

Old Testament Prayer

Definition of Prayer in the Old Testament

Prayer in the Old Testament is the act of humbly addressing, praising, petitioning, or communing with God, grounded in faith, often through spoken words, silence, or symbolic actions, and shaped by covenant relationship.

Key Components of Old Testament Prayer

1. Communication with God

Prayer is first and foremost **relational**—a dialogue with a personal God.

Hebrew words:

- **פָּלַל (palal)** – *to intercede, to pray, to judge oneself before God.*
- **תְּפִלָּה (tefillah)** – *prayer, petition, or entreaty.*

Examples: Abraham pleading for Sodom (Gen 18), Moses interceding for Israel (Exod 32).

2. Forms of Prayer

- **Petition** – Asking for help (Hannah – 1 Sam 1:10)
- **Confession** – Admitting sin (David – Psalm 51)
- **Praise/Worship** – Exalting God (Many Psalms)
- **Thanksgiving** – Gratitude for God's acts (2 Sam 22)
- **Intercession** – Praying on behalf of others (Moses, Abraham, Nehemiah)

3. Prayer as Covenant Practice

- Prayer is tied to the **covenant relationship** between God and His people.
- It's not magic, manipulation, or meditation—it's conversation with the **Covenant-Keeping God (YHWH)**.

“I will be their God, and they will be My people” undergirds prayer's basis.

4. Prayer Often Accompanied by Actions

- **Fasting** (Joel 2:12)
- **Sackcloth and ashes** (Esther 4:1)
- **Sacrifices** (Lev 1–7, Ps 141:2)
- **Lifting hands, bowing, or prostrating** (1 Kings 8:54, Ps 63:4)

☐ These symbolize the **posture of the heart**.

5. Prayer Anchored in God's Character

- Old Testament prayer appeals to:
 - God's **mercy** (Ps 51)
 - **Faithfulness to promises** (Gen 32:9–12, Deut 9:26)
 - **Justice and compassion** (Ps 9:12, Ex 34:6)

The pray-er doesn't rely on their own worth, but on who **God is**.

In Summary:

Prayer in the Old Testament is a sacred, often urgent expression of faith, trust, and dependence on the God of Israel. It is shaped by reverence, repentance, gratitude, and the deep longing for God's presence, mercy, and guidance—whether whispered in solitude, cried aloud in crisis, or sung in joyful praise.

HOW to Pray — Old Testament Guidance

1. With a Humble Heart

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”
— **Psalm 34:18**

“Though the Lord is exalted, he looks kindly on the lowly; though lofty, he sees them from afar.”
— **Psalm 138:6**

- **Insight:** Pride hinders prayer; humility opens the way.

2. With Reverence and Awe

“Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him.”
— **Psalm 33:8**

- **Insight:** Prayer involves worship and recognizing God's majesty.

3. With Sincerity, Not Just Ritual

“These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”
— **Isaiah 29:13**

- **Insight:** God desires authenticity—not just going through the motions.

4. With Persistence

Daniel prayed three times a day... just as he had done before.

— **Daniel 6:10**

- **Insight:** Regular, disciplined prayer—even in hardship—is honored.

5. With Repentance

“When I kept silent, my bones wasted away... Then I acknowledged my sin to you... and you forgave the guilt of my sin.”

— **Psalms 32:3–5**

- **Insight:** Honest confession is a key part of prayer.

WHEN to Pray — Old Testament Patterns

1. Morning

“In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice...”

— **Psalms 5:3**

- **Pattern:** Start the day in communion with God.

2. Evening

“Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!”

— **Psalms 141:2**

- **Pattern:** Evening prayer as part of a daily rhythm.

3. At Set Times (3x a Day)

“He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed...”

— **Daniel 6:10**

- **Pattern:** Fixed daily times for focused prayer.

4. In Times of Crisis

Hannah prayed in anguish... David prayed during battles... Hezekiah spread the Assyrian letter before the Lord...

- **Pattern:** When overwhelmed, turn to prayer first.

5. During National or Communal Events

“Proclaim a sacred assembly; call the elders... and cry out to the Lord.”
— **Joel 1:14**

- **Pattern:** Gathered prayer during national repentance or need.

Some examples

1. 2 Chronicles 7:14

“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”

- **Theme:** Humility, repentance, national healing.
- **Why it stands out:** A foundational verse for intercessory prayer and national revival.

2. Psalm 5:1–3

“Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.”

- **Theme:** Personal devotion and early morning prayer.
- **Why it stands out:** Highlights the intimacy and rhythm of daily prayer life.

