

Why Pastors Need Prayer

Colossians 4:2-4

5/31/2025

Application

Announcements Pray for the Honduras missions team Second Sunday prayer next week Bill Owens with the Lord Tom Richmond prayer for school board

Scripture

Colossians 4:2-4 (NKJV) "1 Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving; 2 meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains, 3 that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak."

This morning, I'm going to give you a message entitled simply, why Pastors Need Prayer. This message is not to bring any sort of pity or praise. We don't need that. But we do need the prayer support of the body of Christ.

Why Pastors Need Prayer. Now you might say, well, Josh, don't we all need prayer? I mean, shouldn't we all be praying for one another? And the answer is absolutely yes. In fact, it wouldn't be strange at all if I gave you a sermon this morning entitled Why Pastors Should Pray for Their Church?" Right? Everyone here would say, of course, that's what pastors should be doing.

According to Acts, chapter 6, verse 4, part of a pastor's job is not only to be committed to God's word but also to pray for the church.

Scripture

Acts 6:4 (NKJV) "but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

I am often convicted by the Apostle Paul, who himself had a pastoral heart. In every single letter to every single church, you know what he tells them? That he's praying for them. Here's a few examples:

To the Romans, Paul says, "without ceasing, I make mention of you in my prayer." To the Corinthians, he writes, "I thank God always on your behalf." To the Ephesians, he writes, "I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in every prayer." To the Philippians, he says, "I am always in every prayer of mine, making requests for you all with joy." To the Colossians, he writes, "we give thanks to the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you." In Thessalonians, he says, "we give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayer." To Timothy, who was a young pastor and a son in the faith, Paul writes, "without ceasing, I remember you in my prayers night and day." And he says the same thing to Philemon.

Now, when I read this, I get the sense that Paul is either a liar or he's a prayer. And I tend to think the second about Paul, that he is a man, obviously, who is committed to consistent prayer. He's a man who said, "pray without ceasing." He took that command seriously. He was a pastor who was burdened, whose heart bled for the church. He carried their struggles. He was broken over their sin. He was connected to their pain. He felt their heartache. He worried about their spiritual condition. And what did he do as a result? He prayed for them. He spent many sleepless nights and early mornings on his knees, praying for people and for churches.

Once, Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the perils that he endured for the sake of the Gospel. It's almost difficult to read. I'm going to read it to you. It's found in Second Corinthians 11, verses 23 through 28. Paul says this.

Scripture

2 Corinthians 11:23-28 (NKJV) - Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

Does anyone want to sign up yet? This was Paul's life. And what do you think of all the things he went through? And what does he add to this list? Oh, I'm beaten. I'm in prison. I can't sleep. I'm tired. I'm being reproached, I'm being persecuted from within and without. And then he says this. And besides all these things, what comes upon me daily? My deep concern for all the churches.

Application

You see, that's the heart of a pastor, a man whose burden for the church is transformed into prayer. Paul spent his nights in jail, concerned about how the church was doing. Now, most of us pastors today would never dare compare ourselves to Paul. I certainly haven't undergone even a tenth of the trials that he has experienced or that he discusses here nor have I developed the same spiritual maturity and discipline. However, the more I pastor, the more I understand his deep concern for the church more than ever. His concern is born from the Holy Spirit, who is concerned about the church.

And I know, and I know what it's like to be on bended knees during sleepless nights after hearing people's stories and feeling like there's nothing you can do about it. I know what it's like to sit in my office, desperately crying out to the Lord to please give me some sort of message to deliver to his people. I know what it's like to pray out of desperation for God's touch and help toward His flock. When a mother who gave birth to a miracle child with no arms and an underdeveloped stomach watches her baby grow for two years, this miracle child, and I get a call one day, two years in. Josh, you need to come to the hospital. Our son just died. And to sit in a hospital room with a mother buried in unimaginable pain, saying, "Why God? Why me, Josh? Why would God do this?" And all I could do was pray. From broken marriages, to dying loved ones, to struggles against sin and great steps of faith, it would be deeply concerning to have pastors who didn't pray for their flock. The burden a pastor carries, holding concern for the spiritual health and eternal destiny of hundreds, of ten, of one hundred, or of a thousand people; it matters not, for one person is a fearful thing for a pastor. It's not something to complain about. It's something we

A number of years ago, a pastor in Chino Hills, the city I grew up in, committed suicide. And after he did, I wrote a short blog that addressed some concerns I had about the culture that the church has created around pastoral ministry. Within one day, I had garnered over a thousand shares on social media, and I knew that this was striking a nerve and resonating with the church. This post I wrote is fairly short, and I'd like to read it to you to set the tone. We are getting to the message here in a moment. Here's what I wrote after I learned of this pastor's suicide.

