

Pray for Me

Moving Forward, Part 3

Philippians 1:19-20

Walter Maier told the story, recorded by Sam Gordon in his commentary on Philippians, about a man who had been shipwrecked. He alone had made it to a deserted island where he languished for months.

In the days that followed he was able to painstakingly construct a hut with a few of the boards that eventually washed upon shore . . . he also found other items that washed up as well – precious things that enabled him to barely sustain life on the island. His little hut became his haven – protecting him from the harsh elements – it was also the place where he could safeguard his possessions from curious animals.

One night, after spending a long day searching for food, he was stunned to find his little hut engulfed in flames. Somehow smoldering embers from his fire had touched off a blaze that he could not put out. He lost everything.

Despondent and crushed by this loss, he spent the night tossing and turning on the sandy beach below the smoldering remains of his hut.

He awakened the next morning to the sound of voices, and to his utter surprise, a ship was anchored off the island. Crew members stepped ashore and one of them said to him, “We saw your smoke signal and came to rescue you from this island.”

What seemed like total destruction and cause for despair had turned out to be deliverance.ⁱ

That’s a wonderful story – and we can’t imagine the joy in that man’s heart as he left that island and sailed toward home.

When we observe the Apostle Paul declaring his joy and trust in Christ, it’s remarkable – if for no other reason than this – there is no ship anchored off

his island of his isolation where the believers in Rome for the most part have abandoned him.

There’s no rescue party showing up after a sleepless night or two.

In the words of one commentator, Paul is surrounded in a sea of troubles. Shackled to a soldier, confined to house arrest, charged with fomenting civil unrest – a capital crime – he awaits his day in court.ⁱⁱ

Yet he remarkably says as *verse 18* comes to a close in chapter 1 of his letter to the Philippians, “**Yes, and I will rejoice.**”

No ship in sight to rescue me . . . but, **yes, I will rejoice.**

Paul’s decision to rejoice whether he lived or died wasn’t some kind of irrational piety . . . it was actually based on knowledge.ⁱⁱⁱ

Notice *verse 19*. ***For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.***

Paul writes, “***For I know***” . . . from oida – to know with the grasp of mental certainty.^{iv}

Not – I hope so; I think so; I’m really biting my nails about this but I’m hanging on . . . ***I know this will turn out for my deliverance.***

Most commenters hear Paul actually quoting Job’s reply to Zophar as Job delivers that incredible statement of trust – ***Though he/God slay me, I will trust in Him – this will turn out for my deliverance (Job 13:15-16)***

Now the question that immediately comes to mind is – what’s Paul actually thinking about here when he says that he’s absolutely convinced he’s going to be delivered?

- Is he hoping to make an escape?

- Is he expecting an angel at any moment to unfasten the handcuffs and whisk him away?
- Or is he referring to being vindicated in court?
- Is he certain that his reputation will finally be vindicated with all the pastors and church leaders in Rome who've assumed he's being judged by God by this incarceration?

From the way Paul clarifies his comments in *verses 20 and 21* as living or dying, it seems best to understand Paul's idea of deliverance as either being delivered in court by an innocent verdict which allows him to live, or being delivered through death into the presence of Christ.

As if to say, whether I live to see the light of day again as a free man, or end up being executed, I consider either one of these conclusions – my deliverance . . . and in that I can rejoice!

In other words, one way or another, by life or by death, I know I am heading towards deliverance.^v

With that said, you could easily assume that Paul is the epitome of a confident Christian, right?

I mean, no wonder he's the great Apostle!

Marooned on a deserted island, his hut going up in flames, Paul is rejoicing in the confidence of his deliverance.

Not so fast.

While Paul is convinced of his ultimate deliverance, he's not so sure about how he'll behave in the meantime.

So he transparently reveals two things he's absolutely dependent upon – the same two things you can depend upon when you're shipwrecked on a deserted island; the same two things Spurgeon implied when he wrote 150 years ago – we are at our spiritual best when we find ourselves shipwrecked on the island of God's sovereignty.

What are these two critical things?

1. The first thing Paul is depending on is the prayers of the saints.

Notice *verse 19 again*. *For I know that through your prayers . . . this will turn out for my deliverance.*

In other words, I can't rejoice unless you pray for me!

I love the fact that Paul was never too big to ask for prayer. He was never so confident that he didn't

fully realize he was helpless without the help of God.^{vi}

So throughout his letters you find this theme – he begs other believers for prayer:

- To the Thessalonians he writes, *“Pray for us! (1 Thessalonians 5:25);*
- *In 2 Thessalonians 3* he writes, *Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored . . . and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2);*
- He writes to the Corinthian church – *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 (2 Corinthians 1:11);*
- He wrote to the Roman believers, *I appeal to you, brothers . . . strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf. (Romans 15:30)*

In other words, I know I'm going to be delivered but I'm not going to make it very well along the way without your prayers.

