

Prayer using the “A.C.T.S.” Model

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Introduction: Learning to pray takes time and it takes...prayer. You only learn how to pray by praying. But how do you pray? What do you actually do when you pray?

Many years ago, I learned an acrostic that serves as an excellent guide to prayer. I have found it helpful and I hope you will also find it helpful. It uses the word “ACTS” to guide you through the elements of prayer so that your prayers can be grounded in the pattern set by the Scriptures. This lesson aims to help you understand the A.C.T.S. pattern and provide Scriptural examples of these elements of prayer along with guidance for how to pray.

Purpose: Learn to pray in a Scriptural manner using the A.C.T.S. method.

A – Adoration

“Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” (Hebrews 13:15)

The word “adore” means “to love and respect deeply.” It has to do with loving someone for who they are rather than what they do. When we worship God, we must not only give thanks, that is worship him for what he has done), we must also worship him by praising him for who he is. Consider, for example, how the Psalms and other Scriptures praise God for who he is, rather than simply what he does.

Psalm 8:1 O Lord, our Lord, / How excellent is Your name in all the earth, / Who have set Your glory above the heavens!

Psalm 63:3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, / My lips shall praise You.

Our Lord taught us to honor God’s “name” (his character and nature) in prayer:

Matthew 6:9 In this manner, therefore, pray: / Our Father in heaven, / Hallowed be Your name.

In the Revelation, John gives us a glimpse into the heavens and shows us that praising God for his character and nature is what occupies many of the heavenly creatures (some exist for this purpose):

Revelation 4:8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

“Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!”

Revelation 5:12–14 saying with a loud voice:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

¹⁴ Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

Also read Psalm 95:1-5 and Psalms 103, 145, 150 for examples of adoration: praising God simply for who he is.

During this time, you can think about one of the attributes of God that you have meditated on and praise God for this. Or you can look for an attribute of God in your daily Bible reading and pray and praise God for that attribute. In doing this, think about how that particular attribute is relevant to your prayer and the concerns of your life. You will be strengthened by thinking about who God is and how his entire character and nature (his “name”) are directed toward accomplishing his will in your life.

C – Confession

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Consider Isaiah’s response when confronted by the glory of God:

“So I said: “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.”” (Isaiah 6:5)

When we confront or are confronted by God in his glory, the realization and confession of sin is the appropriate and expected response. Confession is a gift from God that enables us to draw near to him for cleansing from sinful acts resulting from indwelling sin. Confessing our sins means that we see ourselves in truth and agree with God about the things we have done wrong. This confession to God should lead us to make things right with others and to be accountable to each other and to God. This strengthens our relationship with God and one another and gives us confidence that God hears our prayer.

Psalm 66:18 “If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.”

Psalm 84:11 “...No good *thing* will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.”

Our Lord taught us to confess our sins in prayer:

Matthew 6:12 “And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors” and

Luke 11:4 “And forgive us our sins, For we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.”

Our prayer time can also involve searching our hearts in light of God’s Word and Spirit and letting God, through his Word and Spirit, point out where we are wrong.

Psalm 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.”

Often this prayer will be answered during the preaching of God’s Word and other times it will be revealed while reading God’s Word in private or in conversation with your fellow believers. Still other times, the Holy Spirit will prick your conscience when you do things that are displeasing to God. This is one prayer that God is sure to answer, though he uses various ways and means to answer it.

Once God reveals your sin, you must seek forgiveness and accept it, allowing God to cleanse your heart.

Psalm 51:10–13 “Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit. ¹³ *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.”

Be sure, once you have confessed *and* forsaken (Proverbs 28:13), that you accept God’s forgiveness (Jer. 31:34).

T – Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is when we thank God for what he has done. We often think of this as praise, and it is certainly an aspect of praise though here, instead of worshipping God just for who he is, here we worship him for what he has done.

Thanksgiving is supposed to be a common part of the lives of believers:

Ephesians 5:20 “...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” and

Philippians 4:6–7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

If we pray specifically for God’s blessing, guidance, and deliverance, we must be equally certain to thank God specifically, that is, thank him for specific acts of blessing, guidance, and deliverance.

We also can thank God for how his attributes have guided him in his blessing, guidance, and deliverance. This is where there is some overlap with adoration. In adoration we worship God for who he is; in thanksgiving we thank him for being this kind of God.

Psalms 118:1 “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good! For His mercy *endures* forever.”

We also must give thanks for intangible things like salvation, and grace, and all the aspects of his character that result in the actions that he does to bring these things to reality in our lives.

Psalms 100:4–5 “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, *And* into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name. ⁵ For the LORD *is* good; His mercy *is* everlasting, *And* His truth *endures* to all generations.”

S – Supplication

“Supplication” means “asking for something earnestly or humbly.” It refers to the part of our prayer where we make requests and petitions to God for others, for the church, and for ourselves. It does not necessarily refer to intercessory prayer (prayer on behalf of others), since the Bible portrays prayer largely as intercession, and since that characterized Jesus’ earthly ministry (John 17) and is the essence of Jesus’ continuing ministry (Heb. 7:25), intercession should be a big part of our supplication.

Many Christians know how to make their requests known and, sadly, that is the only thing they do in prayer so that prayer becomes a recitation of a shopping list, spiritual and material. If, however, we keep first things first, this will be an opportunity to see God’s hand at work and have further chance to praise and thank him.

Prayer should be our first resort, not our last resort. It should characterize our lives. It is the antidote to worry and frustration and worldly methods of problem-solving.

Philippians 4:6–7 “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:19 “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

This is where our prayer list comes in handy (though it is certainly appropriate to list the things you want to say during the previous portions) and be sure to keep track of answers to prayer so that you can give appropriate thanks to God for answered prayer and testify to others about God’s goodness. During this time simply follow the prayer list given out by your church (I was taught to always pray for others first) and then follow with requests of your own. Be sure to pray for your church, your pastor, and your fellow church-members. You have a responsibility to each of these to pray for them and it is sin not to pray for them since the Bible commands it.

Be certain also to pray for things that will never be answered in this life, things that Paul prayer for such as wisdom, and holiness, and unity, and love. Also, if you don’t know what to pray for on behalf of someone else, pray Paul’s prayer from Colossians 1:9-12 or another of Paul’s prayers for them. Here is a list of Paul’s prayers from the New Testament. Study them to learn what to pray for.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-12

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Colossians 1:9-14 (Note: this one is my favorite and I pray it for others and myself all the time)

Philippians 1:9-11

Ephesians 1:15-23

Ephesians 3:14-21

Romans 15:14-33

Conclusion: Don’t view these as rules or rigid, constraining guidelines; instead let them serve you by guiding you into a biblical model of prayer. Set aside some time each day to kneel or bow in prayer. Perhaps it will be easier to do it several times a day. A notebook will help. Set it next to your Bible. Write in it the verses or passages that help you in prayer such as the Lord’s Prayer or passages listed above. Also use it to record your requests, the answers, and the ongoing things you will pray for. Keep your church prayer list with it. Commit yourself to prayer and see what the Lord will do in your life, in others’ lives, and in our church.

Sources: I do not know where I first heard the A.C.T.S. model and though it has been referenced extensively (a quick internet search will provide many examples of its use, some good some, others not so good), I have not been able to determine with whom or where it first originated.

Definitions for “adoration” and “supplication” in this study were taken from the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*.