Illustration

I just got word of a fellow senior pastor who committed suicide on Friday. In the community where I grew up, this breaks my heart for many reasons. I don't know the source of this man's pain or the reasons for his actions, but it has brought to mind something I have long been burdened by. Our culture has created a celebrity model that no human being can effectively measure up to. For Christian pastors, please remember that your pastors are just people. They, too, are sheep that are part of the same flock as you. They are men who are being sanctified and are doing their best by God's grace to shepherd the flock of God and be an honorable example of Jesus. Unfortunately, pastors also make human mistakes. They argue with their spouse. They aren't always great fathers. They aren't always perfect evangelists or mastered theologians. They battle with temptation and pride, and they are afraid of vulnerability. They fear being eaten alive by the sheep if they disappoint them in any way. Instead of dealing with the criticisms of non-understanding people, it's easy for them to put on a face and press through their struggle alone and isolated. This can often end in depression and tragedy. I'm not excusing the blatant sin of some pastors or hypocrisy from the pulpit, nor am I minimizing the weighty biblical responsibilities of a pastor. To be honest and have integrity, a pastor must walk in the spirit and not contribute to his own difficulties. There are certain high biblical standards for the office of an overseer that must be taken seriously. I will say, though, that the celebrity culture and human expectations that have been laid upon pastors today are heavier than what most are able to carry. If we are honest, we can clearly see that there has been an Unbiblical precedent set for today's pastors. Yes, pastors need to take heed to their character and their doctrine. But people in the church need to pray for support, submit to, and show grace towards their pastors. As a pastor, it's time to speak up, not merely for my own sake, but for the sake of those who have given their lives to the calling of leading, teaching, and shepherding God's people. It's a hard job, and not for the faint of heart. There are unspoken battles, intense spiritual warfare, and unbelievable mental and emotional weights that every pastor carries. We carry those things willingly for the sake of Christ and his church. But the culture has to change, both internally within a pastor's heart and externally within our churches. So, church, instead of idolizing your pastor, support him. Instead of criticizing his every word and every move, pray for him. Instead of demanding from him, empathize with him. Instead of assuming the worst, have a conversation face-to-face. And to my fellow pastors, don't hide in the shadows. You and I need accountability. We need friends. Face it. We are all together part of the body of Christ, and we need one another.

Stats:

The statistics you've all heard are staggering. Here are just a few from research firms such as Barna, Lifeway, and the Fuller Institute. 72% of pastors report working between 55 and 75 hours a week. 78% of pastors report having their vacation and personal time interrupted by ministry duties. 80% of pastors expect conflict within their church. 70% of pastors do not have someone they consider to be a close friend. 57% of pastors feel fulfilled, yet discouraged. Stress and fatigue. Yet 90% of these pastors feel honored to be a pastor.

Last year, it was reported that 1500 pastors at one level or another left the ministry every single month. Now, before I go any further, I do want to say that some of these statistics are due to the culture we've created. Pastors today are often put into place not based on their character or their calling, but on their charisma and their communication skills. And that can create problems for everybody. When a pastor begins to believe his own positive press, he can develop a grandiose view of himself and become arrogant. A pastor can believe that he is somehow above the petty battles that other people face, and he can become isolated. It's also easy for a pastor to give so much of himself to the work of the ministry that he forgets his first love or drifts from Christ. All of these things a pastor must be careful of. That's why Paul told Timothy, "Take heed to yourself and to your doctrine." But you know what? On top of that, the pressures mounting from our society on pastors today are unbearable. As one person put it, today's pastor is expected to have the wisdom of Solomon, to preach like the Apostle Paul, to have the faith of Peter, to lead like a CEO, to be a counselor, psychologist and have the mercy of Mother Teresa and do it all while walking in the humility of Jesus. That's a tough job description.

