

Two Forgotten Principles of Prayer

A.C.T.S. has long been a suggested guide to personal prayer. There is nothing wrong with it. It is indeed a good and helpful guide to a disciplined prayer life. **A** is for adoration, **C** is for confession, **T** is for thanksgiving, and **S** is for supplication. All these are good and excellent steps for obtaining a full and satisfying prayer pattern. The problem I discovered as I sought to know for Scripture how to pray is that this little acronym leaves out two of the most important aspects or steps in prayer. It will be in adding these two lost principles of prayer that you will find the greatest satisfaction in prayer.

We have presented a similar pattern for prayer as ACTS, but with two important distinctions. 1) First, and left out completely is Stillness. Psalm 46:10 makes that very clear, as do a number of other Scriptures. 2) Second, is a step almost totally forgotten by most believers and that is the putting on of the armor of truth. I call it Clothing Yourself. 3) The third is the order. We suggest that there is a better order or sequence to follow. Psalm 100 suggests that thanksgiving precede adoration.

So, our prayer pattern is this:

INTIMACY		
Focus on God	1. Stillness	<i>Be still and know that I am God</i>
	2. Thanksgiving	<i>Enter his gates with thanksgiving, be thankful unto him.</i>
	3. Adoration	<i>Into his courts with praise, and bless his name.</i>
Focus on Self	4. Confession	<i>If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive</i>
	5. Clothing	<i>Put on the whole armor of God</i>
	6. Care	<i>Casting all your care upon him for he cares for you.</i>

INTERCESSION		
Focus on Others	7. Sinners	<i>My heart's cry is that they may be saved</i>
	8. Saints	<i>Bear one another's burdens</i>
	9. Sick	<i>Pray one for another that you may be healed,</i>
Focus on World	10. Ministers	<i>Pray for us that we may speak as we ought to speak</i>
	11. Missionaries	<i>Pray for them that the word may have free course</i>
	12. Magistrates	<i>Pray for kings and all in authority</i>

I. Forgotten Stillness

Stillness is not popular. You won't find it advertised on TV or touted on billboards. It is not Madison Avenue hype-word. It is not cool, spiffy, or in vogue in any age and certainly not in our western society. You'll not find it in schools, bars, or places of business. Stillness is a stranger to most of us. It doesn't fit into who we are. If silence takes place for more than a few seconds we get antsy and need to get some noise, so we turn on the radio, CD player, TV, or dial someone on our cell phone. Silence and stillness are enemies in our society. Quietness is not a virtue.

That is the very reason God calls us to be a people "set apart." I like the expression of the King James Version in 1 Peter 2:9; "We are a peculiar people." I know the word means "purchase people" but the idea of being peculiar fits. God calls his people to be different, to live by different rules, to go against the grain of society, and to march at the beat of a different drum. The command "be not conformed to this world" (Romans 12:1-2) is still in operation today. The world is not to be our pattern. The command, "Come out from among them and be separate" (2 Corinthians 6:17) stands for the church throughout all ages.

There are several kinds of stillness that God desires and we need to cultivate daily.

1) One is **location stillness we call solitude**. That is the getting apart into a solitary place away from noise, people, and distractions. Jesus called his disciples to pursue a closet where they could be alone and commanded the door to be shut so they could be in secret with their Heavenly Father. Closets are solitary places where we can get away from everything else to pursue the whisper of God.

2) Accompanying much needed solitude is the **physical stillness of the body**. It is the quietness of putting away all of our busy thoughts, plans, and to-do lists for the sake of knowing God. Physical stillness requires a stopping of activity. We need to cease and desist in our constant struggle to achieve yet more and more. Stillness is not about doing. It is about "not doing." Nervousness, jitteriness, nail biting, cracking knuckles, chewing gum, fidgeting with hand held objects, are all symptoms of an unstill body – a nervous body. The physical body needs to slow down.