Here's the balance in Paul's confidence.

John MacArthur writes in his commentary: Paul believed in the limitless sovereignty of God and he had total confidence that God's purposes would be carried out. But he also knew that God's sovereign plan incorporated the prayers of His people. MacArthur, p. 73

In the mystery of God's providence, His plans and our prayers co-labor together in fulfilling His purposes.

By the way, have you noticed that God's word never hints that we don't need to pray . . . in fact, the opposite is true: we're told to pray about everything – *In everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God (Philippians 4:6).*

The truth is, the Lord emphasizes our praying much more than we begin to apply – and it is much more significant than we can ever begin to understand.

We unfortunately assume the stronger someone is in Christ, the less they'll need the prayers of other believers.

I'll never forget learning otherwise years ago – to my own betterment – as a man I deeply admired – the president of a mission's organization I greatly respected – sit in the front seat of my car and weep openly over the pressure and the pain he was facing . . . and he asked for my prayers.

Listen, the fact that he was weeping marked me – I didn't think spiritual giants did that either. And then he needed my prayers.

That moment marked me, greatly. And it rewrote some of my youthful misconceptions about spiritual maturity.

And here, Paul who is confident in his ultimate deliverance as God unfolds for him His purposes . . . in the meantime he tells these Philippian believers that he *must* have their prayers on his behalf.

Secondly, Paul not only depends on the prayers of the saints, but on:

2. The provision of the Spirit

Notice *verse 19 again – For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.*

The word used here by Paul for help – the help of the Spirit – is from a word (epichoregia: επιχορηγια) that can be rendered supply . . . provision.^{vii}

It's a word that describes generous, sufficient, bountiful resources.

Paul has every reason to be concerned about what he will say when he stands before the Imperial court to testify on behalf of the gospel and of Christ and His church.

I have little doubt that Paul is not only revealing his utter dependence on the Holy Spirit during his incarceration, but that unique promise from the Lord, recorded earlier by Matthew's Gospel where Jesus made this incredible promise – *“And you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak[s], but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you (Matthew 10:18-20)*

Paul is absolutely confident in the purposes of God being fulfilled, but he's not so confident in how well he will bear up under the pressure.

And so he states in *verse 19* that he's utterly and transparently depending on the prayers of his believing friends as well as the provision of the Holy Spirit to supply what he needs.

Paul's Prayer Requests

Paul has prayed for the Philippians in that wonderful prayer list we explored earlier in *chapter 1 and verses 9-11*; but now Paul effectively hands over a list of his own personal prayer requests And there are 3 of them.

1. Pray that I will mind what matters most

Notice the first phrase of *verse 20. It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed . . .*

In other words, I really want you to pray that I'll not let you down, the church down or Christ down – whether before Caesar, the world or even to the church at large watching me.^{viii}

He doesn't want to miss what matters most.

The word here translated *eager expectation* has to do with watching something with the head turned away from other things.^{ix}

It's a word (apokaradokia: αποκαραδοκια) actually made up of three words – the preposition “away”; the noun for “the head” and the verb, “to watch”.^x

In other words, Paul wants them to pray that his head will be turned away from less important things so that he can focus on what matters most.

To put it even more simply, Paul doesn't want to be looking in the wrong direction and miss the crucial thing.

As I was studying this particular word, I remembered an event from 45 years ago. It's amazing, I cannot remember what happened 45 minutes ago, but I can remember something that happened 45 years ago. I'm sure what that means. If you know, don't tell me . . . it can't be good.

I was around 12 and my 3 brothers were 14, 8 and 6.

My parents had just purchased our first television. It sat in the living room until sometime later when it was replaced by a piano and the TV went down into the basement.

We used to have to read the same amount of time we wanted to watch television. It was Saturday and my parents had to go to a meeting. So they left us to our homework and of course the clear command, “Do not turn on the television while we're away.” The thought never entered our minds.

They left; my brothers immediately put down their books and turned on the TV. I remember protesting, of course, but I was outnumbered.

We took our 6 year old brother and stood him on the window sill that faced our road where our parents would have to turn in – Red Brook Road – as they drove home. That would give us about a block and a half before they would pull into our driveway.

He didn't like that assignment, because he couldn't get a clear look at the TV – it was just around the corner from him. We told him that his assignment was critically important to the mission – he would be rewarded one day in heaven. Probably not.

We watched TV for about an hour. My little brother could see the TV if he gripped the window sill and leaned back just enough to stretch out his neck and look around the corner at the TV.

And of course we would tell him, stop watching TV – your job as the little brother is to watch the road.

Sure enough, he eventually shouted, “They’re coming.” There was enough movement in that living room as if the rapture was occurring – everything was changing in the twinkling of an eye.

We turned off the TV, grabbed our books and got to work – our little brother jumped off the window sill and went back to coloring.

