

The Doctrine of Prayer



Prayer is the act of asking God to do what he has already promised to do.

We do this through the power of the Spirit as adopted children through the Messiah Jesus.

We see this kind of interaction with God evidenced throughout the Bible as his people continue to ask him to follow through on his promises and bring about his kingdom and rule.

We can be confident that God will answer our prayer for his purposes because he has explicitly promised to bring his purposes to pass.

These include for God to glorify himself, for forgiveness, for our own knowledge of God, for godly wisdom, for the strength to obey, and for the gospel to spread.

Prayer is not defined explicitly anywhere in the Bible, but its basic meaning is to ask.

This is evident in, for example, the Lord's Prayer:



Matthew 6:9-13 King James Version

9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

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

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Where in response to a request to “teach us to pray!” from his disciples, Jesus gives them a framework for asking God to act by building his kingdom, promoting his reputation, and forgiving and sustaining them, his servants.

Their ‘asking,’ then, is to be shaped by God’s prior action—to put it simply, to pray is to ask God to do what he in his grace has already promised to do.

Prayer in the Bible is not a generic word for a vaguely spiritual activity but is firmly rooted in the nature and action of God.

John Calvin makes this point clear in his discussion of prayer in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (III.XX.1):



Just as faith is born from the gospel, so through it our hearts are trained to call upon God's name:

Rom. 10:14-17 King James Version

14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

And this is precisely what [the apostle] had said a little before: the Spirit of adoption, who seals the witness of the gospel in our hearts [Rom. 8:16] raises up our spirits to dare to show forth to God their desires, to stir up unspeakable groanings [Rom. 8:26], and confidently cry, "Abba! Father!" [Rom.8:15].

Romans 8:16 King James Version

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

Romans 8:26 King James Version

26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

Romans 8:15 King James Version

15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.



Theologically, then, God invites us through the gospel to participate in the life of the Trinity through union with Christ, which entails asking God the Father to do specific things for us on the basis of the fact that we now participate in Jesus's sonship by adoption through faith, which is brought about by the power of the Spirit.

Matthew 7:7-11 King James Version

7 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:

8 For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

9 Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

10 Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

11 If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?

Matthew 7:7–11, with its repeated command to ask, makes this very clear—in particular in its closing assurance that “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

This asking is shaped and controlled by the gospel—that is, what God has already committed to do for his people.

It is normally to be addressed to the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit.

Prayer in the Old Testament



This understanding of prayer as asking God to do what he has promised is displayed in almost every part of the Old Testament.

From **Genesis 4:26**, when men “began to call on the name of Yahweh” (presumably to fulfill the promise of a rescuer in **Gen. 3:15**), onwards, the prayers of God’s people are essentially *gospel-shaped*, asking God to come through on his covenant promises.

Genesis 4:26 King James Version

26 And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.

Genesis 3:15 King James Version

15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

When Abraham and his family pray, they are asking God to come through on his covenant commitments.



So Abraham prays (foolishly) that Ishmael might be his heir (17:18); both the unnamed servant of Abraham and Isaac himself pray for the success of the “wife project” in Genesis 24-25, and then Jacob memorably prays in Genesis 32:9-12 to the “God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Yahweh who spoke to me . . . ,” on the basis of his promise to make his “offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.” (Gen. 32:9-12)

For Jacob, prayer is clearly asking God to do what he has promised, which involves protecting him so that the promises to his grandfather Abraham might be fulfilled.

This basic perspective is replicated in almost every prayer in the pages that follow.

The Exodus begins with a prayer like this (Exod. 2:23-25), and Moses’s interactions with God throughout the journey from Sinai to the land are characterized by this concern that God do what he has promised (for example, see Num. 14:13-20).

Joshua picks up where Moses leaves off (Josh. 7:6-9) and this is reflected in the cycle of prayers for deliverance in the middle of judgment in Judges (for example, see Judg. 3:15).