3. Daniel 6:10

“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”

- **Theme:** Faithfulness in prayer under persecution.
- **Why it stands out:** Daniel’s consistency and courage in prayer.

4. 1 Samuel 1:10–11 (Hannah’s Prayer)

“In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, ‘Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery... then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life...’”

- **Theme:** Prayer from pain and desire.
- **Why it stands out:** Shows how heartfelt prayer can lead to divine intervention (Samuel’s birth).

5. Psalm 34:17

“The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles.”

- **Theme:** God’s attentiveness to the righteous.
- **Why it stands out:** Reassurance that prayer is heard and answered in distress.

Bonus Mentions:

- **Jeremiah 29:12–13** – *“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me...”*
- **Nehemiah 1:5–6** – Nehemiah’s prayer of confession and appeal.
- **Isaiah 56:7** – *“My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”*
- **Psalm 145:18** – *“The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.”*

The **definition of prayer evolves** in the New Testament— not by contradiction, but by **deepening through the life, teaching, and person of Jesus Christ**. The core essence remains: *communion with God*. But the **relationship becomes more intimate**, the **access becomes more direct**, and the **purpose becomes more Kingdom-centered**.

How Prayer Develops in the New Testament

1. Prayer Becomes Personal Through Jesus

“When you pray, say: ‘Our Father...’”

— **Luke 11:2**

- **Old Testament:** God is holy, sovereign, and to be approached with reverence (still true).
- **New Testament:** Jesus reveals God as **Abba**, Father. Prayer is a **child-to-Father** relationship.

Intimacy replaces distance. We are no longer just servants or worshipers —we’re **sons and daughters**.

2. The Holy Spirit Helps Us Pray

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness... the Spirit himself intercedes for us...”

— **Romans 8:26**

- The Spirit prays **with us and for us**, even when we don't know what to say.
- Prayer is now **Spirit-empowered**, not just human effort.

3. Prayer Is in Jesus' Name

“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do...”

— **John 14:13**

- **Authority shift:** In the Old Testament, prayers often appealed to God's covenant or past deeds.
- In the New Testament, we now pray with the **authority and access of Jesus Christ**.

His name is not just a phrase—it means praying **in alignment with His will, purpose, and character**.

4. Continuous, Unceasing Prayer

“Pray without ceasing.”

— **1 Thessalonians 5:17**

- Not just fixed times (like Daniel), but an **ongoing attitude of communion** with God.
- Prayer becomes a **way of life**, not just a ritual or emergency tool.

5. Prayer as Partnership in the Kingdom

“Your kingdom come, your will be done...”

— **Matthew 6:10**

- In Jesus' model prayer, we see the **shift to missional prayer**—aligning with God's redemptive purposes.
- Prayer is not just about **getting from God**, but about **bringing His will to earth**.

So, Does the Definition Change?

Yes—It Deepens and Expands:

New Testament Prayer is intimate, Spirit-led, Christ-centered, and missional. It's not only a sacred act of communication—it's an invitation into **fellowship, transformation, and co-laboring with God** through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Top Prayers in the New Testament



Prayers of Jesus

1. The Lord's Prayer (Model Prayer)

Matthew 6:9–13 / Luke 11:2–4

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...”

- The foundational prayer model Jesus gave to His disciples.
- Focuses on God's glory, kingdom, provision, forgiveness, and protection.

2. Jesus' High Priestly Prayer

John 17

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son...”

- Jesus prays for Himself, His disciples, and all future believers.

- Deep themes of unity, truth, protection, and eternal life.

3. Gethsemane Prayer (Before the Cross)

Matthew 26:36–44

“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not as I will...”

- A raw, honest prayer of anguish and submission.
- Shows Jesus' full humanity and divine surrender.

4. Prayer on the Cross

Luke 23:34, 23:46 / Matthew 27:46

- *“Father, forgive them...”*
- *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*
- *“Into your hands I commit my spirit.”*
- These prayers fulfill prophecy and reflect mercy, pain, and trust.

Jesus' words from the cross were not only expressions of deep suffering, love, and faith—they were **direct fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy** and **echoes of ancient prayers**, spoken to complete what was written.

1. **“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”**

— Luke 23:34

Prophetic Fulfillment:

Though no single verse predicts this exact statement, it **fulfills the *spirit* of several messianic and intercessory prophecies**, where the Servant of the Lord suffers on behalf of others.

Isaiah 53:12

“He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

- This is a **direct match**—Jesus intercedes for those killing Him.
- His plea for forgiveness shows He is the **Suffering Servant, not just the sacrifice**, but the **high priest** too.