But if these are just some of the battlegrounds your pastor is facing day to day, is it too much to ask that intercession and prayer be made for him? I don't think so. In seven different times, in seven different letters, Paul asked the church for personal prayer. Seven different times, Paul the Apostle, the pastor, looked at the church and wrote to them, Please pray for me. This is not a selfish or arrogant request. It is desperation.

Illustration

I was amazed that I had the blessing of serving a ministry in India. I try to go to India once or twice a year. I train pastors there, and I was so challenged and convicted. A number of years ago when I was in India I woke up early Sunday morning, and I heard this noise at the church. I went down and asked the pastor, What's going on over at the church? I mean it's super early. It was like 4 am I asked him later that morning what was going on at the church at like 4 am, and he said, Oh, every single Saturday night we have 200 men and women that come to church and they pray all night for me every single week. He said, We have a group of 25 men whose sole ministry in the church is to meet every single week together and spend hours praying for me in the proclamation of the Gospel. It's amazing. He's planted over 250 churches in India in opposition to the Hindus, the Muslims, and the government, and all these sorts of things. And they have this culture where they recognize to lift up the arms of those who lead, not because they're more important or somehow on a different level, but because they're the ones that God has called to lead into the battle against the enemy, to proclaim the truths of the gospel on a platform where they are vulnerable.

And so, for the remainder of our time together, I will examine each of these prayers and briefly outline five ways you can pray for your pastors. If you're taking notes, I encourage you to write down these seven brief points. The first one is simply this. How can I pray for my pastor?

Main Point

Point 1

Pray for their protection.

Scripture

Philippians 1:19 (NKJV) For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

In the scripture, Paul is confident that the prayers of the saints will effectively work toward his deliverance. Three separate times, he asked them to pray for his deliverance, and when you examine his life, you can understand why.

Remember, once Paul had to be lowered down a wall in a basket to escape assassins who had vowed to kill him. Paul was frequently in prison because of his bold testimony of the gospel. Paul was once stoned and left for dead outside the city. Even when he wrote this, he was in prison. And Paul knew something that we should all understand:

Quote

— *Pastor Josh*

Wherever God's truth is being proclaimed, an enemy and a battle are not far behind it.

Let me say that again. Anywhere God's truth is being unashamedly proclaimed, an enemy and a battle are not far behind it. That is true right here in our context. It's true in your own life. We aren't here playing church games. We are engaged in spiritual warfare, and a pastor is often called to lead the charge in this battle. A seminary professor once put it much more directly. He said,

Quote

— *Anonymous*

Ministers have a bull's eye on their back and footprints up their chest.

It is the truth, I praise God, that I have not had to experience jail or death threats. But I've had my share of attackers. Enemies come in different packages, in different battles, in different forms. Outside America, many pastors today are facing physical threats. But the spiritual enemies and threats to a pastor are just as real and just as dangerous. Sometimes the enemies of the pastor are not those who are simply around him, but those within him.

Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest preachers of this century, is said to have spent one-third of his ministry in debilitating depression. Even then, he trusted that his battles were not outside of God's sovereignty. Regarding the enemies of a pastor, Charles Spurgeon wrote,

Quote

— *Charles Spurgeon*

As officers in God's army, we are the special target of hostility of men and of devils. They watch for our faltering and work to trip us up on the hills.

This is one of many reasons why pastors who pray for their flocks need their flock to pray for them. Pray for their protection.

Main Point

Point 2

Pray for their productivity.

I have not met one faithful pastor who isn't impassioned to see the work of the gospel be fruitful, that their efforts would produce something productive for the kingdom.

Scripture

2 Thessalonians 3:1-2 (NKJV) - Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.

Paul was not looking for his own glory. Paul was not looking to build his own kingdom. But he wanted to see God's word go forth in power, and the glory of God be magnified, unhindered by the attacks of the enemy or wicked people.

Illustration

Runs swiftly - It's a Greek word that was a metaphor for an athlete running a race, who would come up against obstacles and endure, pressing through to the finish line.

And Paul was saying, here, pray for us that we, being carriers of God's word, God's word would endure, would finish well, would run with strength all the way to the finish line so that God's word would be glorified. Who cares about my name? I don't need to make a name for myself, but I pray that we would have productivity, fruitfulness, and effectiveness for the sake of God's Word going forth into the world. That's a great way to pray for your pastor.

