
How to Pray! Part IV

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The ACTS of Prayer

Mathew 7: 7-14 and Luke 11:1-4

A.C.T.S is an acronym or axiom that points us to the Lord's Prayer and other Scripture, and gives us precepts so we can divide up our time and purpose to engage in prayer with a correct devotion and attitude. "ACTS" refers to the precepts of prayer—the categories of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

- **A**doration, means to worship and acknowledge the majesty of God—Praise be to God! *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.* This is about the greatness of God, His incredible omnipresence, omnipotence and omniscience, His sovereign nature and rule, and His complete holiness. It also indicates the incredible, wonderful privilege that He cares for us and hear us. This means our prayer life is to recognize His Sovereignty so we can honor Him as LORD over all, over our lives and all that is around us. This helps us trust Him and place Him first in our lives. This is to be our duty and desire that comes from our gratitude for what He has done for us. We can see the awesome privilege we have to know Him and to commune with Him. We come to understand His love and grace for us, so we can have a greater delight in Him, not just as a necessity, a law, or a ritual, but living our life because of who He is. When we truly love the Lord, we will reverence Him and grow in our relationship to Him. This transfers to us in a prayer for further dedication. We are to be dedicated to God not just by our words, deeds, and promises but also by our will, heart, and mindsets and with our whole being. Knowing that God is in charge helps us realize we belong to God and we are not our own; we are in Him, a much greater purpose. This means when we pray, we should begin our time adoring and praising God. Praise Him for who He is! Then, look over all that is in your life (even if you think you do not have much) and all He has done for you. God delights in your praises!
- **C**onfession. *Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.* This means we are to see our sins and agree with God about the things that we have done wrong. During our prayer times, things will come to our mind that will not be pleasant to recall. We will be convicted of our sins and failure, where we have not been truthful, or have exaggerated or missed His precious opportunities for doing good. We will have genuine sorrow for what we have done and left undone. Then, we are called to deal with it and make restitution where we can, seeking His forgiveness and going to others for forgiveness where we wronged them. Keep track of these items that God brings to us, our sins. Know that God will *forgive me all my sins.* *Confess* also means we are called to be accountable to one another, to state what we are going through and are struggling with to someone in confidence who will listen and help guide us by His Word. It is not about going to a pastor or priest, but to God directly, in and with accountability, with another trusted person, small

group, or mentor. We cannot grow closer to God when we have unconfessed sin in our lives; these sins act as a barrier, cutting off our communion with Him. We cannot do the Christian life by ourselves; it is not a spectator or individual sport! Christianity is not for *lone rangers*; it is for community (1 John 1:9)!

- **T**hanksgiving—for *Thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever*. This means in our prayer life, we are to be grateful for what He has done for us. We are to go over His mercies, all that He has done for us. They are more than you know! He truly and deeply loves you beyond your ability to fathom it. He provides, nurtures, and protects you and gives you hope and a purpose for life. Look at your family, friends, health, home, love, work, books, fun, a night of rest. In our times of prayer, we are to bring our attitude to His will. Remove your pride and seek Him first and foremost in all occasions so to live your life in gratitude to God for all things. Have the inward awareness that God has indeed been with you "all through the day."
- **S**upplication, *Give us today this daily bread . . . Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one* is a fervent, personal petition, letting God know of our needs. This is called *petition*, our earnest, humble request before God. It is the seeking of not only personal needs, but for the needs of others as well. It is sharing our requests before God with the attitude that He does provide, but it may not be what we want or think we need. We need to learn how to depend upon Him and to express and develop real, impacting faith. This is only one small component of our prayer life, yet, most will spend most of their time and energies here while others, seeking to be humble, never venture here. It probably accounts for over 95% of all prayer requests. This is not to be our only aspect of prayer. We are to intercede for others, seek forgiveness of our sins, seek His will, and most importantly, we are to praise and adore Him! Petition is a vital component, but not the only piece. Make sure you have a well-balanced prayer life that is not selfish, but that does not ignore your needs either. In this component, we are also to make intercession for others—*Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" To pray for others is **intercession**, the understanding of the needs of others and bringing those before God. This is exercising love and kindness, and showing our unity in the Body of Christ (John 17). Start to make a prayer list. Pray for others as their needs come to you; pray for your city, state and country, your leaders, missionaries, government officials, and persecuted Christians in the world, as well as God's for guidance, wisdom, and opportunities for you and your church and all that can come to you, and for you and them to grow and to serve. Be specific and be real!

The Lord's Prayer and this ACTS guide that is derived from it help center us and keep us on His track. This is not meant to be a rigid blueprint or for us to have *canned* prayers; rather, it is a method and guide to help us build our prayer time. This ACTS has been around for many decades and has served many countless Christians well. It should serve you well too! Use this method to ask God for guidance all through the day. Use this as a discipline to praise Him, be thankful, and to seek needs. Every breath you take, every step you make, and every task you do is to be spent in Him. You are already His child, so live that way as people of prayer. Fore think and foresee your day with Him.

