

How to Pray When Separated from Church

Colossians 1:9-11

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, May 10, 2020

How do you pray when you're separated from church? That's the context of Col. 1. The apostle Paul has been isolated in prison, only a few visitors are allowed, he's been away from regular corporate worship many Sundays and he's waiting to hear from the government about his future. His freedom and rights as a Roman citizen had been unjustly taken away, he *could* argue, and he *would* argue his case before governors in the book of Acts. Paul appealed to Caesar, he petitioned Rome's highest court and he's waiting to hear back, but his hope and focus was in the gospel, not government. That's our focus. Today we get to hear Paul's appeal and petition to God's higher Supreme Court of heaven. He looks above circumstances to the supremacy of Christ, the theme of the book. He can't be in God's house, he's under house arrest, bound to a pagan soldier as he writes with his hand literally rattling a chain:

³ *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. [that was last time, now **our text for today**] ⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy ...*

Let's pray. Our heavenly Father, we pray for your glory to cover the earth, that the knowledge of you would increase like the waters cover the sea. We pray in light of Pastor's Corey's message on heaven, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We thank you the gospel can't be locked down and it's going around the world. Thank you for government leaders you ordain. Fill them with the knowledge of your will. For President Trump and Governor Newsom, give them wisdom and understanding, not just politically but spiritually, so they'll trust you and understand the grace of God in truth. I pray for Melania Trump, Jennifer Newsom, their families.

I pray the same for VP Mike Pence and his wife Karen, for Nancy Pelosi and her husband Frank, for our county representative Lori Parlin and her family she raised in Shingle Springs. Thank you for county health officer Nancy Williams and her family and her willingness to meet with pastors. We pray for Pastor Drew at Cool Community, our church of the month for prayer, who's asked us to pray their church can gather this month, us, too! Thank you for his partnership in the gospel and relationships in our county. Thank you for Ruth who Drew and Amy adopted. This Mother's Day give moms joy, endurance, patience. I pray the same for our church family that you'll help us to walk worthy, pleasing you, bearing fruit in Christ's name.

Paul shows us how to pray for people you don't see face to face. In ch 2, v. 1, Paul says he's praying for this church he's separated from and can't see.

How to pray for others?

#1. For wisdom and understanding of God's will

In v. 9 Paul writes *'And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will...'*

How do we know God's will in the circumstance we're in? Don't pray with a closed Bible for God to show you His will, pray with an open Bible so you can know His will. God's Word gives us His will. *'Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you'* (1 Thess 5). So God's will is for us to say thanks, and that includes for our government. 1 Tim 2 commands giving thanks for kings and all rulers, interceding for them in His will so we'll live peaceable quiet lives. Then it says God wills all men to be saved (that's His revealed will of desire) and God wills for men to pray without anger or dissension.

Stirring anger or dissension about govt. isn't God's will there or in Titus 3

Eph 5 talks about knowing what God's will is, being filled with the Spirit, in other words under His influence, and it affects how you speak, think, walk. Being filled with the knowledge of His will comes with being Spirit-filled, saved, saying thanks, and sanctified. 1 Thess 4 says *'this is the will of God, your sanctification'* (goes on to sexual sin, self-control). God's will is for us to be sanctified, meaning set apart, different from world, holy aka Christlike

It's also God's will that we suffer, according to God's Word. 1 Pet 4:19 says we *'suffer according to God's will.'* I don't like that part of God's will, but I will suffer according to God's will, and so will you. Peter says entrust your soul to your faithful Creator and do good when it's God's will you suffer. If it were up to me, my will is to avoid suffering, but nevertheless, not my will

Paul prays in v. 9 we'd be filled with the knowledge of God's will and Peter gives one more you may not like: be submissive to government. 1 Pet 2 says *'For this is the will of God'* right after he writes *'submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men—as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice...'* There's all kinds of vices or divisive ways people are using rights or freedoms or liberties in defiance of governor ordinances, but it's not God's will or God's way to rebel or riot. God's will, Peter says, is for us to submit to the will of govt. unless they command us to disobey God (like Peter said when told not to speak about Jesus, Acts 5:29).

