

PRAYER IS CONFESSION

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Biblical prayer does not invite God into our plans (as if we have the fuller grasp of the situation and its purpose) but seeks to discover and align with *His* plans. So, prayer is not only asking and receiving, but *seeking to discover God's purpose and activity*.

Although God doesn't always answer our prayers just the way we want Him to, because He is following His own agenda, the astonishing thing is that He gives attention to our prayers and invites us to partner with Him!

Psalm 116:2 *Because he bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!*

This is what sets our God apart from all false gods and idols: He is the One who hears and answers prayer.

Therefore, when they saw how He prayed, the disciples of Jesus asked Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." They did not ask Him to teach them *how* to pray, but simply *to pray*. And Jesus did not give them a method; He gave them a *model*.

Prayer models are simple guidelines for prayer that can help to keep our prayers fresh and focused.

The model that Jesus gave His disciples is what we call "The Lord's Prayer."

Another model for prayer, which we are examining this month is the ACTS Model, based on an acronym:

- **A**doration
- **C**onfession
- **T**hanksgiving
- **S**upplication

Last Sunday, I spoke with you about the extreme importance of rooting all your prayers in adoring worship, for without that they have little purpose besides pleasing yourself and impressing others.

Today, let's consider the second element of the ACTS Prayer model: Confession.

An Offering for Sin

In the Old Testament it was part of a "sin offering." Along with the prescribed physical offering of blood and roasted flesh, a verbal offering was required.

Leviticus 5:5 *When you become aware of your guilt in any of these ways, you must confess your sin.*

When a penitent sinner presented his offering to the priest, he also had to describe the nature of the sin for which he was making an offering. This defined the purpose (and the value) of his sacrifice.

There may be sins of commission (wrongs we have done) and there also may be sins of omission (good deeds we have left undone). There may be more than you can recall! This, too, is part of the *seeking* aspect of prayer: asking God, who knows *all* things, to search our hearts and reveal any unnoticed or hidden sins that are lurking there.

Leviticus 4:13 *If the entire Israelite community sins by violating one of the Lord's commands, but the people don't realize it, they are still guilty. ¹⁴ When they become aware of their sin, the people must bring a young bull as an offering for their sin and present it before the Tabernacle.*

Notice something more in these verses: *"When you become aware of your guilt..."* It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of sin. Therefore, when we ask Him to search our hearts, if nothing concrete surfaces, move on. The Holy Spirit doesn't need your help, only your faithful response. No dredging allowed!

If something seems to surface that is vague or unclear, ask God for clarity. If it does not become clear, simply tell the Lord that when He makes it clear you will happily confess it, but until then you will not give it another thought. This prevents the devil from taking advantage of your uncertainty to bring general condemnation on you. Remember this, the devil's condemnation is vague; the Holy Spirit's conviction is precise.

A sin confessed is a sin dealt with and properly buried by God in His sea of forgetfulness, never to stand between you and Him as an issue again. Hallelujah! If He won't bring it up again, neither should you, unless you sin the same sin again. Then, confess it again. Confession prevents sins from piling up!

Before we go further with this theme, let me address a question that usually surfaces about here: How can I sin less?!

The answer is simple to express, though it takes time to implement fully. Instead of hiding the sin that you find in your heart, get the sin out by confession and hide the Word of God in your heart instead.

Psalms 119:11 *I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.*

Nothing will clear your path and your conscience like the renewing of your mind by God's Word.

Speak the Truth

Confession is about speaking the truth.

Joshua 7:19 *Then Joshua said to Achan, "My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, by telling the truth. Make your confession and tell me what you have done. Don't hide it from me."*

In the Bible's original language, *confession* translates a word meaning *to say the same as*, or *to agree with*. That's why Joshua said that confession is telling the truth. It is verbally agreeing with God about what *He knows* is true.

When we try to hide our sin, it may be hidden from others, and may *partially* be hidden from you, but it can *never* be hidden from God. He knows the secrets of every heart and knows even your thoughts, although He is in Heaven and you are on Earth. Which means that others who are fooled are oblivious to the matter, and God cannot be fooled, no matter how you act; it is *only you* who pretend that all is well, while you wrestle to keep your sin submerged.

Tell the truth! It will set you free inside.

Confess Your Sin

Since confession is simply verbal agreement, we may confess by agreeing with things either negative or positive. In church circles, we are most familiar with confessing negative things — telling the truth about the wrongs we have done. The Bible does indeed address this important action.

If we sin against another person, we are to make confession *to that person*, if at all possible.

Numbers 5:6 *If any of the people—men or women—betray the Lord by doing wrong to another person, they are guilty. ⁷ They must confess their sin and make full restitution for what they have done, adding an additional 20 percent and returning it to the person who was wronged.*

Where fellow Christians are concerned we can accomplish even more. How much more of God's grace we could see in our lives if we confronted a wrongdoer *in love*, seeking to forgive and reconcile with them, or received the confession of a wrongdoer *with compassion*, instead of judgment or spurning!

James 5:16 *Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*

Of course, we are *always* to make our confession to God, even before speaking to another person about it. God, who is with us at all times and knows everything about us, can receive your confession *on the spot* (with no waiting in line!).

1 John 1:8 *If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. ⁹ But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. ¹⁰ If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts.*

Sandwiched in the middle of this passage, between two slices of what is plainly “white bread” (a cheap substitute with no significant value) is the real “meat” of the matter: “if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive... and to cleanse.”

Here, then, are the wonderful results of this difficult task: forgiveness (mercy) and cleansing (healing)! One gesture, that's tough on our pride, yields *two positive results* that we could never accomplish for ourselves. What a deal!

Psalms 32:5 *Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, “I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.” And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone.*

Proverbs 28:13 *People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy.*

Confess Your Faith

Interestingly, for all that the Bible has to say about dealing with our sins effectively through confession, there is even more to be found on the theme of confessing our faith! Did you know that?

Solomon's prayer for mercy (at the dedication of the Temple) expressed this:

2 Chronicles 6:24 “If your people Israel are defeated by their enemies because they have sinned against you, and if they turn back and acknowledge your name and pray to you here in this Temple,²⁵ then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and return them to this land you gave to them and to their ancestors.

²⁶ “If the skies are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and if they pray toward this Temple and acknowledge your name and turn from their sins because you have punished them,²⁷ then hear from heaven and forgive the sins of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them to follow the right path, and send rain on your land that you have given to your people as their special possession.

To be clear, *acknowledging God’s name* includes confessing your sins, because to acknowledge His name means also to agree with all that He is and all that He commands. The modern notion that one may “believe” in God but ignore His ways and His commands is patently absurd.

Well, perhaps you remember God’s response to Solomon’s prayer in the next chapter:

2 Chronicles 7:14 If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.

Confessing the name of the Lord is an affirmation of hope and trust. It is a confession of allegiance.

Matthew 10:32 Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.³³ But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven.

Philippians 2:9 God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Romans 10:9 If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

1 John 4:15 All who confess that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God.

Make Your Confession

This morning, I invite you to make your confession to God. If you wish not to participate, simply close your eyes and remain in your seat and no one will be the wiser.

If you choose to put into practice what I have presented, you may choose to stand with arms uplifted in an expression of surrender. Or, you may choose to fall to your knees. You may prefer to come forward to the altar area to speak with God alone.

If your words falter or emotions rise, that is normal. Just do your best to express yourself honestly to God.

Let’s make confession a normal part of a healthy Christian life again.