

Prayer in the New Testament

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There is no single word in biblical Hebrew or Greek that signifies “prayer” in general, but rather a whole series of different words with related meanings, such as praise, give thanks, confess, bless, repent, ask, plea, beg, petition, sacrifice, worship, bow down, kneel, lift up (eyes/hands), sing psalms, hymns, etc. [The following chart is *not* comprehensive, but lists only *some* of the most prominent words related to prayer.]

To learn about the wide variety of “prayer” in the Bible, we can not only look at the explicit teachings about prayer by Jesus, Paul, and other biblical characters and authors, but also consider the situations in which these figures are portrayed as praying, as well as the texts of specific prayers they used. While all four Gospels contain some teachings and examples of prayer, by far the most prayer-related material is found in Luke’s Gospel, as well as in Paul’s letters.

Greek	English	Matt	Mark	Luke	John	Acts	Paul	Heb	Cath	Rev	NT Total
προσεύχομαι	to pray, speak to God	15	10	19	0	16	19	1	5	0	85
προσευχή	prayer, request	2	2	3	0	9	14	0	3	3	36
εὐχομαι	to pray, make a vow	0	0	0	0	2	3	0	2	0	7
εὐχή	prayer, vow	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	3
δέομαι	to ask, beg, plead	1	0	8	0	7	6	0	0	0	22
δέησις	prayer, plea, petition	0	0	3	0	0	12	1	2	0	18
δοξάζω	to praise, give glory	4	1	9	23	5	12	1	4	2	61
εὐλογέω	to bless	5	5	13	1	1	7	7	2	0	41
εὐλογητός	blessed	0	1	1	0	0	5	0	1	0	8
εὐχαριστέω	to give thanks	2	2	4	3	2	24	0	0	1	38
ἐξομολογέω	to confess, praise	2	1	2	0	1	3	0	1	0	10
εὐχαριστία	thanksgiving	0	0	0	0	1	12	0	0	2	15
προσκυνέω	to bow down, worship	13	2	3	11	4	1	2	0	24	60
κάμπτω	to bend, bow, kneel	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
ἀδω & φωνή	to sing / song	0	0	0	0	0	2 / 2	0	0	3 / 5	5 + 7
ὕμνεω & ὕμνος	to sing hymns / hymn	1 / 0	1 / 0	0	0	1 / 0	0 / 2	1 / 0	0	0	4 + 2
ψάλλω & ψαλμός	to sing psalms / psalm	0	0	0 / 2	0	0 / 2	4 / 3	0	1 / 0	0	5 + 7
ἐπαιτέω & προσαιτέω	to beg	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	2 + 1

Prayers spoken by Jesus himself

- While teaching the disciples to pray: **The Lord's Prayer** (Matt 6:9-13; Luke 11:2b-4; see below)
- **Thanking or Praising** the Father for hiding things from the wise, revealing them to children (Matt 11:25-27; Luke 10:21-24)
- Before curing a deaf man, Jesus looks up to heaven, sighs, and says, “*Ephphatha*” or “Be opened” (Mark 7:31-35)
- Before calling Lazarus out of the tomb, Jesus **thanks** the Father for hearing him (John 11:41-42)
- After the Last Supper discourse: **Jesus' Great Prayer to the Father** (John 17:1-26)
- At Gethsemane, Jesus prays to accept God's will (Matt 26:36-44; Mark 14:32-39; Luke 22:41-46; cf. John 18:11)
- **Hanging on the cross**, Jesus prays Psalm 22 (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34), asks God to forgive those crucifying him (**Luke 23:34**), and entrusts his Spirit to the Father (**Luke 23:46**; cf. John 19:30)

Versions and translations of the Lord's Prayer / [Our Father](#)

Luke 11:2b-4 (NRSV)	Matthew 6:9-13 (NRSV)	Didache 8.2 (ANF, vol. 7)
Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.	Our Father 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 bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.	Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, as in heaven, so on earth. Give us today our daily (needful) bread, and forgive us our debt as we also forgive our debtors. And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (or, evil); for Yours is the power and the glory for ever. Thrice in the day thus pray.
Roman Missal (Latin edition)	Roman Missal (English Translation)	International English Translation (ICET)
Pater Noster, qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo et in terra. Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie, et dimitte nobis debita nostra sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris. Et ne nos inducas in temptationem, sed libera nos a malo.	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.	Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

Other occasions when Jesus prays in the Gospels

- After having been baptized in the Jordan river, Jesus remains praying (**Luke 3:21**)
- While living in Capernaum, Jesus goes outside of town to pray by himself (Mark 1:35; cf. **Luke 5:16**)
- Before choosing his Twelve Apostles, Jesus spends the night in prayer (**Luke 6:12**)