He still boldly spoke to them with honor, gentleness, respect (1 Pet 3:15)

Peter wrote 'honor the emperor' when the Emperor was Nero, a conspiracy creating, Christian-blaming, Christians-flaming literally in his gardens guy. Talk about horrific, inconsistent, injustice, that's who's the Caesar is when Peter writes submit, but the 1st century line crossed in "say Caesar is Lord."

Daniel's govt. told him not to pray, but he dared disobey all the way to the lion's den. Other biblical examples of civil disobedience are commands to do what God forbids (ex: Egyptian govt. told Jewish midwives told to kill babies, Babylonian govt. told Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to bow). We will not bow, faithful believers say, and will not stop speaking of Jesus.

Paul in Rom 12 talks about how we can discern the will of God and Rom 13 tells us to submit to governing authority as ordained by God and to resist the authorities is to resist God. But Paul himself made appeals to authorities in Acts 21-26 and invoked his rights as a Roman citizen when beaten. That's where the end of Col 1:9 comes in: '*spiritual wisdom and understanding...*'

We need to pray for that balance this month, this week!

God's will is for you to be submissive, be saved, sanctified, saying thanks, suffering, Spirit-filled, but to understand how to live that out needs spiritual wisdom. The knowledge of God's will isn't enough. Paul prays for wisdom – that's the practical application of knowledge, knowing how it applies for our lives. Spiritual understanding is insight, discernment, decision-making.

Look at ch 4 for how he applies it later: ⁵ *Walk in **wisdom** toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.* ⁶ *Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.* [Apply to media, social media, how Christians act and interact with outsiders, how we use our time, how much, thinking and speaking w/ grace]

Many Americans are turning to lawlessness, but I think of Titus 3, after Paul writes how the grace of God has appeared to redeem us from lawlessness, it says, Titus 3:1 *Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work,* ² *to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.*

Pastor Cliff I think gave a good model in what he wrote county authorities this week and a key county leader has agreed to meet with local pastors next week about how and when churches can meet. I believe your prayers are a part of that, be thankful as you pray. God's way is courtesy, not quarreling, not speaking ill of rulers or rules we disagree with. Part of what I wrote:

Dear Supervisor Parlin and [County] Board of Directors,
God's Word commands us to pray for our government leaders with requests and thanksgiving (1 Timothy 2), and I've urged our church to be praying earnestly this week

for you. I will encourage our people to prudence rather than defiance, and I hope to encourage you in the difficult role you are in. We've asked our people to pray...for God to give wisdom, understanding, and that our people would be strengthened for endurance with patience (from passage in Holy Scripture I'm preaching from this Sunday [Col. 1]).

I know I speak for other church leaders in our community as well; we pray for you and want to support you and want your support to help us reopen...

in person ministry and interaction is essential to our faith and faithfulness to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...By God's grace and for God's glory...'

I've also asked them and our Governor for clarity on gathering in homes or outdoors and fellow pastors and leaders have asked our county the same.

There are constitutional questions the courts may need to address but PTL for the rights we have, it's His will that we use them rightly respectfully.

Let's keep being thankful and prayerful for great understanding and wisdom

How to pray for others? #1. For wisdom and understanding of God's will.

#2. For lives worthy of and pleasing Christ

¹⁰ *so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him...*

If you got the weekly prayer guide, I asked we pray this for our families.

Pleasing the Lord is applied to children if you look at Col 3:20 '*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*'²¹ *Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged.*' I'm convicted I've discouraged my kids last week. I need to pray for help to please the Lord.

DG: 'How do we pray for our children when our words seem to run dry? How do we faithfully lift them before the Lord with confidence that our prayers match his desires for them?... As a parent, I long to pray for my kids more faithfully. I long to stand in agreement with my Savior, and pray bold and powerful prayers for my kids. But sometimes I get stuck. Sometimes I can't find the words. Paul's words to the Colossian church offer... truths to pray ...Offering these prayers for my kids daily has centered my focus and blessed my prayer life, molding my heart to want the things God wants...

Pray they will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. (Colossians 1:10)

While it's tempting for parents to spend excessive time praying for the behavior of our children, we honor God when we remember to pray that their behavior...will glorify him...with godly motives. This goes for our spouses, friends, parents, and other loved ones as well...

