when you walk in the doors and go, oh, they had an argument. And you're sitting there and you're kind of a little miffed at your spouse or whatever. What if you're called to sacrifice that and praise God?

What if I'm being called to sacrifice my discouragement? Discouragement is hard. Boy, when discouragement comes into our lives, is He still worthy of praise? I think we would all agree that He is, but that doesn't make it easier to do, does it? Just because I can pass a theology quiz that says, yeah, He's more worthy than my discouragement. Yeah, no problem.

Now doing it, that's a different issue altogether. I mean, literally setting it aside and saying, "I'm going to praise God anyway!" That's a sacrifice of praise. And that's when we begin to offer real true sacrifices. When we begin to set aside those things that would otherwise stand in our way. And guys, make no mistake about it, that's what he's saying, we are called to do. We're called to do that. It is our calling.

People seem to say to me, "Pastor Paul, I don't know what my calling is."

What they're talking about is their specific calling in ministry. I have this sneaking suspicion that God holds back sometimes on revealing our specific calling in ministry until we get our other callings down, like continually praising him even when we don't feel like it.

We want to jump right into ministry, “Lord, I’m here, I’m available. Let’s do this thing. Right? Give me, show me my calling. I’m going to jump right into it and we’re going to be involved and it’s going to be exciting!”

And we haven’t learned how to praise him in the difficult times yet. We haven’t learned how to set aside the pain and the difficulty and the stress and so forth of life to just praise the Lord continually. And we want to jump into ministry. It’s kind of, it’s kind of interesting.

But you know that sacrifice, that idea of sacrificing yourself, you know that guys, that’s what worship is all about. Worship is all about sacrificing self, putting self on the altar. Let me show you how Paul said it when he wrote to the Romans and he said,

Romans 12:1 (ESV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

“*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as (a what?) living sacrifice...*” In fact, he tells us here that it’s not only holy, but it’s acceptable to God and it’s actually your spiritual worship. It’s your spiritual act of worship to give yourself to God.

Oh, and we thought it was music. No, music is not your spiritual act of worship. Raising your hand or hands, or doing a little happy dance that’s not your spiritual act of worship. Getting on your knees, bowing your head, that is not your spiritual act of worship. Those are outward expressions that may go along with worship.

But the spiritual act of worship is saying, “I am yours.”

Why is that so significant, particularly in our day and age? Because the world is constantly telling you, “you are yours.” It’s saying that you belong to yourself and we have people parading around, “It’s my body. I’ll do what I want with it. It’s my life. I’ll make my own decisions and choices, and it’s all about me. It’s my life.” We come to Jesus and all that changes suddenly, it’s His life.

Paul writes and he says, “*Do you not know you’re not your own? You’ve been bought with a price.*” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) Oh, well that changes the whole scope of things. I don’t belong to myself. I can’t do whatever I want with myself, and that includes enjoying sometimes, my little pity party or whatever the

situation may be. I belong to Jesus and when I come to him and I say, Lord, I offer myself to you today, that is my spiritual act of worship. I have just worshiped God. I just worship the Lord.

Isn't that a beautiful thing? So you see, we still offer sacrifices today. We just don't have those big rock altars in the wood and the fire and the knife and the blood, but it's just as difficult. Getting on the altar is just as difficult as it ever has been. Dying on the altar is just as difficult as it ever has been.

Because guys, it all sounds gloriously wonderful when we talk about, give yourself as a living sacrifice. Do you know what that means? You know what the bottom line is? Die. Yeah! It's called dying to self that's the other side of that same coin. Giving yourself to the Lord means dying to self. You can't give yourself to the Lord without dying to self.

Because you see, there's this constant gravitational pull in our lives to give ourselves to ourselves. I want my life, it's mine. I want to have it and use it for what I desire to use it for. And the world is constantly egging me on to do that very thing. In fact, they tell you that's true fulfillment, fulfilling your greatest desires. And you hear people all the time, it'll just run after your desires. Do what makes you happy.

And we come to Jesus and we realize that's not the drill. We're supposed to please Him. We're living to please Him. But you see, and yeah, that's worship when that, when it happens, but it also requires death to self. And self doesn't die easy, believe me. It goes out kicking and screaming, clawing and scratching, and oh dear, at least my flesh does. A life offered to God.