Insight:

This prayer fulfills the role of the Messiah as mediator, a role prefigured by Moses, who also prayed for a rebellious people (Exodus 32:32). Jesus surpasses Moses, interceding even at the moment of His execution.

2. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

— **Matthew 27:46 / Mark 15:34**

Prophetic Fulfillment:

Psalm 22:1

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

- Jesus is **quoting directly** from Psalm 22—a powerful messianic psalm.
- The rest of Psalm 22 goes on to describe **mocking, pierced hands and feet, divided garments**, and ultimately **God’s vindication**.

Psalm 22:16–18

“They pierce my hands and my feet... They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”

- This quote **connects the suffering of Jesus to David’s prophetic lament**, fulfilling not only His **physical suffering**, but the **emotional and spiritual depths** of abandonment.

Insight:

This cry shows Jesus entering into the **depths of human alienation**, yet it's not a loss of faith—He still addresses God as “*My God.*” It is a **faithful lament** rooted in Scripture.

3. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”

— Luke 23:46

Prophetic Fulfillment:

Psalm 31:5

“Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, Lord, my faithful God.”

- Jesus is **quoting this verse exactly**, fulfilling it in the most literal sense.
- Psalm 31 is a psalm of **trust and deliverance in the face of betrayal and enemies**—very fitting for the cross.

Psalm 31:13

“For I hear many whispering... They conspire against me and plot to take my life.”

- Jesus embodies the **righteous sufferer who trusts God**, even in death.

Insight:

This is a **voluntary surrender** of life—not taken from Him, but **given**. It completes Jesus’ obedience to the Father (Philippians 2:8) and fulfills **the ultimate act of trust**.

Prayers of the Early Church

5. The Church's Prayer for Boldness

Acts 4:24–31

“Sovereign Lord... enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness...”

- After persecution, the early believers don't pray for safety—they pray for courage and power.
- The place was shaken after they prayed.

6. Stephen's Martyrdom Prayer

Acts 7:59–60

“Lord Jesus, receive my spirit... Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

- A Christlike prayer of forgiveness and faith in death.
- Echoes Jesus' words from the cross.

Prayers from Paul's Letters

7. Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom

Ephesians 1:17–19

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ... may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation...”

- A beautiful prayer for insight, hope, and knowledge of God's power.

8. Prayer for Love and Discernment

Philippians 1:9–11

“That your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight...”

- Emphasizes growth in love, purity, and fruitfulness.

9. Prayer for Strength and Fullness

Ephesians 3:14–21

“That you may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being...”

- A soaring, heartfelt prayer for believers to be filled with the fullness of God.

10. Prayer of Thanksgiving

1 Thessalonians 1:2–3

“We always thank God for all of you...”

- Paul regularly begins his letters with prayers of gratitude and remembrance.

Other Notable Prayers

- **Zechariah’s Prayer (Benedictus)** – Luke 1:68–79
- **Mary’s Song (Magnificat)** – Luke 1:46–55
- **Simeon’s Prayer** – Luke 2:29–32
- **Cornelius’ Prayer (heard by God)** – Acts 10:30–31
- **Paul’s Prayer for Israel’s Salvation** – Romans 10:1

New Testament Warnings and Conditions on Prayer

1. Unforgiveness Hinders Prayer

“And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them...”

— **Mark 11:25**

- Bitterness or an unforgiving spirit **blocks communion** with God.
- Forgiveness is not optional—it’s **integral** to effective prayer.

2. Selfish Motives Block Prayer

“You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives...”

— **James 4:3**

- Prayers focused on **personal pleasure, greed, or ambition** are ineffective.
- God listens to prayers aligned with **His will**, not just our desires.

3. Doubt Disrupts Prayer

“But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt...”

— **James 1:6-7**

- Faith is essential. Doubt or double-mindedness can render prayers ineffective.
- This isn’t about having perfect faith—it’s about **trusting God's character**.

4. Hypocrisy in Prayer is Condemned

“Do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray... to be seen by others.”

— **Matthew 6:5**

- Public, performative prayer with no heart connection to God is rejected.
- Jesus calls for **private, sincere communion**, not religious showmanship.

5. Broken Relationships Affect Prayer (Especially Husbands)

“...so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”

— **1 Peter 3:7**

- A husband who mistreats or dishonors his wife will find his prayers hindered.
- This principle applies to **relational righteousness**—how we treat others matters to God.

6. Repetitive, Mindless Prayers are Useless

“Do not keep on babbling like pagans...”

— **Matthew 6:7**

- God isn't moved by **empty repetition** or formulaic words.
- True prayer is about **relationship and reverence**, not magic words.

7. Lack of Obedience Can Block Prayer

“We receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands...”