Pray they will please God in all respects. (Colossians 1:10). I have prayed this prayer often during seasons when my children were struggling with sin. Whether it's a child with a sudden inclination to fabricate information, a child who is struggling with an

ungodly temptation, or a little one who is struggling with sadness, this is a relevant and powerful prayer. It's a prayer God loves to honor, because it is the desire of his heart as well ... [This mom concludes] I cling to the confidence that God's word never returns empty, and I see the fruit of my prayers often in the midst of my everyday life with my kids. Find a passage or set of verses to pray over your children, and watch God respond to his word with faithfulness and power.'¹

Pray big things for your little ones – great resource

How do adults walk worthy of the Lord? Paul and expands on v. 10 in Eph 4: '*walk in a manner worthy... [how?] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*' If you want to walk in a worthy manner, if you pray for others to, pray for humility and gentleness in areas where Christians differ. In these weeks ahead as things reopen, we need open Bibles and open hearts toward differences of Christian opinions, and disagreements on social norms between family and friends in the future.

Some will want to dispute about the past and have discord about the present. Pleasing the Lord by walking worthy isn't diligently persuading everyone to what you think or what theory you hold – walking worthy is being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. What's even more important than the US Constitution is union with Christ and each other. You can be right, but not go about it in a right way if you're not humble, gentle, and patient, or not showing tolerance or not showing love in communicating. You don't please the Lord by getting others mad or fired up at the system, you please Him by getting more meekness in you. Let's be fired up for the Savior and the gospel and be forbearing with different church/state views. Let's pray to come together patiently graciously in a way pleasing the Lord. The worthy walk doesn't have to talk about who's too fearful or too careful, in your judgment. There's different comfort levels on being home, different convictions in having people over or not, coming back to church right away or not, wearing masks or not, etc. Friends, let's not judge others by externals or personal conscience. If you assume why others do what they do, assume the best, as love hopes all things, believes all things, and endures all things.

Costi Hinn: 'one of the ways that the enemy will seek to divide our ranks within the church is by tempting us to use our opinions against each other. If the Devil has his way, we'll be throwing stones of accusation from all sides, calling the cautious people "soft," labeling the optimists of being "reckless." More than that, the enemy especially loves when we cement ourselves in political corners; adding opinionated fuel to the...fire of conflict. Things can get ugly — very quickly. This is a new frontier of ministry for an entire generation of leaders. We must recognize the challenge...before it erodes valuable relationships... as we approach re-assimilation with friends, family, and our church... Here are 4 attitudes... that will strengthen your ability to navigate differing views and approaches [before and after crisis]:

1. *Optimistic people are a blessing to my life.* It keeps me hopeful about the future and enables me to embrace uncertainty as opportunity.

2. *Cautious people are a blessing to my life.* It keeps me sensitive to the needs and concerns of others and enables me to make prudent decisions.

... Pride demands that everyone do things the way we demand. Read 1 Cor. 12... *People matter more than my opinion.* Being in healthy relationships ... requires me to love others above myself... Preserving... relationships... is more important than winning arguments, or being (more) right... Choose love.¹² Let's pray for each other even now to walk worthy and please Jesus.

v. 10 fills out that picture fuller if you keep reading: ...*fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God...*

We please Christ when we abide in Him and bear much fruit, for apart from Him we can do nothing. Back in v. 6 he says the gospel bears fruit in them, so we need the gospel as Christians to bear fruit. Good works aren't the root of salvation, they're the fruit of it (Eph 2:8-10). We're not saved by works; we're saved for works. Faith without works is dead. Do you have a living faith in Christ, a faith that works. Are you bearing the fruit of the Spirit?

Jesus talked about the word preached like seed that *bears fruit as it's heard*, and James says in humility receive the implanted word that's able to save your soul, but be a doer of the Word, not a hearer only, deceiving yourself.³ Even the demons believe, but do you trust and obey, as the fruit of God's good works in you? If not, repent of your sin and receive Christ in faith as dying for sin. Confess He is Lord and believe God raised Him from the dead

If you know God as savior, pray the end of v. 10, to grow in knowledge of God. Keep increasing, and praying the saving knowledge of God to spread around the world. Last Thursday was the National Day of Prayer and the key verse was Habakkuk 2:14, '*the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*' Let's pray big things for our big God as His servants declare His glory among the nations. For those who don't know, let's pray these days they'll come to know across the seas.