3) The third type of stillness is connected with the body but **has more to do with the mind**. Be still is a command for the mind as well as the body. A racing mind is not a quiet mind. A over-busy mind creates noise of spirit that deafens the ear to the still small voice of the Spirit. This is the area of greatest struggle for most of us. How does one still the mind? Can we stop thinking? Certainly we do not stop the mind entirely or we'd be brain dead. Stillness of the mind has more to do with singularity of focus than not thinking at all. Multi-tasking minds are busy about many things like Martha in the kitchen.

These three aspects of stillness need to become part of our regular prayer routine. Jesus commanded it of his disciples. That is what set their prayers apart from the Pharisees. It is really preparatory to prayer rather than the prayer itself.

Practical Helps for Achieving Stillness

Most of us wrestle with getting still and being silent before the Lord. Even the most experienced prayer warriors may find it the most difficult prayer discipline to cultivate.

Be Still

Find a quiet place in your home where you will not be disturbed by people, noise, or distractions of any kind. As you enter into that place tell the Lord that you are coming to seek his face and hear his voice. Ask him to help you become very still.

Your physical position is important. If you sit as you always sit your mind will fall into the same old patterns. Choose a position that is comfortable and honoring to God in your pursuit of Him. I prefer to lay on my face, on a prayer cloth, with a pillow under me. Others find it helpful to kneel at a chair, or sit cross-legged on the floor with back straight. Whatever the position you choose it needs to be a special position you use primarily to get quiet before the Lord.

Now that you have found a position, relax. Don't fall asleep but relax deeply. Begin with your mind asking God to teach you to be still. I usually end up repeating quietly every fifteen seconds or so, "Here I am Lord." It is not a mantra but a heart-felt prayer.

Breath deeply, deliberately. Exhale completely and repeat, "Here I am Lord" or as Samuel did, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening."

Make it your initial goal to sit still like this for five minutes. You may find stillness does not come that quickly. Be patient. You cannot hurry stillness. It is almost like becoming quiet enough and still enough that the Lord can sneak up on you. I remember deer hunting during archery season. My goal was to become so quiet, so part of the surroundings that a deer could approach and sniff me without my disturbing him. Fidgety movements of the hands, head or feet easily spook deer. Be quiet in mind, body, and spirit so that the Lord can sneak up on you undisturbed.

Let your body relax from head to toe. Literally relax your body piece by piece. Be aware of the stiffness and tension in your neck. Relax! Feel your body's tenseness and let go of that tightness as you move down your body from the head to your toes.

Sit or lie still. Let nothing distract you. Imagine yourself before the throne of God in holy awe without words or movement – that is total surrender. When you mentally say, "Here I am Lord," let it be with surrender in mind. "I quietly wait for you."

Noises will distract your stillness. Even music on a stereo, CD or MP3 player is a distraction. It may help you to worship but this is not a time of worship. It is a time of quietness. Be still and know God. And no, you cannot do this step properly driving to work in your car. If you cannot sacrifice this little bit of time to the Lord you will not have the reward of finding great stillness and God's whisper.

Stay in this quiet place relaxing every muscle of your body. Silence all the clamoring thoughts by saying, “no” to them and “yes” to the voice of the Lord. Stay until your rushed spirit feels no more hurry, no anxious thoughts push away His Presence, and no busy agenda crowds him out.

You will know when the Lord shows up. His quietness is a holy and awesome hush. His presence brings fullness of joy. You will find it so peaceful, so rewarding, so sweet that you won’t want to leave this quiet place.

You will need to schedule some time for this. I suggest that you allocate a half hour just to get still each day for several weeks. A half hour may seem an extravagant waste of you precious time. If so, you have discovered what keeps you from His Presence. It is your agenda that is more important than His Presence. God will not share his glory with another. You cannot make the Lord the priority of your life, and still think that your busy agenda can share the throne.

Make no mistake; this is not easy to do. It may be for you the hardest discipline of prayer. It takes work, practice, and most importantly time. Many find it easier to work on this discipline in an extended prayer retreat far from the clamor of business and home. I recommend a two-day retreat to get started on your journey toward stillness.