He goes on in verse 16 to talk about some other sacrifices that are pleasing to the Lord and it includes how we treat others. He says, "*Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have...*" That's a good phrase right there. I want you to take note of, "*to share what you have.*" And he goes on to tell us, "*for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*"

So we know some other sacrifices that are also pleasing to God. We give ourselves to the Lord that's pleasing, but we give ourselves to others. Because we know the Lord and because we love God, we love and serve others and that too is an act that is pleasing to the Lord. But it's kind of hard to do that sometimes because the key here is talking about sharing what you have.

And you know what, I'll just say it here in America, we tend to be pretty protective of what we have. We call it our hard-earned money and our possessions, and we frankly don't part with them easily.

But it ought to be a distinguishing mark of who we are in Christ to share with others. Why? Because it's the model that He gave us. Let me show you a 2 Corinthians, Paul wrote to the Corinthians said,

2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV)

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

And this is just talking about the fact that God, the Son, divested Himself of so much in order that He might come and become a man, a human being. We think being a human being is so cool. God had to become nothing to become like you. That kind of puts us in our place, doesn't it? That's what the Bible literally says, “*He emptied himself to become a man.*” It says that in Philippians chapter 2.

But through that willing determination to pour Himself out to bless others, we receive a model of how we're to treat one another, how we're to live with and for one another in the body of Christ. And obviously this passage is, that we read up there on the screen, it's not encouraging. It's not telling you to subject yourself to utter poverty so that others can have something. It's just encouraging generosity.

As Christians, we should be generous people. We ought to be generous people, because you know what? There's a wonderful promise that always goes along with generosity. Let me show you Proverbs chapter 19, it says,

Proverbs 19:17 (ESV)

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.

Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord (and look at the last part), *and he will repay him for his deed.*

I got to tell you something, God's repayment plan, God's investment program in the kingdom is second to none. I mean, His is good. You're looking for a good investment? Give to the Lord.

I had a person write to me just yesterday and said, “Pastor Paul, is the stock market gambling?”

I said, "Of course it is. But then again, so is life, marriage is a gamble. Starting a business is a gamble."

Good grief. Pretty much everything in life is a gamble, isn't it?

"I don't gamble."

"Oh, really?"

"You get in your car in the morning and turn the key, you just gambled, right?"

So it's perspective. But listen, if you're looking for a sure thing, invest your hard-earned life in the Lord. Give to the Lord. Give to the poor, and you are giving to the Lord. And it's a wonderful way to invest because He will repay, and His repayment is wonderful.

I've told you guys this before because for those of you that have been around, I only have so many stories, but there was a time many years ago, and we were living in Washington. And we were kind of hurting financially and yet I felt like the Lord kind of was encouraging me to give some money, and I don't even remember where I gave it. But I gave it with this particular idea in mind, I thought, "Well, okay, I'm investing in the kingdom." But see, I had this expectation of just exactly how it was going to get returned back to me.

Have you ever done that to God? You kind of do something and then you go, "now here's what I'd like you to do." And so I did. I gave the money and nothing happened. And I was kind of like, and I was a Pastor by the way, so I'm kind of, I'm just trying these things out a little bit, to kind of see what happened, and nothing happened, and nothing happened, and nothing happened. And I was just kind of like, "Whatever, I'm just going to go on. I'm not going to stress over this thing."

Well, later on, and it was quite a little bit later on, maybe a year or so, we went through an even more challenging time, even more challenging. And I remember one afternoon going out and walking out to the mailbox to get the mail. And by the way I'm not trying to be, well, do I want to say that or not? Okay. The amount I gave was like something like around \$500. And I go out to the mailbox and there's a letter from my dad, and by the way, my dad's not a believer to this day. He's 94 years old.

But I opened up this letter from my dad and he goes, "Hey, I just thought I felt like I needed to give you, there's a check in there for \$5,000." And the Lord just

kind of tapped me on the shoulder and said, remember that investment you made? My time, not yours. Thank you. That's God's graciousness and His goodness, right?

When it says here that this is a, this is God's kind of investment program. He does it how He sees fit. Jesus talked about this in Luke's gospel account. I love this he said,

Luke 6:38 (ESV)

“Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

That's such a wonderful reminder, such a wonderful promise in God's Word. And because of the promises that we have about the blessing that comes from generosity. That's why I said we ought to be the most generous people on the face of the planet. Because we know things the rest of the world doesn't know or at least if they know, they don't believe them. And that is that God has promised to respond in like manner to our generosity.

