



Praying the Names of God
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Requests for information should be addressed to:
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I

GOD, MIGHTY CREATOR

אלהים
ELOHIM

The Name

Elohim is the Hebrew word for God that appears in the very first sentence of the Bible. When we pray to *Elohim*, we remember that he is the one who began it all, creating the heavens and the earth and separating light from darkness, water from dry land, night from day. This ancient name for God contains the idea of God’s creative power as well as his authority and sovereignty. Jesus used a form of the name in his agonized prayer from the cross. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” —which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Key Scripture

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)

Monday

GOD REVEALS HIS NAME

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, “Let there be light.” God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” God called the dome Sky.

And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.”

And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night.”

And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.”

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.”

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. (Selected from Genesis 1 NRSV)

Elohim, Mighty One, you made everything out of nothing, imposed order on chaos, gave birth to beauty, and called it all good. Help me to know you as the one true God who created everything and everyone, the one who has placed me on the earth for a purpose—to magnify your name. Amen.

Understanding the Name

Elohim (e-lo-HEEM) is the plural form of *El* or *Eloah*, one of the oldest designations for divinity in the world. The Hebrews borrowed the term *El* from the Canaanites. It can refer either to the true God or to pagan gods. Though *El* is used more than 200 times in the Hebrew Bible, *Elohim* is used more than 2,500 times. Its plural form is used not to indicate a belief in many gods but to emphasize the majesty of the one true God. He is the God of gods, the highest of all. Christians may recognize in this plural form a hint of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Elohim* occurs thirty-two times in the first chapter of Genesis. After that the name *Yahweh* appears as well and is often paired with *Elohim* and, in the NIV, the two together are translated “the LORD God.”

Studying the Name

1. “Genesis” is a word that can mean “birth,” “history of origin,” or “genealogy.” What can you observe about who God is from this passage about beginnings?
2. What can you observe about the world he has made?
3. What do you think it means to be created in “the image of God”? How would your life change if you lived with the constant awareness that he created you to bear his image?

4. God seems delighted by what he has made, proclaiming it good and even very good. How does God's assessment of creation shape your own attitude toward the world? Toward yourself?

Tuesday

PRAYING THE NAME

Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

*So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:26–28 NRSV)

Reflect On: Genesis 1:26–28

Praise God: For his power in creating the heavens and the earth out of absolutely nothing.

Offer Thanks: That God has not only created you, but made you in his own image.

Confess: Any tendency to forget that every human life, including your own, is sacred.

Ask God: To renew your sense of wonder and gratitude for the things he has made.



A mighty God could have created a world quite different from the one we know. It could have had perpetually dark skies, grass that hurt to walk on, dogs that couldn't be housebroken, and people incapable of love. Have you ever wondered why the world you take for granted is often so stunningly beautiful? So pleasant to live in? Why the people around you are capable of so much kindness?

So often we miss life's beauty because we are preoccupied by its flaws. Instead of taking off our shoes to feel the feathery soft grass beneath our feet, we complain that it's growing so fast we don't have time to mow it. Rather than enjoying the gregarious woman behind the supermarket counter, we blame her friendly chatter for delaying the checkout line. And what about us? Who stares back from the mirror each morning? A child of God who is growing daily in his image or someone whose nose is too big or too small, whose hair is in a state of perpetual rebellion, or whose skin is aged and worn?

Today, ask the God who made you to remake your sense of wonder at his creative power.

Wednesday

PRAYING THE NAME

Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s house, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth.” (Genesis 28:20)

Reflect On: Genesis 28:10–22; 35:1–8

Praise God: Because he not only created the world and everyone in it but continues to sustain it through his creative power.

Offer Thanks: For the way God has blessed you with the good things of the earth.

Confess: Any tendency to take God’s earthly blessings for granted.

Ask God: To increase your desire to bless others with the gifts he has given you.



Jacob, you may remember, was the twin who tricked his brother out of a blessing. Fleeing from his brother’s wrath, he had a dream one night in which he encountered the God of his grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac. Promising him descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth, God told him: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

This was *Elohim* speaking, the Creator of the heavens and the earth. He made it all, he owned it all, and he could give away its fruit to anyone he pleased. Jacob asked for safety, food, and clothing—

basic human needs. But God gave him so much more, making him a wealthy man and the father of numerous children. He even blessed Esau, the brother whose blessing Jacob had stolen.

Then as now *Elohim* desires to use his creative power, not only to sustain us and the world he has made, but to create for us a life filled with blessings, both physical and spiritual. Ask him now for what you need, believing in both his power to bless and his desire to care for you.

Thursday

PRAYING THE NAME

*In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.*

*They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.*

*Like clothing you will change them
and they will be discarded.*

But you remain the same. (Psalm 102:25–27a)

Reflect On: Psalm 102

Praise God: For his unchanging nature—no matter what happens to us or to the world around us, God remains the same.

Offer Thanks: That our Creator is perfect—nothing could be added to or subtracted from him to improve his nature.

Confess: Any tendency to place God on your own level, as though he is subject to the same laws and limitations of creation as you are.

Ask God: To help you perceive his greatness more fully so that you will stop projecting your own feelings and judgments on him.



Imagine for a moment that you live in a world that never changes. In this world civilizations never rise and fall, the weather is constant, children don't grow up, and people never change jobs. In this world, the same old television shows run year after year.

Wouldn't it bore you to death? Without the right kind of change, there would be no growth or development, no hope, nothing whatever to aim for. No one would ever talk about discerning

God's plan for their lives nor would anyone strive to fulfill their God-given potential because there wouldn't even be a word for "potential." We know that to be human is to be subject to change.

As human beings we need constructive change because both we and the world we live in are imperfect. We are not yet everything God intends us to be. But God himself is already perfect, already everything he needs to be: all-powerful, loving, wise, beautiful, and good. Change could not possibly improve him. Furthermore, he is not subject to a changing universe because he exists outside of time and space. He always was and he always will be. This means that the God who loves you will never stop being who he is. His attitude won't change depending on his mood, depending on your mood.

Perhaps you face unwelcome changes right now: the loss of a loved one, a child leaving home, a dwindling paycheck—the future you counted on suddenly in jeopardy. Or maybe you suffer from a mood disorder, up one day and way down the next.

Let the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever steady your world today. Whatever challenge or change confronts you, let it drive you toward the God who never changes, a God so stable and strong you can lean on him forever.

Friday

PROMISES ASSOCIATED WITH GOD'S NAME

A promise is only as good as the person who makes it. Sometimes young children make promises they cannot keep, like the one about eating all their vegetables if only you will *please* give them a candy bar right now. Lovers promise to stay together in sickness and in health until death parts them. Yet sometimes they stray. Salespeople promise the moon just to close a deal. But when it comes to making a promise and keeping it, God is not like any of his flawed creatures. He is absolutely reliable, completely trustworthy, entirely able to follow through on his word. As the Creator he has infinite resources to accomplish his purposes. Remember that when you think about the following promises from his word in Scripture.

Promises in Scripture

Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

*The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.*

*He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak. (Isaiah 40:28–29)*

*So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.*

*I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)*

*I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.
(Genesis 28:15)*

Continued Prayer and Praise

Remember that we bear God's image. (Genesis 9:6)

Thank God for his covenant with all living creatures. (Genesis 9:12–17)

Pray that God will turn darkness to light. (Psalm 18:28)