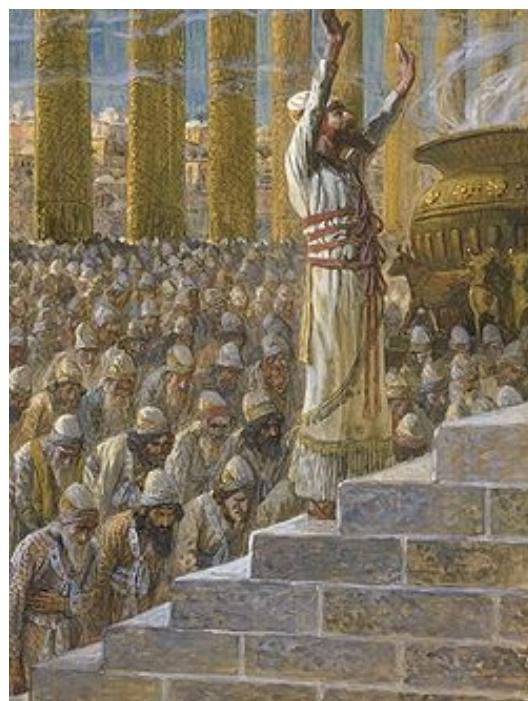
Prayer is never less (and seldom more) than asking God to do what he has promised.

This is even more striking when one considers the “big prayers” of the Old Testament.

Hannah's prayer in the wake of God ending her barrenness surprisingly focuses not on her own child, but on God's commitment to work in our world by sending a rescuer - (1 Sam. 2:1–10).



When Solomon prays at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8), he remarkably does not focus on the bricks and mortar but on the progress of God's work in the world.



In Hezekiah's prayers, even when he focuses on his own misfortunes, God's response graciously redirects him to the progress of his plans in the world.



Similarly, the prayers in Daniel 9 and Nehemiah 9 barely touch on the circumstances or needs of the individuals praying; rather, these are cries to the Lord to continue to roll out his promises on the stage of world history.

Even the angst-ridden “confessions” of Jeremiah - (e.g. Jer. 12:1–12) derive their tension from the fact that God is apparently *not* doing what he has promised.

The book of Psalms makes a particular contribution to the Bible's theology of prayer.

Many of the Psalms are characterized by their direct, personal address to God (see e.g. Pss. 3:1; 4:1; 5:1 etc.).

A large number of these Psalms are Davidic, and are concerned initially, at least, with the trials of God's anointed.

Where any given Davidic psalm is a prayer, it is first and foremost *his* prayer.

On close examination, both David's experiences and the way in which he reacts to these experiences *are not* intended to capture the generalities on life on planet earth for human beings this is the intense reality of life as God's "messiah," the one who stands at the center of God's plans on earth, and as a result is the focus of attention of God's enemies.

To attempt to pray the Psalms without recognizing this is a mistake!

But this is not the end of the story.

Within the Psalter itself there is also a progression to prayers prayed by the people of the Messiah, crying to God to do what he has promised both the Patriarchs, and his anointed King - (see Pss. 77; 103; 130).

In that sense, then, the prayers of the Messiah become the prayers of the people of the Messiah.

The Psalter's 'teaching' on prayer then is both more complex than is often realized, but also more integrated with the rest of the Old Testament's teaching on prayer than one might think.

The essential understanding of prayer in the Psalms is reflected by the way in which the king/Messiah prays—it is calling on Yahweh to deliver on his promises.

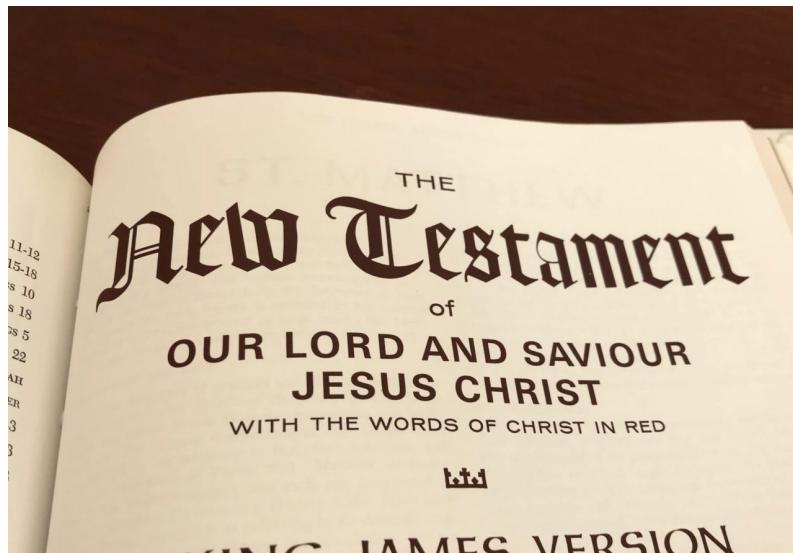
This basic conception of prayer spills over into the prayers of the people of the Messiah, who continue to cry for God to work by sending the ultimate Davidic King, establishing his kingdom and drawing the nations to him. By the end of the Old Testament, the need to cry out to Yahweh to plead with him to act is very clear. Chronicles, for example, records ten more specific prayers than the comparable sections of Kings.