The next point of the letter has to do with believers responding to their leadership. Says in verse 17, *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”*

And we learn in this verse that there are people in the body of Christ whom God has called into positions of leadership, and their job is to keep watch over the souls of the saints. Now, what does that mean exactly?

It just means they're just, it's just like a shepherd. It's just a shepherd just looking out over the sheep and just making sure that they're doing okay. It's not a big heady sort of thing, and it's not hard to understand. It's just that concept of what a shepherd does. They're watching out for you. They're making sure that you're well fed. They're making sure that the wolves aren't getting too close, and you might even have to chase them away from time to time. And there's other things that a shepherd does, but they have a calling and it's also a responsibility for which they will give an account.

I say they, and I'm one of them, but there's an account that has notice, he says it right there. He says, here's how I want you to respond to these people, because they're going to have to give an account for how they have functioned in their

role, in that position of leadership. And so he exhorts the rest of the body of Christ to respond to the calling of leadership that is put into those individual's lives, okay?

God puts the calling in people's lives. God puts the ministry and we're called to respond to it, out of respect to the Lord. It's really the same thing that a wife responds to her husband. He's been given a calling too. He's been given that position of headship in the home. So how the wife simply responds to that, that calling of headship, realizing that her husband didn't take that position on himself. He didn't even ask for it. He simply got it when he said, I do it, the altar. And so she responds to him. But she responds to him knowing that it was God who gave it.

It's the same thing with church leadership. There are individuals for whom God has placed a calling to keep watch over the flock and the rest of the body is to respond to it so that he says it might be a labor of joy and not a grueling wearying endeavor.

So in other words, live your lives in such a way around your church leadership. And this is weird for me to do this and say this because, again, it's like I'm kind of telling you what to do. But it's not me, you're seeing it in the word right here, you're to live your lives in such a way and respond to the leadership of those such individuals so that it would be a labor of joy.

And let me just say that you guys do a great job. It's a labor of joy. Next, he asks for prayer, verse 18 and verse 19 he says, "*Pray for us...*" It is always good when you hear leaders say, "pray for us, pray for us." Why is that good? Shows humility, shows the dependence on the Lord.

And church leaders are the kind of people who often are being asked to pray for everybody else. And you know how I feel about that? Those of you guys who've been around here very long, you know that I get real jittery when people start looking to me to pray for them and thinking that there's something special about my prayers. That bums me out as a matter of fact, I feel like I haven't done my job as a teacher. I really do. I feel like I've failed as a teacher when people look to me and think that there's something special about my prayers.

Hopefully, I've communicated to you guys over the years that we all have the same access to Jesus Christ, all of us in Christ. But that doesn't stop people and leaders do need to be available to pray for others. That's part of our calling and that's fine. As long as you understand that there's nothing special, right? But I don't mind praying for people, but it's also important for me from time to time

to say to you, “Hey, pray for me. Pray for me too because I need prayer. I need prayer, just like you do and for just the same reasons.”

And I like, and not only is he writing here, pray for us, but you'll notice that he's urging earnest prayer. Look at verse 19 he says, “*I urge you the more earnestly to do this...*” And he's talking about prayer, “*I urge you to earnestly... (pray for us so that we) might be restored to you sooner.*”

Now, that is an interesting statement in the Bible, is it not? Because what he's saying here is that your prayers can make a difference, in the timing of things when doors are opened or when doors are closed. And you can tell when you read statements like this in the Bible, you can tell that these guys believed that prayer made a difference because they were asking for, he's saying, “Hey, he wants to be with them.” He's making that clear, “I want to come and visit you guys, so would you please pray, and I'm even asking you to pray more earnestly so that I would be able to come sooner rather than later.”

So do you get the impression that he believes that their prayers are going to make a difference to him and the timing of him coming? Because I do, it is what it sounds like to me. It sounds like he really truly believes that it's going to make a difference.

The Apostle Paul asked for prayer from the believers too. Let me show you this passage.

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 (ESV)

Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith.

Finally, brothers (again, here's that humility, pray for us), pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and (that it might) be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered (from all that persecution) from wicked and evil men. For not all (everybody) have faith.

Yep. We know that. Again, you see here these calls or requests for prayer and you kind of say to yourself, you know what? I think they did that because they thought it was going to make a difference.

Isn't that an interesting thought? We pray because we think it's going to make a difference. Do you know what else I've always believed? I've always believed

that prayerlessness was for the opposite reason because we are not at all convinced it's going to make a difference.

