

New Life International Fellowship
Sermon by Rev. Timothy C. Geoffrion, Ph.D.
“What are you praying for?”
October 27, 2019

Introduction—Group Spiritual Direction

Every week, I meet with a group of MIT students for Group Spiritual Direction. We read Scripture. I guide them in prayer. But the main goal is to help each one to recognize how God is at work in their lives, and how they would like God to be working in their lives?

How would you answer? How is God working in your life? How would you like God to be working in your life? Often my students struggle to answer this question. They are accustomed to praying for concrete things, e.g., money for school fees, healing, safety in travel. But they're not used to identifying how God is at work to mold them, help them to grow, to bring healing and transformation in their personal life, in their relationships, in their family, at work, at church, and in their ministries. Now this is a very big subject. So, today, we're going to be able to focus on just one part of it: How would you like God to be at work in all the major areas of your life? How are you praying for what you most desire and believe to be God's will?

Prayer

Sermon

Spiritual discipline of thoughtful prayer

In order to grow spiritually, each of us needs spiritual practices and disciplines. Spiritual practices help us to connect with God. *Disciplines*—practices that we commit to doing regularly in an orderly, thoughtful fashion—*provide structure to support the growth we seek.*

Prayer is one of the most important spiritual practices to maintain and develop our relationship with God. But to go beyond just praying for help when we need it, everyone needs to have some kind of prayer discipline, or structure and plan to come before the Lord on a regular basis with all sorts of prayers. There is not one right method, but there are some proven ways that many find helpful. Today, we're going to look at one way to create more structure, content, and depth to your daily prayers.

Sometimes, when you hear a sermon on prayer, the preacher may mention the ACTS model as a guide. Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. All four types of prayer are important. Today, we are going to just focus on the fourth item, supplication—what we ask God to do in our lives and in the lives of others.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

God invites us, urges us, and commands us to be praying people. Most people just do this naturally. But how are we supposed to pray? According to the Apostle Paul, one place to start is with your anxieties. What are you anxious about? Take those concerns to God in prayer. What do you desire for your life? Take those desires to God in prayer. What do you desire for your loved ones, for your neighbors, and for our world? Take those concerns to God in prayer. As we pray with anxieties, concerns, hopes, and dreams, we move out of the realm of emotion and into the flow of the Spirit.

As a spiritual discipline, we can intentionally organize our prayers around the major areas of our lives, such as our personal life, our family, our friendships and relationships, our work, our church, and our ministry. We can even be systematic about it to help us go deeper and be more thorough in our prayer life. We start with the desires of our heart for each important, major life area, then align our will with whatever we know to be God’s will (based on Scripture and the rule of love), and then turn these desires, concerns, and priorities into prayers. When we practice prayer in this way, we are bringing our hearts and deepest selves into the flow of the Holy Spirit, who will lead us to the Father.

My Daily Prayer Guide To help me with this spiritual discipline of identifying my vision and desires for every area of my life and of praying for God’s will to be done, I have been slowly creating a prayer list over many years. **It begins with a reminder of my heart’s desire, my daily prayer, and my life mission.** Then I add a few pages of my favorite Scriptures, followed by many names and situations I want to pray for. It’s now 12 single-spaced pages long. I can’t pray for everything every day, but it’s become my *Prayer Guide for daily use*.

Let’s look at some examples.

1. Personal

My heart’s desire: to fully abide in Jesus, living a Christ-centered, Spirit-led life, full of wisdom, truth, righteousness, peace, joy, and love

Sample prayer “Please continue to draw me to you, to Christ, and deeper into your love and grace. **Help me to delight in you, to know you better, and to love and serve you with all my heart, soul, strength, and mind;** and to love my neighbor as myself. Please comfort me in my distress and anxiety, my unfulfilled longings and desires. **Thank you for calling me to abide in Christ more fully and more deeply.”**

A couple biblical examples

"In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head." (1 Samuel 1:10-11)

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16)

2. Family (Eph. 3:25-28, 33; 6:1-4)

My daily prayer: "Lord God, please help me to live fully, love deeply, and give freely, so that others will know and experience you through me."

Family relationships are very important, as we all know. They can also be some of the most difficult relationships in our lives. We don't get to choose our families, but we can choose our attitudes. We can also choose to pray for our family members and our relationships with them.

I pray for my wife and sons daily. My extended family all by name, once a week. Often, I just mention their names, but I go slowly enough to let the Spirit prompt me to pray in more depth for one or more individuals.

Sample prayer "Help me to see where she needs my support and help, and to give it to her readily and generously, with empathy, wisdom, tenderness, and patience.... To love her in ways that feel like nourishing, reassuring love to her... Be a reliable, consistent husband and spiritual co-leader with her in our marriage. To wear the sword to protect her and look out for her needs and best interests. Put her ahead of all my other relationships...."