Work at it daily. Make it your eager pursuit. *“The Lord is in his temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.”* (Habakkuk 2:20)

II. Forgotten Armor/Clothing

Another important, but often forgotten, aspect of prayer is that of **clothing ourselves** before the throne of God. It also is preparatory and initiatory to effective prayer. Thus as preparation to prayer we easily hurriedly rid ourselves of this necessity thinking that prayer is primarily asking things from God.

As with stillness, clothing ourselves in God's armor, is assumed to be a prayer add-on rather than an integral part of the prayer process. We often overlook it because we have not seen it patterned in others. We leave it out because we are in a hurry to get the meat of our prayer – bottom line – getting what we want. Yet God has revealed that prayer is a powerful antidote to the enemy's assaults. (Ephesians 6:10-18)

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

2 Corinthians 10:3-4 tells us that effective prayer pulls down (demolishes) strongholds. *The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

Our assumption that we are automatically clothed in the righteousness of Christ defies the command of Scripture to "put on the whole armor of God." We are told to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to obey its lusts. We are to put on truth as a garment. Our shield is the truth of God's word. (Psalms 91:4 *His truth is your shield and buckler.*) The Lord "*himself covers himself with light as with a garment.*" (Psalms 104:2) and that "*God is light and in him is no darkness at all.*" 1 John 1:5

Let us be children of light. Let us put on light as a garment. Truth is that garment. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We put on the Lord Jesus by putting on his truth as the Jew puts a **shawl, a 'talith'**, around his head when praying. So we too need to cover ourselves with God's truth. Let his truth be our shield. Our sword is the Word of God, our shield is faith in his Word. His Word is all-authoritative. His Word puts the enemy to flight. His Word guards are minds and hearts. This is why Michael the archangel, when contending over the bones of Moses, did not bring against him a railing accusation but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

Too Much Railing

The word for railing is *blasphemia*, meaning slander, detraction, or an injurious speech, to another's name. The word for an accusation is *krisis*, or a sentence of condemnation, damnatory judgment, condemnation and punishment. Too often we have heard well-meaning pray-ers bring railing accusations against the enemy. When did Jesus ever lead us in that kind of praying?

Spiritual warfare is not bringing railing accumulations. We are not to involve ourselves in slinging mud at the enemy. Even Michael the top angel did not do that. We are to say the Word of God, "The Lord rebuke you, Satan!" (Jude 1:9) Jesus quoted Scripture to the enemy. He did not call him names or declare curses upon him. (Matthew 4:1-4)

Spiritual warfare is truth warfare. It is declaring God's truth in the face of the enemy's lies. It is standing firm, as Paul said we should. It is not being terrified by the enemy but standing on the solid rock and the anchor of our souls. We take our refuge in him. He is our shield and buckler. His truth is our safe place. As someone once penned, "rest in it, nest in it, surely be blessed in it."

Our strongest example is the Lord himself who said, "*Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*" (Matthew 16:23) "Depart from me Satan, you are an offense (stumbling block) to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Practical Helps for Putting on God's Armor

Learn the truth of God's word and wear it around you when you pray. Use Scripture quotations when you pray. Pray the word of God, not your own words. Let his promises seal you in behind and before. Let God's absolutes, that is, what he says about you, be your security.

No one can pray effectively against the strongholds of the enemy, or against the accusations of the enemy, or the fiery darts of the wicked one without quoting or reading God's promises and declaring and believing them.



A Prayer Shawl

A good tutorial is to begin wearing a prayer shawl that has God's truth sewn into it. Keep his promises before you as you pray. Let the shawl around your shoulders and head remind you that you are covered by the blood of Jesus and his righteousness, and are safe in his hands.

Who I Am In Christ

Learn God's absolute truth regarding you as a believer. Then confess it out loud. Declare it openly. Speak it to the enemy. Use the promise sheet titled 'Who I Am.' Make it a part of your daily prayer routine until it becomes as normal as breathing.