— **1 John 3:22**

- Prayer is powerful in the lives of those who **walk with God in obedience and love**.

- It's not about earning God's ear, but about **living in harmony** with His heart.

The Good News

“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence...”

— **Hebrews 4:16**

Through Jesus, **the veil is torn**, and we are invited into **constant, bold access** to God.

So while the **New Testament outlines important conditions**, these aren't barriers—they're **invitations to maturity, sincerity, and deeper relationship**.

One of the most beautiful and revolutionary truths Jesus revealed is that **God is not only His Father—but ours, too**. This shift from viewing God as distant or nationalistic (e.g. “God of Israel”) to **personal, relational, and intimate** (“Our Father”) is central to Jesus' teachings.

Here are **key moments where Jesus reveals God as our Father** in the New Testament:

1. The Lord's Prayer

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...”

— **Matthew 6:9 / Luke 11:2**

- Jesus teaches the disciples **to address God directly** as their Father.
- This phrase is **inclusive**, not exclusive—“our” signifies unity and belonging.

2. Sermon on the Mount

Jesus repeatedly calls God “your Father” when teaching about everyday life and trust:

*“So that your giving may be in secret. Then **your Father**, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”*

— **Matthew 6:4**

“Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.”

— **Matthew 6:8**

*“Be perfect, therefore, as **your heavenly Father** is perfect.”*

— **Matthew 5:48**

“If you forgive others... your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”

— **Matthew 6:14**

“Your Father in heaven causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good...”

— **Matthew 5:45**

*“How much more will **your Father in heaven** give good gifts to those who ask Him!”*

— **Matthew 7:11**

These verses emphasize God's **intimacy, provision, mercy, and fatherly care.**

3. The Sending of the Spirit

“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper... the Spirit of truth.”

— **John 14:16–17**

- Jesus appeals to **His Father on our behalf**, bridging us into the divine family.

- The gift of the Spirit is **from the Father to His children.**

4. Post-Resurrection Declaration

*“I am ascending to **my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.**”*

— **John 20:17**

- Spoken to Mary Magdalene after the resurrection, this is a powerful statement of **shared relationship.**
- Jesus intentionally includes believers in **His own relationship** with the Father.

5. The Prodigal Son Parable

“Father, I have sinned...”

— **Luke 15:11–32**

- Though a story, Jesus **models the heart of God as Father**—compassionate, waiting, forgiving.
- The father in the parable is clearly a metaphor for **God’s fatherhood over all His children**, even the wayward.

6. Instructions About Prayer and Trust

*“Do not be afraid, little flock, for **your Father** has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”*

— **Luke 12:32**

- Jesus reassures believers that **the Father is generous**, not withholding.
- He uses “your Father” to emphasize **belonging, care, and authority.**

7. Jesus' Rebuke to the Religious

"You belong to your father, the devil..."

— **John 8:44**

*"If God were **your Father**, you would love me..."*

— **John 8:42**

- By contrast, Jesus challenges religious leaders who claim God as Father **without love or truth**.
- This teaches that **relationship with the Father is through the Son**.

Where do we pray?

Pray in Secret — Avoiding Showiness

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

— **Matthew 6:6**

- Jesus teaches that prayer is **intimate and personal**, not about impressing others.
- The heart should be **focused on God alone**, not on public approval.

What Jesus Said About Worship exemplifies the heart of prayer (John 4:21-24):

"Woman," Jesus said, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

Benefits of Prayer in the New Testament

1. Peace and Relief from Anxiety

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

— Philippians 4:6-7

- Prayer brings **peace that calms anxiety and worry** by trusting God with our concerns.

2. Answered Prayer and God’s Provision

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

— Matthew 7:7

- Prayer invites God’s intervention, guidance, and provision in our lives.

3. Strength and Support in Trials

“Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

— Matthew 26:41

- Prayer strengthens our spirit to resist temptation and endure challenges.

4. Intimacy and Relationship with God

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name... your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

— Matthew 6:9-10 (The Lord’s Prayer)

- Prayer deepens our **personal relationship with God**, aligning our hearts with His.

5. Guidance and Wisdom

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault.”

— James 1:5

- Prayer is a means to **receive wisdom and discernment** from God.

6. Joy and Gratitude

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances.”

— 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

- Prayer fosters a heart of **joy, gratitude, and continuous connection** with God.

7. Healing and Restoration

“Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.”

— James 5:14

- Prayer can bring **physical, emotional, and spiritual healing**.

8. Power Over the Enemy

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

— James 5:16

- Prayer is a **powerful spiritual weapon** against evil and trials.