- Jesus give thanks (to God) before distributing food to 5000 people (Matt 14:19; Mark 6:41; **Luke** 9:16; John 6:11)
- After feeding the 5000, Jesus goes off by himself to pray (Matt 14:23; Mark 6:46)
- In feeding the 4000, Jesus gives thanks (to God) before distributing the loaves (Matt 15:36; Mark 8:6-7)
- Jesus prays alone before asking the disciples who people think he is (**Luke** 9:18)
- Jesus goes up a mountain with three disciples to pray, when he is transfigured (**Luke** 9:28-29)
- After observing Jesus at prayer, one of his disciples asks him to teach them to pray (**Luke** 11:1)
- People bring children to Jesus for him to embrace them, pray, and/or bless them (Matt 19:13; Mark 10:16)
- Jesus prays blessings over bread and wine at the Last Supper (Matt 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-23; **Luke** 22:17-20)
- Jesus prays the Peter's faith may not fail (**Luke** 22:32)
- Jesus mentions that he could call upon his Father to save him (Matt 26:53)
- The Risen Jesus blesses bread while at table with two disciples at Emmaus (**Luke** 24:30)
- The Risen Jesus blesses his disciples before ascending to heaven (**Luke** 24:50-51)

Prayers addressed to God by other NT characters

- Mary's Song of Praise: *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55)
- Zechariah's Prayer of Blessing: *Benedictus* (Luke 1:68-79)
- The Angels' Hymn of Praise: *Gloria in excelsis* (Luke 2:14)
- Simeon's Prayer to God: *Nunc Dimittis* (Luke 2:29-32)
- Prayers by a Pharisee and a Tax Collector in a parable (Luke 18:10-13)

References to other characters praying in the Gospels

- Zechariah enters the temple to offer incense and pray, while the people outside pray (**Luke** 1:8-22)
- The prophetess/widow Anna remains in the temple fasting and praying night and day (**Luke** 2:37)
- The disciples of John the Baptist and of the Pharisees are said to fast and pray often (**Luke** 5:33)
- A Samaritan prostrates himself and thanks Jesus after being healed of leprosy (**Luke** 17:16)
- In a parable, a Pharisee and a tax collector go to the temple to pray (**Luke** 18:10-14)
- After Jesus' ascension to heaven, his disciples are often in the temple blessing God (**Luke** 24:53)

Jesus' instructions on prayer

- Pray for those who persecute you (Matt 5:43-45; **Luke** 6:28)
- Don't be like hypocrites, who show off or babble when they pray (Matt 6:5-8; Mark 12:40; **Luke** 20:47)
- Forgive others, so that God may also forgive you (Matt 6:14-15; Mark 11:25)
- Trust that God will give you good things when you ask (Matt 7:7-11; **Luke** 11:9-13; cf. John 14-16)
- Some demons can only be driven out through prayer (Mark 9:29)
- Pray always and don't lose heart (**Luke** 18:1, with the parable of the Unjust Judge)
- Jesus calls the Jerusalem temple "a house of prayer" (Matt 21:13; Mark 11:17; **Luke** 19:46; quoting Isaiah 56:7)
- Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive (Matt 21:22; Mark 11:24)
- Pray that you may escape from the coming judgment (Matt 24:20; Mark 13:16; **Luke** 21:36)

- Pray that you might not come into the time of trial (Matt 26:41; **Luke** 22:40, 46)
- If you ask anything in Jesus' name, he will do it (John 14:13-14; 15:7; 16:24)

Prayers within the Acts of the Apostles

- **Acts 1:14** – After Jesus' ascension, his disciples and family devote themselves to prayer
- **Acts 1:24-25** – The apostles pray before selecting a replacement for Judas
- **Acts 2:42** – The Jerusalem believers devote themselves “to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”
- **Acts 3:1** – Peter and John go up to the temple at the hour of prayer
- **Acts 4:29-31** – Peter and John pray for boldness in preaching and for God to do miracles
- **Acts 6:4-6** – The apostles select seven men to serve the community, so they can devote themselves to prayer and preaching; they appoint them by praying and laying hands on them
- **Acts 7:59-60** – Stephen prays to the Lord Jesus at the moment of his death
- **Acts 8:15** – Peter and John go to Samaria to pray that new believers may receive the Holy Spirit
- **Acts 8:22-24** – Peter tells Simon the Magician to repent and pray for forgiveness; Simon asks Peter to pray for him
- **Acts 9:11** – After encountering Jesus on the road, Saul of Tarsus remains in Damascus praying
- **Acts 9:40** – Peter prays before raising Tabitha back to life
- **Acts 10:2-4** – Cornelius, a Roman centurion, is described as a devout man who prayed constantly
- **Acts 10:9** – While in Joppa, Peter goes up to a roof to pray (cf. 11:5)
- **Acts 10:30-31** – Cornelius recounts how an angel appeared to tell him his prayers had been heard
- **Acts 12:5, 12** – While Peter is in prison, the church prays for him
- **Acts 13:3** – The Christians at Antioch fast and pray before sending Barnabas and Saul off on a mission
- **Acts 14:23** – With fasting and prayer, Barnabas and Paul appoint elders for the churches they founded
- **Acts 16:13, 16** – Paul, Silas, and Timothy go to a place of prayer outside of Philippi
- **Acts 16:25** – While in prison overnight at Philippi, Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns
- **Acts 20:36** – After speaking to the elders from Ephesus, Paul kneels with them and prays
- **Acts 21:5** – On a beach near Tyre, Paul kneels and prays with believers from that city
- **Acts 22:17** – Paul tells a crowd of Jews about what happened while he was praying in the Jerusalem temple
- **Acts 26:29** – Paul tells King Agrippa that he prays that he and everyone listening will become Christians
- **Acts 27:29** – During a storm at sea, the whole crew prays for day to come (so that they might be safe)
- **Acts 27:35** – While on the ship, Paul gives thanks to God for the bread before they all eat
- **Acts 28:8** – On Malta, Paul cures the father of the governor Publius by praying and laying his hands on him
- **Acts 28:15** – Upon landing on the Italian mainland, Paul thanks God for the believers who meet him

