

ACTS of Prayer

One of the most important things a Christian does is to pray. And it's amazing to me, how little thought I have ever given to how I ought to pray. I think the same is probably true of many Christians.

Like many Christians, I have a prayer list — a list of people who need healing or other blessings, and some other things to ask God for, like a marvelous spiritual revival in this country. I can go through this list each day religiously, as I have done many times, bringing each of these needs once again to God's attention; asking Him, sometimes with heartfelt emotion and sometimes just as a duty, for His will to be done for each request.



Is this prayer? Yes, it is. It's me, bringing my petitions to God, as His Word has invited (and even commanded) me to do. But ... is there perhaps a better way to pray?

Someone has come up with an acronym that is an outline for perhaps a better way to come to God in prayer. It's the word "ACTS" which stands for

Adoration **Confession** **Thanksgiving** **Supplication**

Let's first look at each of these four activities separately, and understand what they mean.

Adoration

(Matthew 22:35-38) A lawyer asked [Jesus] a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."

Jesus says that the foremost and greatest of all of God's commandments is that we love

Him wholeheartedly and passionately. We need to do more than simply agree with that. We need to do more than simply say, "Oh, yeah, God's great. Of course I love Him." We need — we really, really need — to hear ourselves expressing and demonstrating our love for God. Why? Because when we hear our own voice speaking the truth, our faith in that truth grows stronger. We tend to believe what we say.

How can we "adore" God? Psalm 95 gives us some good ideas:

(Psalm 95:6, 2) Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

First, enter into God's presence. It helps to get on your knees, because it takes you out of your comfort zone and tells you that you are serious. So kneel down.



Secondly, think about who God is. You are kneeling before a Being who is unimaginably great — so powerful that He could imagine all the largest and smallest details of the entire, magnificent physical universe, and then create all of it from nothing, just by speaking it into existence.

And God's greatness is matched by His splendor, His majesty, and His glory; also by His goodness, His mercy, His kindness, His generosity — in fact, in everything He is and does, God is perfectly, awesomely glorious and loving.

You can't put this into words every time you come into His presence — and you don't need to. Just remember that it's all true. And also remember this: you are in His presence because He invited you. You don't deserve His love, but you have it. You cannot earn His forgiveness for your sins, but He offers it

freely. You and I certainly don't deserve to be adopted by Him, to actually become His own children, but that is what He wants and has planned for you and for me.



God is wonderful. Take time to adore Him! By doing so, you will be aligning yourself with His plan for your life.

Confession

It's not hard to confess, "I'm a sinner. I have done things I shouldn't have; I've failed to do things I should have." Unfortunately, there's a little more to it than that.

God wants us to do two things: first, take responsibility for our own actions or failures to act. Excuses and blaming someone else won't do. When the Holy Spirit highlights for us a way we have sinned, we must say, "Yes. I'm guilty." And then the second part comes into play: repentance. Not only are we to own our sins; we need to make a course correction so that particular sin doesn't keep happening.

There's no simple way to master confession and repentance all at once. The Apostle Paul couldn't do it, though He tried. But don't get hung up in self-condemnation. God forgives you, and you can forgive yourself when you fail. The important thing is to be honest about your sins, and honestly try to overcome them.

Martin Luther used to whip himself as punishment for His sins. We don't have to do that — Jesus already took our punishment, a horrible whipping and an excruciating death on a cross. We owe Him a debt that we can never pay — but we also owe Him an honest effort to live in a way that is pleasing to God.



Which leads us into ...

Thanksgiving

(Ephesians 5:20)... giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ...

No matter who we are, or what we are suffering, there is much that we can and

should be thankful for. God created us, and He loves us. That is plenty to be thankful for already. Every blessing we have is a gift from God. How can we not give Him thanks, eagerly and often?

Supplication

Supplication means asking. It's what we usually mean when we talk about praying — asking God for something.

The words of Jesus:

(John 14:14) "If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it."

(John 15:7) "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."

These are wonderful promises, but we seem to have trouble fulfilling the "If" conditions.

(Romans 8:28) Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

God gives us permission to ask, and if we let Him, He will help us by His Holy Spirit to ask rightly. He will not allow us to command Him to do what we want.

Conclusion

The ACTS procedure may or may not be useful to you. There are two important things it does not address:

(1) Prayer was never meant to be one-way communication. When we pray, we ought always to listen for God's direction and His responses to our prayers. Be in receive mode, as well as send mode.

(2) Remember the Romans 8 verse above. No matter how smart we are, God's Holy Spirit is smarter. Ask for, and follow, His guidance. In prayer, as in everything, the Spirit is sent by the Father to be our Helper and our Guide.

Blessings and Peace,

Brother Roland

Bible Passages about Prayer

Matthew 6:7-13 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. *Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.’”*

(James 5:13-16) *Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.*

(2 Chronicles 7:14) *if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.*

(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18) *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

(1 John 5:14-15) *And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.*

(Philippians 4:6-7) *Do not be anxious about anything, 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 understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

(Ephesians 6:18) *... praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, ...*

(Matthew 26:41) *“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”*

(Proverbs 15:8) *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is acceptable to him.*

(Romans 12:12) *Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.*

(Psalm 145:18) *The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.*

(Matthew 7:11) *“If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”*

Moving? If you're being released, or moving to another facility, please send me your new address. Maryland inmates, don't forget to include your SID number. I would like to keep sending you the "Good News Guide" for as long as you'd like to receive it.

As always, if you want to send me a question or a comment, send them to me at this address:

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About Prayer ...

Another take on prayer — see if you recognize these prayer suggestions.

Puzzle:

S U N F O R G I V E N E S S D E C O T Z S G S I P T D X K G E
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B H S G I S F S H I L I K E W L Q E U K R Y N I P R B B C C A
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Words:

* When to pray

AT ALL TIMES
WITHOUT CEASING
OFTEN
NEVER GIVING UP

* Whom to pray for

THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE
THOSE IN AUTHORITY
YOUR ENEMIES

* What to ask for

WISDOM
GOD'S KINGDOM COME
HIS WILL BE DONE
ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN
OUR DAILY BREAD

FORGIVENESS

* How to pray

PRIVATELY
AND IN COMMUNITY
WITH HUMILITY
FROM THE HEART
WITH JOY
WITH PRAISE
WITH THANKSGIVING
CONFIDENTLY
TRUSTING GOD
IN THE SPIRIT
WITH THE MIND
REMEMBER THE PATTERN

* How NOT to pray

LIKE THE HYPOCRITES
SHOWING OFF
WITH LOTS OF WORDS
SELFISHLY
PRESUMPTUOUSLY

* Hindrances to prayer

DISTRACTIONS
UNCONFESSED SIN
CHERISHING SIN
NOT FEARING THE LORD
IGNORING GOD'S LAW
UNFORGIVENESS
SELFISH MOTIVES