In each case, the prayers focus on asking God to do his work in the world.

Or to express it differently, the prayers are *gospel-shaped*.



Prayer in the New Testament



Not surprisingly, we find exactly the same pattern in the New Testament.

Prayer, which is made possible by the gospel and shaped by the gospel continues to work in exactly the same way.

For Jesus, prayer is basically a matter of asking his Father to do what he has promised.

The “Lord’s Prayer” in both Matthew and Luke is the template for New Covenant prayer.

The individual petitions in Matthew 6:9–13 (and Luke 11:2–4) are all requests which dovetail perfectly with the revealed purposes and promises of God earlier in Scripture.

Asking in response to the gospel is the heart of prayer.

The delightful truth is, that according to Jesus, we do not need to be anxious about asking for the wrong thing; instead, we are freed to *ask* knowing that our Father will not give us what is unhelpful for us (see e.g. Luke 11:5–13; although James does warn us about doubting God’s willingness to keep his promises when we ask—see James 1:5–6).

Nor do we need to try to wring anything out of the hands of a reluctant God (see also Luke 18:1–8, where God is *contrasted* with the unjust judge who needs to be browbeaten into action).

On the contrary, we can cast all our anxieties on him (1 Pet. 5:7, which must at least include praying), knowing that through the gospel God has already committed himself to answering our prayers.

Jesus makes this explicit in the double promise of John 14:13–14: “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

The context makes clear that Jesus is talking about God’s revelatory work of opening people’s eyes to see his glory.

As those who have been invited to address the Father in the same way as Jesus himself (calling him ‘Abba, Father’, according to both Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6), we are encouraged to pray in line with his mission and his agenda, which, of course, is to do the work that the Father has given him to do (John 14:10).

We are now encouraged as sons and daughters to ask God to do what he has promised in and through the Son by “praying in the name of Jesus” (see 2 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 5:2).

Throughout the Bible, prayer is always construed as asking God to do what he has promised: whether it be to send the Messiah and establish his kingdom or to continue to build the church of the Lord Jesus Christ until he returns.

Essentially, we should pray for God to do his new covenant work through the gospel, which is by his word and through his Spirit.

MORE Implications

This is confirmed by the specific prayers which the NT encourages us to pray (and which we can confidently expect God to answer).

We can be confident that God will answer ...If we pray for God to glorify himself (Matt. 6:9; John 17:5)

If we pray for forgiveness (Matt. 6:12; 1 John 1:9; James 5:13–20)

If we pray to know God better (John 17:3, 24–26, Eph. 1:15–22)

If we pray for wisdom (to know how to live for God)
(James 1:5–6)

If we pray for strength to obey/ live for God)
(Eph. 3:14–21; Matt. 6:11, 13)

If we pray for the spread of the gospel (Luke 10:2; Acts 4:27–29; Col. 4:3) God commits to answering these prayers because these prayers sum up the work of the gospel.

They are all prayers for God to do his new covenant work through his word.

We should also note that a day will come when prayer is no longer necessary.

Prayer is a gracious provision of God for life in a fallen world.

In the new creation, all the promises of God will have been fulfilled in Christ, and in his immediate presence, there will be no need to cry out to him, merely to enjoy him forever - (see Rev. 21:22–27).

How do we obtain the Forgiveness of our Sins?:



How do we get right with God, regardless of our individual sins?

Just say this Prayer and all of your sins will be forgotten, and you will have Eternal life, with Christ Jesus, in Heaven:

Lord Jesus, I repent of all my sins, and I ask you to come into my life a be my Lord and Savior.

Friends, if you prayed that prayer, I believe that you are born again, and you have ever lasting life, get in a good bible teaching church, and may you keep growing, in the Lord, and may HE use you to help save many souls for His Kingdom !

In, Jesus Mighty Name!

Rev. Jesus Del Rio, Ed