

## Praying With Purpose

Contributed by Rodney Johnson on Mar 19, 2020

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:5-34, Luke 22:44-46

**Denomination:** Evangelical/Non-Denominational

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**Summary:** In these uncertain times it is important that Christians begin praying with a purpose. This is my first "remote" message to my congregation in light of not being able to worship together because of COVID-19.

Praying With Purpose

Scriptures: Matthew 6:5-8; 25-34; 7:7-8; Luke 22:44-46

As you know, I have been doing a series on the word "IF" and how it is used in Scripture to show some of the conditions that we must meet as we walk in fellowship with God. I will continue this series next week, but this morning I want to talk to you about praying with purpose. We are witnessing and experiencing a time in our world that has not existed in my lifetime. The outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) has raised alarms around the world and this pandemic must be taken seriously. In my thirty years of being in medical sales, I have never experienced a time when a pharmaceutical company pulled all of its sales representatives out of the field for an extended period of time and yet that is what we have done. Restaurants are closed. Theaters are closed. Stores are closing or reducing hours of operation. Professional and collegiate sporting events have been cancelled. We are being asked to distance ourselves socially from others – something that is very hard to do but yet must be done. Some people are panicking and buying items from stores because they too have never experienced anything like this. People are scared and while that might not be me or you, we need to understand that the fear for some is very real.

But don't lose hope as you read the news or watch it on TV. When you look back in history you will find that there have been other pandemics and yet we have survived. Please here me New Light. We survived them! The HIV/AIDs pandemic has killed over 36 million people since 1981. While there are still millions living today who are infected the world has learned how to deal with it, and we are still learning and developing treatments almost 40 years later. The flu pandemic of 1918 killed between 20-50 million people between 1918 and 1920. What was interesting about that flu pandemic was the people

who died were not the elderly with weakened immune systems or children, but young adults. The elderly and children were mostly spared. Why am I sharing this with you this morning? Why am I stressing the need for us to take this time to focus on praying?

I am sharing this with you because, right now, we do not know where this pandemic is going, but our Father does. Right now we do not know everyone who has been infected, but our Father does. Right now we do not know how long we will be practicing social distancing, but our Father does. In this midst of this, He is God. But more important, New Light, He is our Father and the Bible says He will never leave us or forsake us. Right now, that should give us some level of peace, some level of comfort. So it makes sense to me that if I have concerns, or question or fears that I would want to go to my Father because He alone has the answers I need. He has the answers we need. We can watch the news and take in the data from the experts and do what they are telling us to do, but only our Father can settle that internal fear and panic that might be building up inside of us because we don't know how long we will have to distance ourselves socially from those we generally congregate with throughout the week. This means we must adjust, for the time being, to a new normal. New Light, my new normal adjustment will include more time with my Father. What about you? I am going to suggest something to you: let this current situation be the spark that reignites a burning red heart flame in you to spend more time in prayer with your Father in a more focused way. I truly believe that if we will do this, both through reading His word and by talking with Him, it will change how we currently think about this situation and it will change the life that we live after it has passed. I believe we will go through this with more faith, power and clarity of mind than ever before. New Light I hope you will join me.

So what does it mean to pray with purpose? Many years ago Nikki and I were at home visiting the Church she grew up in. The pastor of the Church asked me to bless the offering. I went to the pulpit and prayed over the offering and sat down. Afterwards he leaned over to me and said something to the tune of, "Thanks for doing it right and only blessing the offering." At first I did not understand fully what he was saying but then I began listening to the prayers that were being prayed over the offering during other services. People prayed for everything – the world, sickness, blessings from the past week and for the upcoming week, and eventually over the offering itself. From that experience I realized that sometimes we do not pray with a purpose even when we are praying in Church. Praying with a purpose really means being intentional about your prayer time; praying specifically for that situation that is most on your mind; and then stopping and patiently waiting to see what God tells you. Remember, personal prayer is a two way conversation. Purposeful prayer is not only about the subject matter, but also about the "when." And let me add this: personal prayer is also us agreeing with what the

Bible says. Let me give you an example. Psalm 91:9-10 says "For you have made the LORD, my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place. No evil will befall you, nor will any plague come near your tent."

