

“Back to School: *Speech Class*” September 27, 2015

Welcome/Open in Prayer

Introduction

When we think of speech class, often times we think of oral reports and persuasive arguments. Memories associated with nervousness and dread might come to mind. However, in the Christian faith, there is a different sort of speech required. Rather than communication between human beings, it involves human-divine interaction, and it’s called “prayer.”

1. What was your experience with prayer either as a child or a young believer?
2. What were some challenges/misunderstandings with prayer you had to overcome?
3. What are some challenges/questions you have now about prayer?

The ingredients of an effective prayer can be described by way of an acrostic – ACTS.

Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication

Like many of us, the first disciples of Jesus felt untrained and ill-prepared to pray. However, they had observed Jesus’ incredible prayer life, so they went to Him and said, “Lord, teach us to pray...” (Luke 11:1 NLT). He responded with a model prayer that we now call the Lord’s Prayer.

Pray, then, in this way:

“Our Father who is 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 do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

(Matthew 6:9-13 NASB)

The ACTS Pattern of Prayer is based on Jesus’ model.

Three of the elements are explicitly found in the Lord’s Prayer, and the fourth emerges from other prayers of Jesus recorded in the gospels.

1) Adoration

Jesus began His model prayer: “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.”

It is very easy, in our communications with God, to rush into His presence and immediately begin making requests. While that is a natural tendency since we know the Lord has the ability to fulfill our wants and needs, it is not very courteous.

1. Why is it so easy to rush into prayer with our requests?
2. How might it change our mindset of prayer if we begin with adoration instead?

When we enter God's presence with words of adoration we recognize *who God is* and acknowledge that He is worthy of our praise. In doing so, it establishes the relationship that exists between God and us. He is the Creator; we are the creatures. He is our Father in heaven; we are His children on earth.

What form should the adoration phase of prayer take? There is some excellent guidance from the Psalms, many of which are prayers:

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise...Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness... (Psalm 96 NIV excerpts).

3. Take some time to practice adoration by praising God for who He is.

2.) Confession

When we "worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness," we realize the extent of our *unholiness*. According to Scripture, that reality creates a barrier to our communication. The prophet Isaiah goes so far as to say that our sins cause God to hide His face from us & turn a deaf ear to our prayers (see Isaiah 59:2). The solution to this barrier is confession.

1. Why is it sometimes difficult to confess our sins?
2. How might it change our prayer if we confess our sins after expressing adoration to God and before making requests to God?

The Apostle John puts it this way in his first letter:

If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 NIV)

Confession also helps us experience the reality described by the Apostle Paul:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV 1984)

3. How does confessing your sins to God help you feel like a new creation?
4. Why is it important to be specific in our confessions?
5. Take time to confess your sins (verbally/silently) to God.

While the Lord's Prayer suggests a sort of all-encompassing confession ("Forgive us our debts/trespases..."), the rest of Scripture claims we need to be more precise. It is hard to change our ways unless we acknowledge the exact behaviors we need to alter.

3.) Thanksgiving

Having been forgiven, it is only right to want to thank God for His gracious action. Whereas adoration recognizes who God is, thanksgiving acknowledges what He has done. Gratitude needs to be expressed verbally to God.

The psalmist says, "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good!" (Psalm 136:1 NLT). For what should we give thanks? Everything that is good in our lives! Spiritual blessings, material blessings, relational blessings, external blessings (e.g. country, community, church), answered prayer.

1. Take some time right now to express thanksgiving to God.

The Apostle Paul says we should even take it a step further than that:

Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.
(1 Thessalonians 5:18 NLT)

2. Describe a time in your life or the life of someone you know when it was difficult to be thankful in a certain circumstance. How can someone overcome this challenge?

4.) Supplication

Supplication is a fancy word for asking God to supply our needs. Paul says in Philippians 4:6-
Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about *everything*. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. (Philippians 4:6 NLT)

1. Why can it be hard sometimes to ask God for things in our lives?

We can present before our God our spiritual ("lead us not into temptation"), emotional ("deliver us from evil"), physical ("give us this day our daily bread"), and relational needs ("as we forgive those who...").

Prayers of *petition* address our own personal needs; prayers of *intercession* lift others' needs to God. "Intercession is love on its knees."

2. Describe a time when you had someone pray for you. How did it affect the situation?

We need to insure our requests promote God's agenda and not our own: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done..."

Finally, as with confession, it is better to be specific in our supplication. When we make definite requests, answered prayers are more likely to increase our faith and bring honor to God.

1. Practice a prayer of petition or intercession.
2. What do you like best about the ACTS pattern of prayer?

Speak to God in your own words and then close with the Lord's Prayer:

"Lord, teach us to pray..." (Luke 11:1 NLT)

Our father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen. (Traditional, from the Methodist Church Hymnal #895)