You might say, "well, Josh, you know, I'm not really an evangelist," or "I could never get up and preach." But do you know that someone has to? Someone has to stand up and proclaim boldly God's Word to God's people. And you could pray for the people who do, and pray that God's Word would come forth from them with power and authority.

Church, I would like to offer a word of exhortation. The church doesn't need any more critics. Sure, we are all to be Bereans. We're all to listen carefully to what we're being taught, compare it to the word of God, call out false doctrine and call false teachers to repentance. I've never known a true pastor who doesn't welcome someone coming up to them and saying, Hey, I had a question about your sermon. That's good for us. We need that. But what we don't need is "He's just not that funny, his voice is so monotone. He preached too long, he preached too short. He's not my style. He accidentally misquoted a verse. He must be a heretic."

The church doesn't need that kind of stuff. You don't know what kind of night your pastor had when he was up at 3 am with a sick kid or on a hospital visit, or he didn't have time to fully prepare his study because he got called off to someone who was dying. You don't know. Pray. If it's not your favorite thing coming from the pulpit, then pray for your pastor. When you have to stand before people, be it few or many, whose eternal destinies might hang in the balance based on what you say, with the weight of the Holy Spirit on your shoulders, pray for your pastor. If

Ephesians, chapter 6, verse 19. Paul requests an amazing prayer request of the church in Ephesus.

Scripture

Ephesians 6:19 (NKJV) "and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,"

And that's every pastor's prayer that they can open their mouth and bring forth the unchanging, eternal truths of God in a way that impacts people's lives powerfully. And part of that reality is that the church is praying for their pastor.

Number three. The third way you can pray for your pastor is this.

Main Point

Point 3

Pray for their Purity

Pray for their protection, pray for their productivity, and pray for their purity. I'll tell you what. For everyone living today in this day and age, the potential for defilement of the flesh exceeds, I think, any other time in history. The opportunities for you and me to get our eyes on something, to get something inside of our hearts that shouldn't be there, are on every corner, in every computer, in every store, and in every place. We have been bombarded with opportunities for our purity to be defiled.

When we think of the word purity, we often think of it in a sexual context. And of course, we should think of it in that way. Do you know that pastoral infidelity is the leading cause of pastoral disqualification today? Sexual sin is biblically unique because the scripture teaches that sexual sin is not merely against God or another person, but it's also against yourself. Pornography is rampant in our culture. It leads people into isolation and secrecy and is an on-ramp to all sorts of other sinful decisions. And statistics have unfortunately proved that pastors aren't immune to the temptations of the flesh. Sure, a pastor should not be walking according to the temptations of the flesh, but they certainly are not immune to the temptations that every other person faces.

Pastors need to be humble and repentant and take their own purity seriously. But do you know that purity for a pastor is not merely sexual? Purity for a pastor means to be unspotted by the world in every sense. Billy Graham was well aware of this. And he had that famous trilemma of pastoral dangers he guarded himself against. The three things that he assessed were the greatest potential threats to a pastor or a leader in the church: money, women, and power. And those are the things that tempt pastors the most these days. This is why Paul wrote to Timothy, who was a young pastor, and he said to him in 1st Timothy 4:12,

Scripture

1 Timothy 4:12 (NKJV) Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

For a pastor, it's not merely sexual purity that matters, but purity in ministry, motives, doctrine, and freedom from the bitterness of unforgiveness of people who hurt you. Integrity in handling church finances and stewarding the influence he has over others. This is why Paul wrote to the Hebrews. In Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 18, he says this.

Scripture

Hebrews 13:18 (NKJV) Pray for us; for we are confident that we have a good conscience, in all things desiring to live honorably.

See, Paul, he wanted to live honorably. He wanted to make a good name for Jesus. He wanted to live above reproach. But he recognized that in order for pastors to do this long term, the church needs to pray for them. Defend us with your prayers and love, so that we may live pure lives in every way and not fall into this world. For when a pastor falls, it can devastate an entire church.

Application

So please, pray for our purity. Pray for us to resist the temptation of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Pray against those who would seek to lie about us or to exact revenge or damage our reputation. Pray that we can live in a way, both publicly and privately, that honors Christ. Pray for our purity.

Number four, the fourth way you can pray for your pastor, or maybe I should say, a reason you should pray for your pastor, is to:

Main Point

Point 4

Pray so that you may partner.