New Light, imagine being in your quiet place and telling God through your prayer: "Father, You are my refuge. You are the Most High in all the universe and I live your house because; You are my Father. And I know because I live with You, no plague, no coronavirus, nor any other disease, can survive where You live. Father, my home is Your home." New Light, how would that prayer make you feel? Would it bring you peace? Would it give you hope? As I sit in my home speaking to you right now I want you to know that the Lord is welcomed here in my house and the coronavirus is not! It might try to sneak in and visit, but it's not welcome here and can't stay. I confess that as a child of God! And, the more I confess that the more it gets into my heart and the more my faith is built up against it. Remember, faith comes by hearing the Word – even if that Word is spoken from your own lips! I am speaking the Word over my life and my home!

Let's talk a minute about praying with a purpose. When we begin to pray with a purpose, we set aside time for this activity. I read a story about a woman named Susan Wesley. Even though she had 19 children she found time each day to pray for one hour. As you would expect, with 19 children she had no place to go in order to pray in private so she would cover her face with her apron and pray. The children were instructed not to bother her when her apron was over her head. The children grew up watching their mother pray for one hour a day. They watched her talk to her Heavenly Father. This was important time for her and she did not let everything that happened throughout her day, including taking care of 19 children, interfere with it. We have a lot of distractions in general, but during this time we have the ability to take a step back and really focus on what important and one of those things is prayer. As I thought of her I was reminded of the song "In the Garden"? It says, "I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses. And the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses. And He walks with me and He talks with me and He tells me I am His own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known." This is a good descriptor of our time alone with our Heavenly Father.

When Jesus taught on prayer in Matthew chapter six, He said the following, "When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless

repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." (Matthew 6:5-8) Jesus assumed that His disciples would be praying. I mean think about it. They saw Him praying to the Father. He led by example so it would be natural for Him to expect and know that they would pray. He knew that for them to stay connected to the Father through Him it would come through prayer and the Word that would follow. In Matthew chapter six Jesus tells the disciples how to pray. Before He walks them through what we know as the Lord's Prayer, He gave them additional instruction. He told them not to pray to be seen of men. (I think this is what Nikki's former pastor was telling me.) He also said to do it at home, in your prayer closet or room. In other words, do it privately - having a personal, private, purposeful conversation with your Heavenly Father. Then He tells them not to use meaningless repetitions - a lot of words that means little. What I believe Jesus was saying here is to pray with purpose. We see this also when He gives them the example of the Lord's Prayer. So what else does it mean to pray with purpose?

First, pray with patience. You might be thinking how does praying with patience align with praying with purpose? When I bake bread there is a process that I must go through if I want the bread to turn out right. Part of that process is allowing the yeast to activate which causes the dough to rise. This can take anywhere between 30 minutes to an hour. If I am not patient as I wait for the dough to rise, I can start the next process before the rising is complete. Having patience when we are praying is twofold. First we take time to wait on God to respond to our prayers if we need an answer urgently, and second, it means waiting on the answer regardless of how long it takes. It means, New Light, parking our thoughts about what we think should be done at the door and waiting on Him. When I am baking bread there are times when I am in a hurry and get impatient based on everything I have going on that day but I have to stop myself and remember the goal. The goal is not to finish at a certain time, but to have good bread at the end. I stand on the promise of what Jesus said in Matthew chapter seven. He said, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8) What is not stated in these verses is the timeline. That's where the patience come it - waiting on the answer that was promised to us.

