

A Model for Prayer

A Scriptural Pattern & Purpose

by Ted Cederblom

What if I challenged you by declaring that the way you are praying is ignoring the clear mandate of Scripture? Sounds harsh! But at the end of this article, I'll ask you one question, and your answer will determine if my challenge has validity.

For many Christian leaders, there is a need to learn anew how to integrate the authority of Scripture into their methodology of prayer. The simple truth is many Christian educators don't know how to pray biblically. The foundational question is: Do we let the plain direction of Scripture dictate how we pray? Before answering this question, consider how we treat Jesus' teaching on prayer as revealed in Matthew 6 and Luke 11.

There may be many areas of our Christian walk where we might face uncertainty regarding God's will, but not in the area of prayer. The Bible, in fact, spells out exactly how we should pray! Scripture in essence lays out the blueprint for our daily prayer. In Luke 11:1, the disciples requested of Jesus, "Lord, teach us to pray." We are the benefactors of their request, because the Scripture proceeds to lay out the very components of prayer that Jesus knew were essential for our lives. In Matthew 6:9, Jesus said, "This, then, is how you should pray." Did you catch that? Jesus plainly states that the following prayer is to be "how you should pray." The Lord's Prayer is a daily prayer straight from the Master's mouth to ours.

For most of my life as a follower of Christ and as a minister of the gospel, the Lord's Prayer functioned mainly as a type of window dressing. We would sing the words at church functions, usually at the end of the service as a benediction. Beyond that, my interactions with the Lord's Prayer were few and far between. It was only as I meditated on the truth of Jesus' command, "This is how you should pray," that this prayer straight from God's Word has taken its rightful place at the center of my prayer life.

There are numerous acronyms that serve as formulas for helping us pray. Perhaps you have heard of and even used one of them: ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication), PRAY (Praise, Repent, Ask, Yield), FACTS (Faith, Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication), PUSH (Pray Until Something Happens), JOY (Jesus, Others, You), and many more. Each serves a purpose in that it helps us to be focused and intentional in praying. But what if, instead of building your prayer routine around man-made acronyms, you followed what Scripture says? The Bible says from Jesus' own mouth: "This is how you should pray." Something tells me that if we follow what Jesus commands, we will find it far more potent and in sync with God's purpose.

Here's why following Scripture is better by far. Let's take as an example one of the acronyms: ACTS – Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication. For years I used that acronym as a structure for my prayers. These are all wonderful terms of course. But these four terms are action verbs on the part of the believer: I adore you, Lord, I confess, I give thanks, I beseech you, Lord. The emphasis is on my action. Compare this to the biblical model of prayer that Jesus gave us in Matthew 6. It is centered on his person and who he is. It is based on God's actions, not mine—it is God-centered! YOUR kingdom come, YOUR will be done, YOU provide, YOU forgive, YOU lead, YOU deliver, YOUR kingdom, YOUR power, YOUR glory. What a beautiful prayer model the Bible gives us! It is prayer the way the Lord would have us pray. The center of focus is God, not us! It certainly helps adjust our perspective when we realize it is all about God, not us. It is God who acts to give us our daily bread; it is God who acts to forgive us, to deliver us. Jesus wanted us to pray for God to act, and Jesus intended for our prayers to be "powerful and effective." In other words, our prayers can move heaven—if we pray as Scripture commands us. It has spurred me on in my prayers to make sure I am really covering everything Jesus wants me to pray about, so that I don't come to a point where I review my prayer time after months or years and come to the realization that I have not covered certain biblically-mandated areas of prayer. For me this epiphany has been transformative, and it was there in God's Word all along.

So, here's my question to you: do you pray daily the Lord's prayer, utilizing it as the fundamental structure for your prayer life? Your answer reveals how committed you are to allowing the Bible to direct your prayer life.