

How to Pray for Your Pastor during Lockdown

If you pray for your pastor, as I hope you do, how will you pray for him during this coronavirus lockdown?

Of course, this global lockdown affects us all differently. We live under widely varying regulations in different countries or even in different counties within the same country. But there are some things you can pray for your pastor—regardless of his circumstance. Consider these five.

1. Pray for him to entrust his flock to the Chief Shepherd.

Any pastor worth his salt cares deeply for the men and women under his leadership. He loves them, he watches over their souls (Hebrews 13:17), and he longs to lead them into maturity in Christ, labouring with all the energy that Christ so powerfully works within him (Colossians 1:28, 29). It is therefore deeply—deeply!—frustrating not to be able to visit them, hold their hands, pray with them in person, sit with them, and listen to their hopes and fears.

Oh, sure, the ubiquitous Zoom means he can speak to and “see” most of them, unless they cannot manage the technology. But video calls are tiring for all parties and, at the very best, second-best. There really is no substitute for face-to-face, person-to-person proximity. All the more important, therefore, for your pastor to remember that he is an under-shepherd and that the pastoring is both ultimately and presently being done by Jesus the Chief Shepherd. Pray that he will be given grace to entrust his people to the Chief Shepherd when he keenly feels this frustration.

2. Pray for him to bear up under the shadow of death.

Pastors often feel the shadow of death more keenly than others. They sit with the dying, they weep with the bereaved, they conduct funerals, and they visit the grieving for weeks afterward. For most of us, death is an occasional visitor; for pastors, it's a familiar intruder.

These days, funerals are small, as the nearest and dearest are self-isolating and not allowed to attend. Gone are larger funerals, where mourners cheer and encourage one another as they grieve together. Pray for your pastor, that more than ever he will be deeply convinced that Jesus offers life and immortality to all who come to him in faith.

3. Pray for your pastor to sleep and take a day off.

Working from home makes it harder than ever to draw healthy boundaries between the day's work and the night's sleep, between the six days of work and the one day of rest. Work is everywhere. It shouts at you from your laptop, your tablet, your iPhone. It comes into the bedroom. Under normal conditions, you might spend your day off outside, or even a coffee shop. Not now.

Pray that your pastor will be given grace to turn off his mind and rest—perhaps literally that he would turn his devices off and rest.

4. Pray for your pastor to be given grace to go on interceding.

Your pastor is called to the apostolic ministry of prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:2, 4). To pray faithfully and purposefully for those whom he leads is an integral part of his work. Such prayer is demanding and draining; it involves a wrestling. It's hard enough in normal days; it's harder than ever under lockdown. In theory, we might think it becomes easier, as more time may be available. But I doubt many pastors feel this way.

Even if a pastor has a wife who is a loyal and faithful partner in prayer (as I do), it's hard not to be able also to pray in person with one's fellow elders and others. So pray that your pastor will be given grace to go on praying.

5. Pray for your pastor to keep his eyes on the final "Well done, good and faithful servant."

In the UK, where I live, the great heroes of the day are the National Health Service. Every Thursday evening, we are encouraged to come out of our front doors and applaud the doctors and nurses, the ambulance drivers and cleaners, all who are in the front line of the battle against the virus. In daily news briefings, alongside the government ministers, the scientific advisers and medical officers are called upon to give us their expertise. I hope all these men and women know they are deeply appreciated, as is entirely right.

In our secular societies, at no point will pastors be praised like this. We won't be asked to prepare the world to deal with death. We won't be asked to share how the gospel of the Lord Jesus gives us hope in the face of death, or how we can love our neighbours as ourselves in these days. At no point will a President or Prime Minister turn with gratitude and respect to a pastor and ask him to speak.

Under normal circumstances, pastors can feel both warmth and appreciation when they preach to their people. Nowadays, when he speaks via live-stream or a pre-recording to a microphone and a camera, all that is gone. Some might take the trouble to thank him afterward, but it's not the same.

So pray that your pastor. He might feel unappreciated. Pray that he will not fall victim to self-pity and say to himself, "I wish they would applaud me!" Pray that he will keep his eyes on the only word of affirmation that will ultimately matter: "Well done, good and faithful servant." Pray that he will walk gladly in the footsteps of his Master who was despised, mocked, and scorned.

By Christopher Ash.

With acknowledgments to the author and to "9Marks"