**Praying for Spiritual Leaders**

Romans 15:30–32 (ESV), “I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, 31 that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, 32 so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

2 Corinthians 1:10–11 (ESV), “He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. 11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

Spiritual Leaders need prayer support. The apostle Paul surely thought he needed the prayer support of his friends. It is one of the main features of his letters. Five times he asks for prayer – twice he reports the results of other’s prayers for him – many spiritual leaders today are not as aware as Paul was of their need for prayer support. Yet they need it as much as he did, possibly even more.

Spiritual leaders need prayer because they will be judged more strictly than other Christians. James cautions his readers, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers… because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” God has always chosen to accomplish His purposes through men and women whom He chooses and calls into leadership roles. Their responsibilies are daunting and the stakes are high. Those entrusted with God’s work cannot accomplish God’s purposes by means of unaided human strength. Without the support of intercessory prayer they are bound to fail.

Spiritual leaders have more than average influence. That’s why satan targets them as he does. He knows that to discredit a spiritual leader is to discredit Christ and his church – at least temporarily. If satan can bring down a person of influence, that’s a huge ‘win’ for his side.

Spiritual leaders today are under attack from an enemy who is intent on demoralizing and defaming them –

Jay Kesler, the former President of Youth for Christ and the current President of Taylor University, was on one of his frequent flights. When lunch was served the young man next to him declined a lunch tray. During the whole lunchtime this man sat with his head bowed, apparently in prayer. Kesler was impressed (and maybe a little humbled) by the man's devotion. He commented to the young man that he wondered if he was a Christian because it appeared that he was fasting. The young man replied with words that shook Kelser to the core of his being. "I am a Satan worshiper and the members of my church have agreed to fast every Friday at noon. During that time we pray that the leaders of the Christian world will fall. We pray that they will fall into sexual sin, and that their family life would crumble."

Many spiritual leaders are experiencing pain and strain. In Romans 15, Paul pleads for fellow Christians to ‘Join me in my struggle’ The word he uses for ‘struggle’ literally means, “strive together with’ Our English word ‘agony’ comes from this same root. In other words, the struggle Paul has in mind involves pain and strain to the point of agony. If you really want ot be an effective intercessor, ask God to reveal to you the pain and strain of spiritual leaders you pray for so that, as you intercede you are able to feel their pain and step into it with them. You will be joining the ranks of suffering servants who serve the Suffering Servant – the Lord Jesus.

Pray for spiritual protection. It seems that spiritual protection was on the top of Paul’s list of personal prayer requests. He asks the Romans to pray that he might “be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea – He wants the Thessalonians to pray ‘that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men’ 2 thess 3:2 – Based on the prayers of the Corinthians he expects that God ‘will continue to deliver us” and he reports to the Philippians that through their prayers and the help of the Spirit ‘what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance’ Phil 1:19 –

The spiritual leaders you know may not ask for prayer protection as Paul did, but they need it more than ever today, whether or not they ask. Your prayers can put a hedge of protection around spiritual leaders and their families and ward off the devil and his predators.

Pray for fruitful ministry. Fruitful ministry was also high on Paul’s prayer list. He urged the Romans to pray that his ‘service in Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints there) 15:34 – He asked the Ephesians to pray that ‘whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel – 6-19 – He wanted the Colossians to pray that God would ‘open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ (Col. 4:3, and he requested that the Thessalonians pray ‘that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored (2 Thess 3:1). Paul was clearly convinced that the success of his ministry depended on prayer. Those early Christians and with Paul taking the lead, the gospel spread throughout the roman empire like a fire – Acts 19 says that all of Asia heard the word of the Lord – Prayer is key to fruitful ministry and the spread of the gospel.

Pray for personal joy and refreshment – Among the things Paul longed for and asked the Roman Christians to pray for was that he would come to them ‘with joy’ and together with them ‘be refreshed’ (rom 15:32). Weariness and discouragement are some of satan’s strongest weapons. Several reports in our nation in recent years says that thousands are leaving the ministry each year – they are feeling beaten down and discouraged. Despite all that Paul had endured Paul never seemed to get down – what was his secret? Prayer support – the joy of the Lord was his strength and that joy was released through the prayers of the saints on his behalf.

As the early Christians prayed for Paul, what were some of the results - he was refreshed. Luke reports that paul was received warmly in Jerusalem and that they praised God for the report of his ministry to the Gentiles (Acts 21:17) …

He was protected . In Jerusalem he was falsely accused, dragged out of the temple by an angry crowd, arrested by Roman troops, and was nearly torn to pieces by the Sanhedrin. But with a plot to kill him hanging over his head, he was whisked away under the protection of 200 soldiers and calvary, twice protected by Roman courts of law against the lies of Jewish leaders, spared death when a hurricane wrecked the ship he was on, and supernaturally protected against a poisonous snake bite on the island of Malta. Paul must have had quite a host of angels…

and his ministry was certainly fruitful. He was able to deliver the gifts designated for Jerusalem’s poor (acts 24:17) – something for which he had asked prayer. AS for the rest of his ‘fruit’ the New Testament record is itself the best evidence of the fruitfulness of his ministry and the answers to so many prayers.

