

PRAYER IS THANKSGIVING

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John 4:24 *God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.*

Jesus said, “The Father is looking for such people to worship Him.”

Prayer is our spirit’s lifeline. It is how we communicate with God. It is our time of communion with God. When we pray, Almighty God bends down to listen to us.

Psalms 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.

Since prayer is so vital for our spiritual lives, I have been describing some prayer models to help you pray more often and more effectively. The Lord’s Prayer is such a model. And there are others. This month we are looking at the ACTS model for prayer:

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

We have learned that prayer always begins with adoring worship — this sets the mood, establishes a right attitude, and reminds us that prayer is building relationship, not shopping for gifts.

We have also learned that prayer involves confession, not only of wrongdoing but also of one’s faith, hope, and love. By our confessions we identify and connect ourselves with Christ and with His people.

The Pause That Refreshes

The third element of this prayer model is thanksgiving. If you have praised God for who He is — His character, attributes, and deeds — and confessed your need of Him and your confidence that He will respond, then it’s time to pause and say, “Thanks.”

In our anxiety-ridden world, one of the most encouraging prescriptions for prayer can be found in Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi.

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

He doesn’t just scold the people for being anxious — anxiety is a normal response to uncertain circumstances — but he tells them how to overcome their anxiety: by prayer. The practice of prayer, plus the relationship of prayer, will exterminate anxieties. Here’s what you must do: in every kind of

disturbing situation, call on the Lord, and with specific requests and worshipful thanks tell God what you need.

Paul doesn't promise that everything will change for your comfort, but he does assure that God will respond by sending His peace and setting a guardian shield over your heart and mind to protect your confidence in Jesus.

These prayers are to be offered *with thanksgiving*. It is the very word that describes the communion ceremony, the Lord's Table, in the original New Testament: *eucharistia*. The Eucharist is a ceremony of thanksgiving for God's graciousness (not grief over your waywardness).

Doing God's Will

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:16 Always be joyful. ¹⁷ Never stop praying. ¹⁸ Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.

This is what God wants from you as a Christ-follower. It couldn't be clearer: Always rejoice, always pray, always give thanks. None of these behaviors are dependent on your circumstances, because they do not arise from circumstances; they arise from the Holy Spirit who dwells within you.

Always Rejoice

Circumstance may make you glad or make you sad, but it cannot give you joy, which is the quality of endurance. Joy arises from a different source: your hope, and, therefore, is tied not to the present but to the future.

Jesus told of Abraham's anticipatory joy:

John 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad.

Jesus encouraged His own disciples to rejoice for His future:

John 14:28 You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming back to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I.

We, too, as followers of Jesus Christ, are urged to have hope as He did:

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus was able to do that most difficult thing — lay down His life for us — because of His anticipation of the joy that awaited His faithfulness: the joy of millions saved and reconnected with God, our Maker — the fulfillment of the Father's plan.

It is this "joy of the Lord" which is *your* strength, too. Regardless of your circumstance, if you trust the One who "works all things together for good," you will rejoice.

Always Pray

Prayer may be called for by your circumstance, but it arises from another source: your faith (your confidence of God's care and willingness to respond to you).

Paul used the words “anything” and “everything” as the bases of prayer to express that there is neither anything too difficult for God to accomplish, nor anything too small for Him to attend to. Whatever you’re going through, He wants to hear from you about it.

Mark 11:24 I tell you, you can pray for anything, and if you believe that you’ve received it, it will be yours.

Prayer puts present-tense trust in God. It is faith in action.

Always Give Thanks

Generally speaking, thanksgiving is reflective. Looking back to the interventions of God, reflecting on His goodness in days gone by, the grateful heart recognizes God’s kindness and, in love, says, “Thanks.”

Does the Bible express God’s goodness? Has God been good to you? Has He been good to others whom you know? Can you see how He has worked things together for good? Have any of your prayers made a difference?

If you can answer “Yes” to any of these questions, then tell God how grateful you are. If it makes you feel glad, or safe, or loved, tell Him so.

What about more recently? Have you witnessed God’s hand of provision recently? Has He intervened to protect you or someone you care for? Has He encouraged you in some way? Spoken to you? Revealed something of Himself as you were reading the Bible?

Remember to thank Him for it! As you do so you acknowledge His partnership in your life. You welcome His plan and purpose. You draw courage and hope.

Joy anticipates the future with hope. Prayer adjusts the present with faith. And thanks acknowledges the past with love.

In Anticipation

By faith, thanksgiving also may, at times, reach with anticipation into the future.

When you pray, you ask God to do things — God-sized things — in your life and in your world. You ask Him because you need those things or want those things. So, anticipate what it will be like to receive the very things you ask for — how you will be helped, how others will also benefit, what a difference it will make — see it, taste it, feel it, and thank God for it, in advance.

If we cannot thank God, in advance, for the things we ask from Him, we fail to demonstrate our confidence in Him as our Provider. Or, we may be thinking only of ourselves, forgetting our partnership in His Kingdom. In either case, we have set aside our relationship with Him and our prayer has become a hollow formality.

Psalms 100:4 Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.

One day each year is not sufficient for thanking God. It is good that we do so as a nation, but for individuals who follow Jesus Christ, it is inadequate. Pausing before meals is also insufficient for thanking the One who loved you and gave Himself for you. We must cultivate our thankfulness as a spiritual art. Take time to say, “Thanks.” It’s an expression of love.

Psalm 92:1 It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to the Most High. ² It is good to proclaim your unfailing love in the morning, your faithfulness in the evening.

Giving God thanks is a *good* practice. Morning and evening, it should at least bookend your days. Throughout the day, you may think of it as your spiritual breathing: exhaling prayers and petitions, inhaling thanksgiving and joy.

Spend some time (10-20 minutes) just offering God thanks for the bounty of His goodness in your life.