I reviewed again our latest SermonAudio report. Our little church can't meet but our sermons were listened to in 51 countries across the seas, including China, Russia, Korea, Iraq, Nigeria, and several Muslim-majority countries! PTL like v. 6 says, the gospel is still bearing fruit and increasing worldwide!

3rd and final way to pray for others: strength to endure patiently with joy

¹¹ *being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy...* Our church prayer guide that went out this week said pray v. 11 for the church, pray for strength for the weak and weary. Ask that God will strengthen and build up His church for His glory, and give power to His people so we can endure patiently and also joyfully.

Our closing song says even in the darkest night, God's empowering Spirit is here
 'And though my strength fades like the light, New mercies will appear ...
 As morning dawns and day awakes, To You I bring my need
 O gracious God, my source of strength, In You I live and breathe
 Each hour is Yours by wisdom planned, Each deed empowered by sovereign hands
 Renew my spirit, help me stand; Be glorified today... Be glorified, I pray'⁴

God's glory is the center of this verse and it's the church's central purpose.

Endurance = steadfastness, ability to persevere, literally 'to remain under.'

It's the Greek words for stay and under, the idea of staying place for a long time (sound familiar?). Most Americans don't like to stay at home or stay under orders – some of you love being at home all the time – that's another issue! But we don't like being told stay. God's Word tells us to pray for this, staying power from God, this persevering strength by God's glorious might. Pray for yourself, pray for others struggling in this, tell them your prayers.

Next word *patience* = longsuffering, the word picture is having a long fuse before we go off. The Greek word for the strength for this was later used of dynamite, but they didn't have that in NT times. Here it's the opposite, the strength to suffer long without an explosion. In the Philippines vendors sell firecrackers that are more like dynamite, I remember sneaking some back to the States on a plane, lighting off at a camp (but 1st made a really long fuse)

Not a good idea, any of that! But the point is a long fuse is needed or else damage can be done! Spiritually we need to be able to go longer and not be exploding! In all seriousness and sadness I confess my impatience has been exposed with family and friends in ways that show my weakness and need for this strength. Pray for me and for each other for more of this '*with joy.*'

That last one is a battle, too, we need to fight for joy. Our fighter verse says '*The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. It is good that one should wait quietly...*' Seeing that good doesn't come natural for me, and I suspect for many of you. '*All patience with joy,*' and all of this requires supernatural strength, so pray for each other that the joy of the Lord would be our strength. We don't like to wait in our fast-food drive- through instant-gratification culture. But that shows lack of love, as love

is patient. Pray for love. My struggle to endure patiently is a weakness I need strength for. So v. 11 starts with strength we need with all power from almighty God

The good news is our preeminent Christ says His grace is sufficient for us, His strength is made perfect in our weakness. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us, amen? That verse comes after rejoice always, as Paul writes from isolation and incarceration. Col 1:11 piles up the terms for empowering and it's emphatically and grammatically God's continual doing

I'll close with parts of Isa 40 that I pray lift us up from the news and lifts up our eyes to our strong big God: *'herald of good news, lift up your voice with strength... lift it up, fear not; say to the "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord GOD comes with **might**, and his arm **rules**... [the Sovereign LORD comes with power⁵]... **He will** tend his flock like a shepherd; **he will** gather the lambs in his arms; **he will** carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span...what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who... taught him knowledge... It is he who sits above the circle of the earth...who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness...*

Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created the[stars]... by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing... the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth... gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength... they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.'

Let's pray as we end for God's strength to endure with patience and joy and to apply this great prayer in Colossians to our great God. And I'll pray as we close from Paul's parallel prayers from Ephesians 1 & 3: *'Father of glory... give us the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Christ, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that we may know... what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might...far above all rule and authority and power and dominion... [as Eph 3 says we pray] according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being... [and] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints... him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

Benediction from Jude?

¹ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/pray-big-things-for-your-little-ones>

² <https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/navigating-different-covid-19-recovery-convictions>

³ Matthew 5:16, Mark 4:20.

⁴ <https://sovereigngracemusic.org/music/songs/christians-daily-prayer/>

⁵ NIV.