We talked about investments a little bit ago. Where do you invest your money? Well, I mean, don't answer me, I don't care. But I got a sneaking suspicion that you're not going to throw your money into an investment that you don't think is going to have a return. I mean, that would be kind of dumb, wouldn't it? I mean, can you imagine, some broker coming up and you're going, "Hey, I got a great investment for you. It's sure to return a zero investment, zero payback. How much would you like to invest?"

You're going to go, "Are you crazy?"

Why do I say that? I think some people think that's what prayer is like. It's a zero investment. Oh, we got to pray. Okay. Why is it that when we have a prayer meeting, it's the least attended service of anything, bar none?

Why is that? Why do you suppose that is? Oh, we're just busy. I don't buy it. When we have a barbecue, people are miraculously unbusy. No, there's something deeper. There's something more systemic going on and it's unbelief regarding prayer and how effective it is.

If you thought that one hour, let's say we say, "Hey, we're going to have a prayer service tonight at six o'clock (we're not, but I'm just telling you), we're going to have a prayer tonight, 6 o'clock, come and join us. We're going to pray from 6 to 7."

Now, if you really believed that you were going to move mountains by spending from 6 to 7 o'clock, you'd be there. I'm telling you, you'd be there. You'd say, "You know what, whatever we had on our schedule, cancel it. We're going, because this is powerful stuff. We're going to move mountains. We're going to change minds. We're going to transform hearts through prayer tonight. We are going to open doors that would've otherwise been shut. We're going to shut doors that would've otherwise been opened. We're going to do it. We're going to come together, and God is going to move powerfully."

When was the last time you heard somebody talk about prayer like that? I mean, really with that kind of faith that says, "yes!" It's really really really rare. So guess what? Prayer is an exercise in faith. That's why we struggle sometimes doing it. Most of us could stand to say, just Lord, increase my faith.

Then the writer includes a kind of benediction in verse 20 and 21. He says, and this is beautiful, just listen to these words again, “*Now, may the God of peace who brought again from the dead, our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,* ²¹ *equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us, that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*”

Isn't that a great prayer? Honestly, if you struggle going back to prayer, if you struggle with prayer, how do I pray for people? How do I pray for my loved ones? How do I pray for my church leaders? How do I pray for people that are going through a rough time? How do I just pray? Just take verses 20 and 21 and pray it. Pray it in your own words but look along with those words and just pray it.

And I think they're perfect, “²⁰*Now, may the God of peace equip you with everything good that you may do His will.*” What a great prayer. May the God of peace equip you that you may have everything good to do His will. What a beautiful thing to say. What a beautiful prayer.

And then he ends in verse 22 by saying, “*I appeal to you brothers, bear with my word of exhortation for I've written to you briefly.*” And I read this and I got to go, really? This is a brief letter. I can't imagine what would be a long letter? This is one of the longest epistles and yet he says, oh yeah, this was just a sharp one. Yeah. This is one of those rare men that has the amount of words usually given to a woman. He's just got a lot of words. Got a lot of words. We know some of those guys, don't we? Jerry? Oh, forget it. I didn't say that.

He says in verse 23, “*You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.*” So obviously the author of this letter knew Timothy. He knew about his situation. He knew that he had been incarcerated and now had been set free, and he expected to meet up with him, hopefully, and together with Timothy, come to where these believers were.

We don't exactly know if these believers were living in Jerusalem or where but a group of Jews living somewhere. But he says, “we want to come visit.” And then in verse 24, he says, “*Greet all the leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy* (and he's probably talking there about Rome, the church in Rome) *send you greetings.*” And then finally, “²⁵*Grace, be with all of you.*” and oh, how we need grace. Amen. Let's stand together with that. We close out the book of Hebrews.

Father, thank you so much for our time together. Thank you for the reminder of what you sent Jesus to do for us on the cross. Thank you for the reminder that we need to receive Him. Thank you, Lord, for the reminders given here in this letter to the Hebrews. Thank you, Father, for the study through Hebrews.

It's been wonderful. We rejoice, Lord God, every time we get to study Your Word. So be with us. We pray as we go from this place, continue to strengthen us. And Lord, fill us with faith, faith and grace. And may we be people who are utterly convinced that our prayers are moving mountains. We commit our hearts to you in Jesus' precious name, amen.