Our parent’s came in and my mother asked, “Did you boys watch TV while we were gone?” She was always suspicious – I never knew why. We all said, with angelic tones, “Why no.”

She walked across the living room floor and put her hands on the back of the television. TV’s used to have long bulbs that heated up. She got third degree burns . . . could have fried an egg.

We all were marched upstairs where the judgment seat of Christ came early.

We were watching the wrong thing. And our little brother really had to struggle to stretch out his neck – he had to really work hard to see it.

That’s the idea here . . . Paul says – in a rather wooden paraphrase – I want you to pray that I will stretch out my neck to look at the right thing – with the same intensity you might stretch out your neck to look at the wrong thing.

No, I want to be that desirous to keep my eyes focused on what matters most and not be distracted by lesser things. Certainly things I’ve been commanded not to watch . . . not to pursue . . . not to experience.

Pray that I’ll *not be ashamed* by having focused my attention on the wrong things.

I want to mind what matters most.

We’re going to talk more about that tonight as we look at a case study from the Bible on resisting temptation – from the life of a man whose first recorded words are the words, “I saw . . . I saw.”

Paul now gives the Philippian believers another prayer request:

2. Pray that I will model courage where it counts

Notice *verse 20 again, that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always, Christ will be honored in my body.*

Paul isn’t as concerned about the courtroom as much as he is about his character.^{xi}

In other words, pray that I will stay true no matter what the verdict says.

It’s easy to forget that all around us are Christians paying a great sacrifice with their bodies and their lives because of their belief in Christ.

I have often thumbed through the pages of a book published by The Voice of the Martyrs organization; an attempt to update Foxes Book of Martyrs, published in 1563.

This updated version includes a note smuggled out of Romania while under Communist Regime; it read, “We do not pray to be better Christians but that we may be the only kind of Christian God meant us to be” – faithful.^{xii}

Paul is effectively writing to the Philippians, “Pray for me that I’ll be the only kind of Christian there is to be – faithful.

Let me also point out that Paul’s word here for *courage* can be understood as *bold speech – forthrightness in speech.*^{xiii}

In other words, he’s not praying for the courage to take it on the chin – he’s praying for the kind of courage to publically identify with the gospel no matter what.

The updated Book of Martyrs also included the testimony of Chet Bitterman – a Wycliffe Bible Translator who was abducted in Bogota, Colombia. They demanded a ransom as well as a promised that all the Wycliffe missionaries leave Colombia within 30 days. Wycliffe of course refused both, and all their missionaries are aware that bribes or ransoms are not be paid – which would end up endangering every missionary. In a note Chet was able to send to his wife he wrote about the potential ministry he might have among these soldiers. He added, “Remember Paul and the Praetorian guard” in

Philippians 1 – maybe God will give me the same opportunity with these who are guarding me.

48 days after his abduction, his life was ended by a single bullet to his heart. Heaven alone has recorded the impact of his life and death.

Not long ago, according to information smuggled out of North Korea, several families were herded together and their children taken from them to be hung until they died unless their parents recanted. The parents refused to publically deny Christ and as their children were hung these adults began to sing together through their tears, the hymn text; “More love, O Christ, to Thee, more love to thee.”^{xiv}

That’s Paul’s prayer – notice *verse 20b* again – ***that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage – boldness – now as always, Christ will be honored in my body whether by life or by death.***

By the way, that last part of *verse 20* provides one last prayer request from Paul.

Third:

3. Pray that I will magnify the Master with all my might

Did you catch that request here – ***that Christ will be honored in my body.***

Now watch this – Paul isn’t just praying that Christ will be honored. Paul knows that Christ will be one day in the presence of the entire human race from all time who see Him exalted, will bend their knee and acknowledge that He is indeed Lord.

Paul isn’t just saying, “Oh, pray that Christ will be magnified” he wants them to pray that Christ will be magnified ***in him.***

It’s easy to pray,

- Oh Lord, show your glory;
- Oh God, let your truth be known;
- Oh God, let your grace be seen.”

It’s another thing to pray:

- Oh Lord show your glory in the way I live
- Oh God, let your truth be known through me.
- Oh God, let your grace be seen in my actions.”

That’s another thing entirely.

Jesus Christ will be exalted *one day* . . . but will Jesus Christ be exalted *today* – in you? Now that’s something to pray about.

You see, Paul wasn’t concerned with the verdict of his trial as much as he was with the value of his testimony.^{xv}

Let Christ be seen in me!

But let me take this a bit further.

Paul says here, “Pray that Christ will be honored in my body.”

That word for honored can be translated magnified is from megaluno (μεγαλυνω) and it means to make large.^{xvi}

In our culture we would say – to supersize – to mega-size the object – make it larger than ever!

What does that mean?