Does interceding for spiritual leaders really make that much difference – I would say absolutely – I believe intercession for spiritual leaders is the most underutilized source of power in the church today –

One of my favorite prayers to pray for leaders today is Col. 1:9-10,

Colossians 1:9–14 (ESV), “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; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”

Spiritual leaders need prayer but spiritual also need to lead their churches and ministries in prayer – as Acts 6:4 says, “but we will devote ourselves to continual prayer and the ministry of the word” I love how Paul prays for others here in Colossians 1

Three times in the first ten verses of this letter the Apostle Paul has told the Colossians that he is praying for them. He tells them he is thanking God for them and that his prayers on their behalf are unceasing. These are not nice platitudes only. I believe Paul WAS praying for these people.

One of the most instructive parts of our text is in noticing what Paul asks on behalf of the Colossians. Paul does not focus on the material and temporal. He is not primarily concerned with comfort . . . He is concerned for their spiritual growth.

Pray that they discern God's Will

Notice that Paul's first request is this: I ask that "God fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." The word "fill" means to be completely filled or totally controlled. The word for knowledge is the normal Greek word for knowledge with a prefix that intensifies the meaning. Paul's primary concern is not for physical health, material prosperity, effective witnessing, or a greater experience of spiritual gifts. Paul's first and primary concern is that the Colossians come to love and understand God and submit to His will.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane He sought to submit to the will of the Father. Many of us have turned this around. We spend our time pleading with God that MY will would be done. We want God to give us what WE want. We want Him to see the wisdom of our desires. Some even proclaim that praying, "Thy will be done" is a weak prayer. All I can say to such nonsense is, "tell that to Jesus."

God’s will that rejoice always, God’s will to be santificed – God’s will to be filled with with the Spirit -

We come to understand God's will as we come to understand God. In our marriage relationships we very often can tell you what our spouse will say to a certain request. How can we do this? We have come to understand our mate. We know what they like and don't like. We have a good idea of what their "will" is. The same is true of God.

We understand his plan and purpose in life as we come to know Him in the Bible, through prayer and through our obedience. Paul prays that the Colossians would not be satisfied with a superficial relationship with God. He prays that they would continue to build a relationship with Him until they understand what God is doing and why.

Pray to DO God's Will

Paul does not only pray that the Colossians are able to discern God's will. He prays also that they might have the power to DO God's will. In verse 10 we read that Paul prayed that they might understand "in order that you may life a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way...bearing fruit in every good work " Paul is not praying just that we might be more knowledgeable . . .He is praying that we might learn more about God so that we will live more faithfully before Him. As one wise person said, "you can be a master of theology and a failure at living."

Fruit – of the Spirit, fruit of new believers, fruit of discipled believers and fruit of answered prayer – John 15:7 -8, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples”

**Pray that the saints will Joyfully Giving thanks to the Father**

It is a joy to give thanks to God. In Paul’s way of thinking, joy and thanksgiving come together. His prayer for the Colossian Christians is that they be able to ‘joyfully give thanks to the Father.’ In another letter he urges all believers to ‘be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances. The joy of thanksgiving is possible anytime and anywhere. It comes from an awareness of the Father’s good gifts and his gracious generosity towards us all –

Thanksgiving is a heartfelt response to what God gives. When we praise him we respond to who God is; we see his face. When we give thanks, we see God’s open hand and respond with joyful hearts to his generosity. Thanksgiving naturally gives rise to joy. It causes us to be conscious of God and what he has done. God is so good and has done so much for us that the thought of his good gifts produces joy.

Joy, on the otherhand can give rise to thanksgiving. David celebrates the joy of a divine healing with a commitment to continuous thanksgiving – Ps 30, “you turned my wailing into dancing you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give you thanks forever

The Scriptures suggest a number of practical ways to increase thanksgiving. First they teach us to give thanks for people through whom God has blessed our lives. Paul’s example is very compelling. 8x in his letters he gives thanks for those to whom he is writing. He says to the Thessalonians ‘We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers” Think of the people whom God has used to touch your life for good – parents, grandparents, children relatives, friends, teachers, coaches, coworkers, pastors, and give thanks for them.

Second, be aware of and give thanks for spiritual blessings. WE tend to be so consumed by things that we almost forget the spiritual blessings that literally fil our lives – new birth, faith, grace, mercy, God’s love, peace, hope, wisdom – every thing we need for life and godliness

-North Korea –

Third, give thanks for blessings of the past. One reason God has given us memory is so that we can recall past blessings. Psalm 105, includes more than 40 verses recalling how God blessed his people from the time they left Egypt until they entered the Promised land. I have found that giving thanks for past blessings always brings great JOY to my heart.

Not to be thankful is like saying to God, “I don’t need you. Your no help. I am doing fine without and your gifts” such arrogance has no place in the life of a praying Christian!

Fourth, make thankful prayer a lifestyle. Always (give) thanks to God the Father for everything – God’s good gifts come as a constant flow

Psalm 100 (ESV), “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! 2 Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! 3 Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! 5 For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.