We can pray for forgiveness, for our nation, show our gratitude, and even pray for the weather. Thus, in all things, we are to be in personal and collective prayer with other believers. Remember, prayer is not just a means to get what we request; it is the means to line us up with God, His precepts, and His presence. Prayer can meet all things and needs, and in everything we will ever face in life, from the trivial to the utmost of importance, prayer can and must be a significant part! We can take confidence that our prayers are heard and are answered. No matter what we need or face, we have Christ! Thus, we must preface, surround, and empower everything we do by prayer. It is never to be an afterthought, rather our first thought, our principle action, and our primary plan.

Stuck? Here are some practical helps:

- Break up your prayer times. Spend time when you first get up; look over your day and all that you need to do, seek His help, and be open to His opportunities and His presence for growth, learning, and more! Then, spend some more time with Him when you are about to go to bed. Use this time to go over your day, what you have learned, and what you can do better in the future. And then, commit yourself to God again.
- Do not be overwhelmed; start to take baby steps—that is, start with five minutes a day in the morning and again in the evening before bed. Then, slowly start to add to it. Keep in mind our Lord's Prayer; give praise to God, seek His will, and seek His instructions, His Kingdom. Do not forget to listen! Ask for forgiveness of your sins!
- Concentrate, that is, *focus* on God. The priority is your sanctification, your learning, and your growth in Him. This is best done in a quiet place, free from distractions. Thus, praying in front of the TV with your favorite show on is not a good idea. This disrupts God and keeps you unfocused!
- Seek to free your mind of stress, worry, and distractions, so Jesus is the only One and item in your mind. This is hard and takes practice, but the more you do it, the better you will become at it.
- If you still feel stuck in prayer, read the newspaper and pray for items in your nation and in the county in which you live, and for your neighbors. Also, read though the Bible and pray. Seek first the kingdom of God! Ask God for the mission that He has given you.
- Read a Bible passage or sing a hymn and use these as prayer templates.
- Find a quite place where there are no distractions.
- Try to pray out loud; this will help you concentrate! Use the Lord's Prayer is a great and the best template. Remember, it is a model for prayer and not a prayer! Go through each petition/stanza and spend time in it. You can also use the 10 commandments or Colossians 1.

Try to start with *baby steps*—10 minutes a day for a month. Then, in the second month, increase it to 15 minutes, the third month, 20 minutes, and so on. Your goal is to have at least one hour of a day in prayer—free from distractions and a wandering mind. If this is too much and your mind wanders, just remember to break the time up throughout the day—one-third in the morning, one-third during the midday, and one-third before bed.

We end our prayers with *Amen*, which means, "So let it be!" It is the wording of your confidence in God and His love for you. This is an affirmation of the goodness and power of our loving God who has heard us and is acting upon the prayer we have offered. It is trust in and reliance on your relationship with God. One day, you will get to heaven and then you will realize all that prayer did on this earth; you will be amazed at how God used you and you will be ashamed of what you missed praying for. The remembrances of all people in need, prayers for loved ones, leaders, pastors, and our church will have made a real difference! So, pray! And, make sure your prayers are real, authentic, not too general, and not weak, and you will be mightily used!

Questions to Ponder

Read Matthew 7: 7-12

1. If you could have whatever you wanted, and God gave it to you, what bearing, what impact would that have on your life and faith—or, would it be a hindrance?
2. Have you ever thought through your dreams and wishes to their logical conclusion and impact? If so, what would you think they would be like from God's perspective?
3. How much time do you spend in prayer? How much should you? What is in the way?
4. Have you considered the value of perseverance and its application to prayer?
5. Do you seek great things for yourself (Jer. 45:5)? How, and why would this be beneficial to the Christian faith, and how, and why would it distract us from God's Will?
6. What do you think Jesus stresses in this passage? How would you put it in your own words?
7. Why would some Christians think that prayer is like a vending machine or God like a bellhop, so we seek what we want, and what we want to do if we have enough faith? Why is that appealing to some people? How appealing is seeking His will? Which really requires more faith, to get what you want or to serve Him?
8. Prayer is getting our mindset aligned with His. What are some of the things that get you sidetracked from pursuing your faith more deeply through prayer?

9. Do you have the confidence that He hears your prayers and answers them?
What is your focus in prayer?
10. Do you also have the confidence that His answers are best? If so, why do we experience stress and worry?
11. What are the conditions we must meet in order to have our prayers answered?
12. Read Psalm 1:1-3; 119:97-104. How does persistence have a significant bearing on receiving His blessings, being a blessing to others, and hearing His call?
What about getting more out of the Word?
13. Do you feel confident that God has provided for you? How do you feel when you hear about Christians who do not have enough food, or even suffer and die for their faith? How does this passage deal with this?
14. What was your impression of all the similar statements from other religions compared to Jesus' statement? What can we gain by learning about other cultures and religions?
15. What are the *Good gifts* that you seek?
16. What is necessary for the *Golden rule* to work perfectly? What keeps society from practicing it? (Keep in mind, nearly all religions and philosophies have this in their teachings; I only listed some of the main ones!)
17. What would you want done to you?
18. Our God is willing and able to give! He wants to give to you every good and perfect gift! It is up to you to ask so you can receive it! What can you do to be better at asking?
19. How can this passage influence both your, and your church's outreach and evangelism programs?
20. This passage needs not to be memorized but rather committed too and accomplished! So what is a plan to get started on this?