Well, think about it this way. The stars and planets out there are actually huge. But to us and our naked eye, they’re little dots in the sky. But if you take a **telescope** – which is much smaller than a planet – and look through it, that star or planet will become much larger – much closer.

Warren Wiersbe writes, to the average person, Jesus Christ is a misty figure, who lived centuries ago. But as they watch a believer’s life, that believer acts as a telescope – bringing Jesus Christ so much closer . . . making Him so much nearer.^{xvii}

Or you can take a magnifying glass, or a microscope and you can make something small, much larger.

Paul effectively prays, I want my actions and my character to reveal – to bring closer to people – and to make larger and more magnificent in real life – my Master – and my Savior, Jesus Christ.

- That won’t be an easy life . . . but it will be right.
- It might require great sacrifice and effort . . . but it will be possible.

We’re choosing to live our lives, not on the basis of what comes easy, but what God determines to be right!

And for each of us, that’s going to look a little different. He chooses each of us – unique telescopes – unique microscopes – to magnify His gospel and His character as He purposes and to bring Him nearer to those in our world.

The best way to do that is to, like Paul, focus on what matters and model boldness in speech and magnify Christ . . . and don’t forget, it means to admit here with the great Apostle Paul, in saying, I’m going to have to depend on the Holy Spirit and I – and here’s where Paul began – I’m going to need your prayers on my behalf.

It wasn’t easy for Paul in the first century – it is not any easier for you in the 21st century.

I smiled as I read recently this interesting article. A researcher had spent a lot of time studying

excavated documents from the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries B.C. I was intrigued to discover what they wrestled with back then – the average citizen living 2-300 years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

He mentioned five issues that concerned those ancient people:

- Number 1 – the imminent outbreak of international hostility
- Number 2 – the weakening of marriages and the breakup of homes
- Number 3 – the rebellion of young people and their lack of respect for parents
- Number 4 – the corruption of politics
- Number 5 – holes in the public roads that were left unfilled^{xviii}

Some things never change.

It's never been easy to live . . . much less live for Christ.

For the believer, the battle never lets up . . .

Take it from an aging Apostle – a man who tutored the church, but at the same time he honestly and openly and transparently asked that he be prayed for, by the church.

He effectively said, “I can’t do this with God’s Spirit – and your prayers. And I want you to pray specifically. That I’ll mind what matters most; that I’ll model courage where it counts; and that I’ll magnify my Master with all my might.

The choir sang earlier a wonderful arrangement. The words are worth repeating . . . and with this I close:

*There are moments on our journey following the
Lord
When God illumines every step we take;*

*There are times when circumstances make perfect
sense to us
As we try to understand each move He makes;
But when the path grows dim and our questions have
no answers
Turn to Him . . . and bow the knee.*

*Trust the heart of your Father
When the answer goes beyond what you can see
Bow the knee
Lift your eyes toward heaven
And believe the One who holds eternity
When you don’t understand the purpose of His plan,
In the presence of your King, bow the knee.
There are days when clouds surround us
The rain begins to fall,
And the cold and lonely winds won’t cease to blow;
And there seems to be no reason for the suffering we
feel
We are tempted to believe God doesn’t know.
When the storms arise,
Don’t forget we live by faith and not by sight.*

*Bow the knee
Trust the heart of your Father
When the answer goes beyond what you can see
Bow the knee
Lift your eyes toward heaven
And believe the One who holds eternity
When you don’t understand the purpose of His plan,
In the presence of your King,
Bow the knee.^{xix}*

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/16/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from Sam Gordon, *Philippians: An Odyssey of Joy* (Ambassador, 2004), p. 51

ii Adapted from Dennis E. Johnson, *Philippians* (P & R Publishing, 2013), p. 69

iii G. Walter Hansen, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Philippians* (Eerdmans, 2009), p. 77

iv Fritz Rienecker/Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 547

v John MacArthur, *Philippians* (Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 73

vi William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 25

vii Rienecker/Rogers, p. 547

viii MacArthur, p. 75

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- ix J.A. Motyer, The Message of Philippians (IVP Academic, 1984), p. 86
- x Rienecker/Rogers, p. 547
- xi Adapted from Grant Osborne, General ed; The Life Application Bible: Philippians, Colossians & Philemon (Tyndale, 1995), p. 37
- xii John Foxe, Voices of the Martyrs (Bridge Logos, 2007), p. 324
- xiii Rienecker/Rogers, p. 547
- xiv Foxe: Voices of the Martyrs (Bridge-Logos, 2007), p. 425
- xv Adapted from Life Application Bible, p. 37
- xvi Rienecker/Rogers, p. 547
- xvii Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Joyful: Philippians (Victor Books 1978), p. 37
- xviii Charles R. Swindoll, Stress Fractures (Multnomah, 1990), p. 97
- xix Christopher Machen & Mike Harland, *Bow the Knee* Centergetic Music, 1997