Praying with a purpose also means that we are alert to what is happening around us and are praying proactively about what could be versus reactively after something has happened. On the night that He was betrayed, Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. Before He separated Himself from His disciples to pray alone, He told them to pray that they would not enter into temptation. After He had prayed for a

while He came back to His disciples and found them sleeping. Luke chapter twenty-two records the following, "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, and said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation.'" (Luke 22:44-46) While we do not know exactly what temptations the disciples would be facing we can guess based on what was going to happen to Jesus. They would face the temptation to go back to their old lives once He died. They would face the hardships of confessing Him in the same society that put Him to death. They would face the temptation to deny Him when pressed with death as we see with Peter. Jesus asked them to pray that they would not enter into temptation. So what am I saying to you? We need to pray proactively about what might lie before us, regardless of COVID-19. We need to be praying about us and those around us. We need to be praying about our schools. New Light, while we need to be alert to what is happening around us we cannot allow ourselves to be consumed by what's happening. When we are alert, we can pray with a purpose because we are praying about a specific situation.

We are facing some trying days over the next few months. There is a lot of fear in the world right now and some people are panicking because of the unknown. People are looking at declines in their retirement accounts based on the markets and wondering if they will be able to retire as planned. People are stressing about their kid's education as school systems are not prepared to instruct kids remotely. People are worrying about their jobs and their ability to pay their bills. If there was ever a time to worry about something people are identifying it right now. But you are not just any people, New Light. You are a people whose Father is the God of all creation! You are a people whose Father loves you – you can't measure it or understand it, but His love is real. You are a people, New Light, whose Father gave His Son to die for you. Do you think your Father is going to sit by and not watch over you? We need to remind ourselves what our focus should be and I want to leave that with you this morning. Turn with me back to Matthew chapter six. Let's begin at verse twenty-five.

"For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is

alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:25-34)

In these verses Jesus made a difference between those who are children of God and those who are not. Those who are not worry about the things of this world. They worry about clothes, food, jobs, etc. They worry about the things that the world tells them to worry about. Their health; their 401K; their home; their car; their job; their kids; and the list go on and on. While this is a normal response for all of us – it is also a learned response. And, just as this is a learned response, we can also choose to learn a new response. Jesus said the children of God do not worry about these things. Why? Because God has them! Because God knows what we have need of and is already providing for us, even BEFORE we ask. Because God is proactive!!! As Children of God Jesus said we should not be worrying about the things the world worries about – including COVID-19. He does not say that we need to be stupid either, but we should not have the paralyzing fear that we are seeing in some people. We need to be wise and follow the instructions given us, but with that we should be placing our faith in God.

In this time of uncertainty, we should be praying with purpose. For all of us who are now allowed to work at home for the time being, we have no excuse not to find some quiet time to talk to God. If the kids are at home and you cannot get to a private place, get an apron and place it over your head and let them know you are entering into your prayer time. Invite them to join you because as we teach them early to talk to their Heavenly Father they will keep doing it when they leave our homes and live on their own. As you pray, know that your Father hears you and understand your heart. He knows what we are dealing with and our natural tendencies to respond. As you pray, turn it all over to Him. Once you have said your piece, wait on Him to response. Finally, before you end your prayer time with Him, give thanks. Colossians 4:2 says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving."

As I close this morning I want to remind you of what was written in Philippians chapter four. It says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6-7)

I love you and I look forward to being in your presence and worshipping God together real soon. God bless.

Until next time, "The Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up His countenance on you and give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26)

(If you are ever in the Kansas City, KS area, please come and worship with us at New Light Christian Fellowship, 15 N. 14th Street, Kansas City, KS 66102. Our service Sunday worship starts at 9 a.m. and Thursday night Bible study at 7 p.m. Also, for use of our social media, you can find us at newlightchristianfellowship on FB. To get our live stream services, please make sure you "like" and turn on notifications for our page so you can be notified when we are live streaming. We also have a church website and New Light Christian Fellowship YouTube channel for more of our content. We are developing more social media streams so please stand by and we will notify you once those channels are up and running. We look forward to you worshipping with us. May God bless and keep you.)