Prayers and instructions about prayer in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Letters

- A “Thanksgiving” at the beginning and a “Doxology” at the end of most of the Pauline letters (for details, see [NT Letters](#))
- Many more instructions about prayer throughout the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline letters!
- [More coming here, some day, God willing!]

Prayer in Hebrews and the Catholic Epistles

- **Heb 5:7** – "In the days of his flesh, *Jesus offered up prayers and supplications*, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."
- **Heb 12:28** – "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, *let us give thanks*, by which we offer to God an acceptable *worship* with reverence and awe."
- **Heb 13:15** – "Through him, then, let us continually *offer a sacrifice of praise to God*, that is, the fruit of lips that *confess* his name."
- **Heb 13:18** – "*Pray for us*; we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things."
- **Heb 13:20-21** (a blessing) – "Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, / make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. **Amen.**"
- **James 5:13-18** – "Are any among you suffering? They should *pray*. Are any cheerful? They should *sing songs of praise*. / Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and *have them pray over them*, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. / The *prayer of faith* will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. / Therefore *confess your sins to one another*, and *pray for one another*, so that you may be healed. The *prayer of the righteous* is powerful and effective. / Elijah was a human being like us, and *he prayed fervently* that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. / Then *he prayed again*, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest."
- **1 Peter 3:7** – "Husbands, in the same way, show consideration for your wives in your life together... *so that nothing may hinder your prayers*."
- **1 Peter 3:12a** – "For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and *his ears are open to their prayer*."
- **1 Peter 4:7** – "The end of all things is near; therefore be serious and discipline yourselves *for the sake of your prayers*."
- **1 John 5:14-16** – "And this is the boldness we have in him, that *if we ask anything according to his will*, he hears us. / And if we know that *he hears us in whatever we ask*, we know that we have obtained the *requests* made of him. / If you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will *ask*, and God will give life to such a one--to those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin that is mortal; I do not say that you should *pray* about that."
- **3 John 2** – "Beloved, *I pray that all may go well with you* and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul."
- **Jude 20** – "Pray in the Holy Spirit."
- **Brief Doxologies** (prayers giving "glory" to God) are also found in **1 Peter 4:11; 5:11; 2 Peter 3:18; and Jude 25**.

Prayer in the Book of Revelation

- **Rev 1:5b-6** (initial doxology) – "To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, / and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, *to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*"
- **Rev 4:8-11** – an extended scene of worship around God's throne in heaven
- **Rev 5:8-10** – "When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and *golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints*. / They *sing* a new song..."
- **Rev 5:11-14** – another scene of worship of God and of the Lamb
- **Rev 7:9-12, 15** – an uncountable multitude worships God and the Lamb
- **Rev 8:3-4** – "Another angel with a golden censer came and stood at the altar; he was given a great quantity of incense to offer *with the prayers of all the saints* on the golden altar that is before the throne. / And the smoke of the incense, *with the prayers of the saints*, rose before God from the hand of the angel."
- **Rev 11:16-18** – the twenty-four elders worship and give thanks to God
- **Rev 14:2-3** – harpists playing and singing a new song before God's throne

- **Rev 14:7** – an angel says, "Fear God and give him *glory*, for the hour of his judgment has come; and *worship* him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."
 - **Rev 15:3-4** – [Those who had conquered the beast] *sing the song of Moses*, the servant of God, *and the song of the Lamb*: "Great and amazing are your deeds, Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, King of the nations! / Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and *worship* before you, for your judgments have been revealed."
 - **Rev 19:1-8** – another extended scene of giving praise and worship to God
 - **Rev 22:20-21** (concluding prayers) – "The one who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." *Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!* / The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. *Amen.*"
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