

I. Key Terms

- A. The most common Old Testament word for prayer is פָּלַל *palal* (80x). This word means to pray to God for something: Hannah's request for a son (1Sa. 1.27) and Hezekiah's plea for deliverance (Isa. 37.15ff). It occasionally has the connotation of intercession: Abraham's prayer for Abimelech (Gen. 20.17) and Job's prayer for his three friends (Job 42.10). It is sometimes associated with confession: God will respond when his sinful people repent and ask for mercy (2Ch. 7.14) and Ezra prayed and confessed (Ezra 10.1).
- B. שָׂאֵל *sha'al* refers to a request for a desired object and is often translated simply "to ask." Ps. 122.6 exhorts prayer for Jerusalem's peace; Ps. 119.76 asks for God's steadfast love as a comfort.
- C. The word עָתָר *'athar* refers to pleading, a request made with urgency. This is the word used to describe Pharaoh's pleas for relief (Ex. 8-10) and Isaac's prayer for Rebekah to conceive (Gen. 25.21).
- D. חָנַן *hanan* is related to a word for a *gift* or *favor* and means "to plead for favor." It is used for Joseph's plea for release from his brothers (Gen. 42.21) and Esther's request for the lives of her people (Est. 8.3).
- E. חָלָה *halah* is again a verb of asking, often with the connotation of seeking approval. Saul sacrifices without this prayer for approval (1Sa. 13.12). The Tyreans seek the king's blessing (Ps. 45.12).

II. Components of Prayer (with Key Passages)

- A. Worship-based
 - 1. Praise

The Psalms repeatedly extolled God's attributes and actions (Ps. 18; 103); Daniel began his request for interpretation with blessings to God (Dan. 2.20-23); the Levitical ministry involved a combination of invocation and praise (1Ch. 16.4).
 - 2. Confession

Ezra and Nehemiah prefaced their requests for divine help with a confession of national sin (Ezra 10.1; Neh. 1.6) and David did the same thing on a personal level (Ps. 32.5).
 - 3. Thanksgiving

David instructed Israel to pray for salvation in order to give thanks for it later (1Ch. 16.35) and thanked God for deliverance in personal prayer (Ps. 52.9). Isaiah prophesied that forgiven people would offer prayers of thanksgiving to God (Isa. 12.1).
- B. Request-based
 - 1. Confession

Confession is a manner of worship as the sinner humbles himself before God; it is also a request for something: forgiveness. Moses pled with the Lord for the Israelites' forgiveness in the wilderness (Ex. 32.32); David brought his personal sinfulness to God and asks forgiveness (Ps. 25); Daniel confessed both his sins and those of the nation in prayer (Dan. 9.19).

2. Supplication

Supplication is a request made on one's own behalf. Hezekiah asked God for healing (2Ch. 32.24); Jabez asked for blessing and more land (1Ch. 4.10); Hannah asked for a son (1Sa. 1.27).

3. Intercession

Intercession is a request made on someone else's behalf. Abraham prayed for Abimelech to be spared (Gen. 20.17); Job prayed for the restoration of his friends (Job 42.8); Jeremiah was specifically told not to intercede for rebellious Israel (Jer. 7.16; 11.14; 14.11).

III. Timeless Truths

A. Prayer is part of both private life and corporate worship.

Manoah and his wife prayed privately for a child (Jdg. 13.8); Daniel prayed alone (Dan. 6.10); Habakkuk took his hard questions to God alone (Hab. 1.2ff). On the other hand, Solomon led all of Israel in prayer to dedicate the temple (1 Ki. 8); many psalms are songs of prayer (90; 118); Nehemiah prays for safety with the returned captive (Neh. 4.9). Christ teaches both secret (Mt. 6.6) and public prayer (Mt. 18.19-20).

B. Request prayer follows worship prayer.

Prayer is not merely asking; it is communicating. The Israelites confessed sin before they ask for healing (Num. 21.7); Daniel praised God before asking for interpretational wisdom (Dan. 2.20-23); the Psalms regularly mix praise for who God is and gratefulness for what he does with requests for deliverance. Similarly, in the New Testament Paul based his prayers on thanksgiving for God's work in people's lives (Phil. 1.3-11; Eph. 1.15-19).

C. Prayer is focused on God's character.

The psalmists addressed God as salvation (3.3), Lord (16.2), holy (22.3), rock, fortress and refuge (31.3), hiding place (32.7), help and deliverer (40.17), king (44.4), miracle-working (77.14), mighty God of hosts (89.8), father (89.26), eternal (93.2), exalted (97.9), enthroned (102.12), unchanging (102.27), great (104.1), good (119.68), shield (119.114) and portion (142.5). Clearly, God desires his people to speak to him and praise him in person. Prayer is not to be an introverted exercise in self-pity.

D. Prayer is concerned with the glory of God's name.

Moses' exemplary intercession was not motivated solely by his desire for Israel's deliverance, but primarily by his desire for God's glory among the nations (Deut. 9.28). Elijah prayed for God to provide a sign in order that the people would know who God was and return to him (1Ki. 18.37). God's glory is the proper motivation for prayer in the New Testament as well: Jesus promised answers for prayers offered "in his name," that is to say, for his glory (Jn. 16.23).

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