In Second Corinthians, chapter one, Paul says this.

Scripture

2 Corinthians 1:11 (NKJV) "you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many."

Paul looks at the church in Corinth and he basically says, "You need to help us by prayer so that when other people receive the gift through us, they might know that it comes from not just me, but the partnership that you gave me through your prayers." And here's a very important principle that Paul understood and we all need to understand.

Quote

When you pray, you partner.

I want you to say that with me. When you pray, you partner. Prayer is a way to partner with your Pastor in the work that God is doing; Paul recognized that deliverance from difficult circumstances, financial provision, and the impact of the gospel were not just a result of his ministry, but a result of all the people praying behind him. When this church grows and this community is being impacted and the work of the kingdom is going out of this church to the nations, it's not simply because the pastor is a great teacher and an effective leader, but because the people of the Church are faithful in prayer. There are people behind the scenes who uplift and undergird the ministry's work.

Illustration

A delegation of American pastors, once visiting Charles Spurgeon, asked him the secret of the success of his ministry. In response, Spurgeon led them downstairs to the lower level of his church. And he opened the door, revealing over 400 people praying for the blessing of God's power to rest upon their pastor as he stood in the pulpit that morning. There, gentlemen, said Spurgeon, is the secret for God's blessing, his work here. The great boiler room prayer company that prayed and prayed and prayed.

The things we've discussed so far are all summed up in Paul's request to the church in Rome. Listen to what he says in Romans 15:30-32.

Scripture

Romans 15:30-32 (NKJV) - Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me, that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe (protection), and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints (purity), that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you (partnership).

Here, Paul is pleading with them. Pray for us. Finally, number five. How do we pray for our pastor? It is simply this.

Main Point

Point 5

Pray for them

Fill in the blank. Everything else. The last verse I want to look at today is simply four words. Paul says this in 1st Thessalonians 5:25. He simply says this.

Scripture

1 Thessalonians 5:25 (NKJV) Brethren, pray for us.

Paul is saying the list is too long. Just in case I miss anything else, just pray for us. Pray for us in any way that you can think of.

Pray for your pastor's financial provision as he seeks to provide for His family's needs. Pray for His boldness to not be intimidated by the growing culture of hostility against the truth.

Here at Grace, we have a group of pastors and elders who love the flock. I hear them pray for you. I see what they do from day to day and week to week. They're in hospitals and nursing homes. They are at your son's wedding, they are at your father's funeral. They are at the fundraiser for the local ministry and the celebration for the new baby. They're at the coffee shop before dawn and in small groups after hours, discipling people. They're in the community, serving people, and in the counseling room, weeping with people. They are on their knees in prayer when no one else is watching and are, by God's grace, seeking to live above reproach when everyone is watching. They are trying to set an example of discipling their kids and loving their wives, all while doing it with every eye on them, and many times looking for the slightest failure. They are searching the scriptures weekly, seeking the Lord, and joyfully sacrificing to fulfill their God-given calling. They are dealing with sparring brethren, wounded sheep, and sin-stained circumstances on a daily basis. They have battled internally, mentally, and spiritually so that they might lead the church in God's perfect wisdom.

Perhaps even this week, one of your elders or pastors has received the question. So what do pastors even do during the week?

This is the only message you'll hear these kinds of words from my mouth. I'm not complaining, but merely informing. We love being pastors. We would rather do nothing else, but for us to do it effectively, we need your prayer. We need your support.

In Ephesians, Paul tells us that pastors are given by God to the church for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry. And if the pastor is given by God to the church, may the prayers and the support of the church be given to the pastor. Spurgeon wrote,

Quote

— Spurgeon

We are miserable men if we miss the help of your prayers. But we are happy if we live in your supplications.

And I would ask you, as a church, I realize this is perhaps an unusual message, one that no one was expecting to hear today. But I want to ask you as a church to uphold, lift up, pray for, and support with your service, your talents, and your gift the pastors and the elders and pastors that God has entrusted to lead you, and work with them to see this place impacted for Christ. For with Jesus, nothing is impossible. Continue with faith, hope, and love to see this place transformed.

And as your pastor is out there trying to lead the charge, surround him, pray for him, and give him and the Lord your all.

Let's pray.