3. Friendships/Relationships (Matt. 22:37-40)

"Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matt. 22:37-40)

Who are praying for on a regular basis? What I've done to handle the number of people I'm praying for is to create Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday lists that are more manageable for me. Then, I try not to pray out of obligation or guilt. But simply mention their names, while pausing over names and requests just long enough for the Spirit to speak to me.

When you feel led to spend more time with one or more names, you could ask yourself the following questions:

- What do I need to see about this person that I haven't noticed before?
- What is God's heart for him/her?
- What are my responsibilities, contribution, attitude, and effort in this relationship?

In my own spiritual development, the Lord has convicted me that I must be thoughtful about what I'm expecting from other people. When I reach out to someone in prayer or in person, I ask God to help me be genuinely concerned for whatever is in their best interest, not mine.

Sample prayer "Lord, teach me to love others as Christ loves them. Help me not to look to people for something they can't, don't want to, or shouldn't give. Help me to remember to ask myself before reaching out: 'Am I trying to meet my own needs or theirs?' At the same time, please give me the humility and courage to be vulnerable with others, so that I can let the right people be a friend to me, when I need friends."

4. Work

"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." (1 Tim. 2:1)

We don't have a king in this country, but

- How are you praying for your boss, co-workers, clients; Board of directors, and others who are in positions of authority in your life?
- What is your attitude toward your job and responsibilities?
- How could you pray for the quality of your work and the impact of your presence on others at your job?

Example: I saw a movie about a great opera singer in Italy, Andrea Bocelli. The movie's title was the Silence of Music. The singer was blind, but the encouragement of family and friends, his determination, his patience, and his incredible talent and hard work led him extraordinary success. He's now sold over 90 million records! At first, I just felt jealous of him. "Why does it seem that everyone is more successful than I am?!" But then, the HS turned that envious spirit of self-pity around. I was able to see that his success was not only due to his great talent, but to his hard work. His maestro drove him to seek excellence. God used that story to motivate me to try harder to do my best and to develop my own abilities and to do a better job making the most of my opportunities.

5. Church

The Apostle Paul provides an outstanding example of praying for the church. In his case, he didn't have just one church, but he prayed for all the churches he founded and ministered to. How do we know this? Many of his prayers are recorded in his letters.

For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3:14-21)

How are you praying for NLIF?

6. Your ministry

How would you define your ministry? I have many specific responsibilities with my work at Faith, Hope, and Love Global Ministries. However, it's also been helpful to me to create a mission statement for my life, and then pray with it every day.

My mission: "To teach, inspire, and encourage ministers and leaders, equipping them to serve Christ more effectively in strategic positions of influence around the world"

The reason I started praying with my mission statement every day was that I felt like I was sometimes losing touch with my primary mission in the midst of all my responsibilities and active social world. When I started praying with the statement on a regular basis and before going out to meet with people, I found that it helped me to remember my priorities and to stay focused. The HS also used this practice to help me remember to be ready to listen, care, and pray with others more regularly.

Sample prayer: "Lord, help me to genuinely and purely love those I am serving and working with, and to be faithful to make disciples of Jesus Christ, strengthening their relationship to God, fostering their growth, encouraging them, comforting them, urging them to live lives worthy of God, all out of a genuine concern for their well-being and for advancing the kingdom of God. Enable me to humbly share the Gospel, pointing to the Father and to Christ, depending on the power of the Spirit to draw others to God and to transform them. Be wise, righteous, and loving in all I do."

What is your mission in life? What is your ministry from day to day or week to week? E.g., singing, teaching, witnessing, serving, overseeing, giving, etc. What is the prayer of your heart for your ministry?

Application: Time for quiet reflection

This coming week is a week of prayer for our church. Our theme is "going deeper in our prayer lives." Each day we will individually be praying in the six areas that I've highlighted this morning. I've offered my personal examples just to give you some ideas about how you might go deeper or further in your prayer life. Now it's time for you to identify your own priorities and create your own prayers.

What are the desires of your heart for your personal life, your family, your friendships and relationships, your work, your church, and your ministry? What do you believe God's will is in each of these areas? How is God speaking to you about your attitudes and actions? What movement do you feel He is leading you to make?

In the quiet of this moment, while Yumi plays softly, prayerfully reflect on each of the following areas of your life. Then, write down at least one thing you want to pray for in each of the following categories on the designated day this coming week.

1. Personal (Monday)
2. Family (Tuesday)
3. Friendships and relationships (Wednesday)
4. Work (Thursday)
5. Church (Friday)
6. Ministry (Saturday)