

# TEACHING YOUTH TO PRAY

The ACTS Prayer Model for Kids

---

Chad Harrington

# Why Use the ACTS Prayer with Kids

For Parents, Grandparents, and Children's Ministry Workers

Chad Harrington

Both of our children started praying out loud when they were around eighteen months old, repeating simple words after us like "Dear, God" and "Amen" and "Thank you." They didn't understand the words, but that was okay with us. We wanted them to start as young as possible. They mostly just followed along as we prayed. That was good, but soon, I wanted something more substantive.

The Lord's Prayer was the most logical next step for me, but when we tried to teach our oldest the Lord's Prayer at two or three years old, it didn't catch. No matter how many times she heard us say it, she just didn't connect. She could say some of the words, but it seemed too far beyond her. I was discouraged.

*I thought, Prayer is so important, and the Lord's Prayer is the most biblical way to pray. So what sort of prayer can I teach them?*

Then I experimented using the ACTS Prayer model with my kids. The result is what you see on the next page. As soon as we started using this, *our kids really started engaging in prayer!* It was a miracle to me and a dream come true. They were repeating after me and my wife, even understanding the basic meaning of the phrases we used. It overlaps with the Lord's Prayer too, so it was the perfect next step for us. (Note: For context, our son is just under two years old, and our daughter is four and a half. I know kids start talking at different ages, so your timeline might be different from ours.)

While that was our experience, I understand every family is different and there's no one-size fits all with regard to family prayer time. What I'm sharing here has worked well for my family (and I hope it helps you chart your own path), but it may not work for your family. Maybe your kids are older and they can learn the Lord's Prayer. If so, go for that!

See "The ACTS Prayer for Kids" on the next page, and use my how-to advice on the last few pages to gain practical advice on how to use this prayer to the fullest extent with your kids. I'm still learning, so please use it, adapt it, and share what you learn in the process!

Learn more: Chad Harrington, "[Everything You Need to Know About the ACTS Prayer Model.](#)"



himpublications.com

© 2023 Chad Harrington

# The ACTS Prayer for Kids

Leader reads **bold**, and the family reads *italics*.

**Our Father.**

*Our Father.*

## OPENING

Addressing God as Father is a vital starting place!

**You're great!**

*You're great!*

## ADORATION

Adore God out loud by praising who he is.

**I'm sorry.**

*I'm sorry.*

## CONFESSION

Confess to God what you're sorry for.

**Thank you.**

*Thank you.*

## THANKSGIVING

Thank God for specific things you are thankful for.

**Help me.**

*Help me.*

## SUPPLICATION

Ask God's help for something specific you need help with.

**Amen.**

*Amen.*

## CLOSING

End your prayer with excitement at what God will do!



[himpublishations.com](http://himpublishations.com)

© 2023 Chad Harrington

# How to Use the ACTS Prayer with Kids

For Parents, Grandparents, and Children's Ministry Workers

Chad Harrington

Learn how to use the ACTS Prayer with your family with this guide!

## Level 1 (18 months and up)

*This is the simple and quick way to start, especially if your kids are young. Expect Level 1 ACTS Prayers to take 1–2 minutes.*

### 1. Pick a time and a place.

Pray ACTS with your family around the table, on your way out the door, or at bedtime (to name just a few examples). When possible, pray the ACTS Prayer at the same time and in the same place every day.

### 2. Pick a leader.

Pick one parent to lead the prayer. That parent reads the bold line, and the family repeats in unison the words in italics after them. Start with "Our Father," and go down the page.

### 3. Be consistent.

Pray the ACTS Prayer every day with your family. Aim for at least five days a week. Don't worry about going deep each time, just try to say it together each day. Your consistency allows your kids to see the importance of disciplined prayer.

## Level 2 (3 years and up)

*Go deeper in the ACTS Prayer with "listening prayer," which involves active participation and "popcorn"-style prayers. Expect Level 2 ACTS Prayers to take 2–3 minutes.*

### 1. Use popcorn prayers during "Thanksgiving."

"Popcorn" prayer is when each person in the family can voice a short prayer at random. Do this one section of the prayer at a time, beginning with only "Thanksgiving" to start. For example, the leader starts with "Thank you, God, for a beautiful day today." By going first, the leader sets the tone for how to do it. If children don't naturally mimic, invite them to participate: "What do you want to thank God for today?" Be



silent as you give them time and space to figure it out, but don't worry if it takes many times before they catch on. If they don't participate at first, just move on for that day until they feel comfortable.

## 2. Add listening prayer during "Supplication."

When you and the kids get comfortable with popcorn prayer, add listening prayer to the "Supplication" section of the ACTS Prayer. Listening prayer, in this context, means praying a specific request over your family, and your family listening to what God might be saying to them. As you listen together, each person voices their response. For example, the family leader says the request and then asks an open-ended question: "Help us follow you at work and school. What do you want of us today as we go to work and school?" Listen in silence and say what comes to mind. This can be a way of expressing anything you and your family sense from God. Over time, this can help you grow in discernment of God's voice together as a family.

Learn more about listening prayer in my article "[How to Listen to God in Prayer: Asking Open-Ended Questions.](#)"

## 3. Extend popcorn and listening prayer to the whole ACTS Prayer.

*This is for longer times of prayer. Expect Level 3 ACTS Prayers to take 3-10 minutes.* The progression might work like this: You get popcorn prayer down in the "Thanksgiving" section of the ACTS Prayer. Then, you add popcorn prayer to "Confession" and "Supplication." Finally, you add popcorn-style prayers to "Adoration." Finally, marry each of these with listening prayer as you see fit. Eventually, you can do both popcorn and listening prayer throughout the entire ACTS Prayer as you grow family prayer.

## Level 3 (5 years and up)

*Teach your kids to lead!*

As your kids get older, slowly pass off the leadership as your kids show responsibility. I haven't gotten to this part yet, but I'd imagine it would go something like this:

1. Teach them to lead the simple prayer (Level 1).
2. Teach them to lead popcorn prayer (Level 2.1).
3. Teach them to lead listening prayer (Level 2.2).

Learn more: Chad Harrington, "[Everything You Need to Know About the ACTS Prayer Model.](#)"

