

# Prayer - Explanations

In this document, an attempt has been made to list all the passages in the New Testament that deal with the subject of prayer. The purpose for doing this is that it might be possible to study prayer from the Scripture as thoroughly and completely as possible. Difficulty arises because there are many instances in Scripture where it is unclear as to whether or not a particular passage should be included in such a study. In order to help determine which passages should be included and which should be left out, several guidelines have been set forth which are listed below.

## Prayer Defined

Prayer is here defined as talking to God and communing with God. The aspect of prayer involving talking to God is found throughout Scripture. For example, in Matthew 6:6 Jesus says, *“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.”* There are also roughly fifty times in the New Testament alone where prayer is simply spoken of as “asking.”

The clearest example of prayer also being communing with God is found in I Thessalonians 5:17, which simply says, *“pray continually.”* For us to engage in any activity continually, it would be required to be doing so while eating, holding conversations, doing work, etc. In light of this necessity, praying continually seems to emphasize being aware of God’s presence and somehow reaching out to Him and interacting with Him, or, simply put, communing with Him. This is possible while performing all these other necessary activities.

## The Words “Pray / Prayed / Prayer / Prayers / Praying / Prays”

There are a few examples in the Scripture where these words are used but they do not refer to prayer as such. For example, Peter and John went up to the temple at “the time of prayer” (Ac. 3:1), and the teachers of the law and the Pharisees made “the tassels of their prayer shawls long” (Mt. 23:5). Since such references give at least some insight into cultural matters concerning prayer, they have been included. Thus each occurrence of every one of the above words is contained in our study. This also helps in performing word studies on the above words.

## The Words “Intercede / Interceded / Intercedes / Interceding / Intercession / Intercessor”

In Scripture, the idea of interceding for another means simply to go between, or to plead the case of another, usually in an effort to bring harmony and unity. It is possible to do this verbally, but it can be done in other ways as well. For example, in Isaiah 53:12 it is said of Jesus that he “bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” This means that he paid the price for their sin by dying on the cross, thus reconciling them to God. Even though in the church world the term “intercession” usually refers to prayer, in the Scripture it does not always refer to prayer. In fact, of the ten passages of Scripture that contain at least one of the above words, five refer to prayer and five do not.

## Various Biblical Phrases

There are some expressions that are used in Scripture where the meaning is not fully clear as to whether it refers to prayer. For example, there are many instances in the Scripture where people are exhorted to “return to the Lord” or to “acknowledge the Lord.” These practices may have included talking to God and communing with God, but they could have been carried out in other ways. For example, it is possible to return to the Lord by forsaking sin, reading Scripture, or attending a worship meeting. It is possible for someone to acknowledge the Lord by telling a friend about what God has done in their life, or by hanging up a plaque with Scripture on it in their

home. On the other hand, it is quite difficult to picture anyone “seeking God wholeheartedly” or “seeking God's face” without doing at least **some** talking to God and communing with God.

Since it is often difficult to know what constitutes prayer and what doesn't, the chart below has served as a guide in these situations. The second column, “included as prayer”, contains the wordings that have been determined to refer to prayer, yet specific passages using these wordings have not been included when the context has made it clear that people were not talking to God and communing with God.

**not always included as prayer**  
acknowledging the Lord  
drawing / coming near to God  
making vows to God  
searching for God  
seeking the Lord  
turning to the Lord / returning to the Lord

**included as prayer**  
asking God / inquiring of the Lord  
calling on God / calling to God  
crying out to God  
seeking God's face

### **Talking to Jesus**

Some would argue that when people were in a physical conversation with Jesus, they were actually praying since they were talking to God. Even though there is benefit in studying the Scripture with this in mind, in such conversations the emphasis is upon human interaction. When Jesus lived on the earth, he was fully God yet he was also fully human. Most of the people that talked with him had little or no idea that they were actually conversing with the God who created the universe. Therefore, such passages of Scripture have not been included in this study.

### **Visible or Audible Presence of God**

Throughout the Bible, there are incidents where people talked with the Lord and He was somehow visibly or audibly present. Examples of this include Abraham's encounter with the three visitors (Gen. 18:1-15), and Ezekiel's vision of the glory of the Lord (Ez. 1:1 - 3:17). Since prayer is predominantly an experience of talking to God and communing with God by faith (i.e. with no visible or audible presence of God), such passages have not been included either.

### **Giving Thanks**

The Scripture seems to make a difference between being thankful and giving thanks. Being thankful is an attitude of heart which does not necessitate talking to God. But when someone engages in the activity of giving thanks (i.e. Jesus “gave thanks” before feeding the five thousand), it is understood that they are thanking someone, and therefore talking to that individual. For this reason, Scripture passages that speak of being thankful have not been included. Those that speak of giving thanks have been included, unless it is clear that the speaker is giving thanks to someone other than God.

### **Praising God**

Passages that speak just of praising God have not been included. If someone praises God by saying, “*Lord, I praise you; I magnify your holy name and give you glory and honor,*” they are also praying, because they are talking to God and communing with God. However, if they praise God by saying, “*I praise God for his faithfulness; He is a righteous and holy God,*” they are not praying, since they are talking about God rather than to God. For this reason, passages of Scripture that refer to praising God have not been included unless there is specific evidence to indicate that the person praising is talking to God.

## Worshipping God

When someone worships God, there usually is a clear communion with God. However, it is debatable whether or not the worshipper is truly talking to God. Even though the act of prostrating oneself before the Almighty involves non-verbal communication, the Scripture does not use the ideas of prayer and worship interchangeably. Realizing that there can be a fine line between worship and prayer and that the issue in question could be taken either way, passages of Scripture dealing only with worshipping God have not been included in this study.

## Text of Prayers in Blue

On those occasions where Scripture gives us a word-for-word account of what was spoken to God in prayer, the text of the prayer is in blue type. For example, the Scripture records that Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” This is in blue. On the other hand, the apostle Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...” He may have been praying this as he was writing, but more likely he was reporting to the Ephesians what he was in the habit of praying for them when he actually spent time talking to and communing with God on other occasions. The report given by Paul is not in blue. Since it is often difficult to define which Scripture passages are word-for-word accounts of what was spoken to God in prayer and which are not, the last section of these explanations has been devoted to clarifying the decisions that have been made in this realm.

## The General Rule of Inclusion

After having considered all these aspects of prayer, there are still several passages of Scripture that remain unclear, quite a few of which are listed below. The last guiding principle that has been employed is that of inclusion. In other words, it would be more detrimental to leave out pertinent information than it would be to include unnecessary information. So when the dilemma has been encountered of a certain passage having the legitimate potential of going either way, such a passage has been included. Fortunately, there are not many Scriptures in this category.

# Prayer - Specific Scripture Passages

**Mt. 7:21** - [Jesus speaking] “Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

**Explanation & Decision:** It is possible for people to say to Jesus, “Lord, Lord,” without his being physically present, thus qualifying as prayer. In fact, most of the people Jesus is referring to would not have had the opportunity to talk with him when he was in a human body. However, the context of this passage makes it unclear whether 1) they are saying so at the Judgment seat of Christ, or 2) they are speaking to Jesus in person when he was walking the earth. Even though these are valid considerations, the principle of praying amiss in this passage is so powerful that it should not be overlooked. **INCLUDED**

**Mk. 10:16** - And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

**Explanation & Decision:** Since Scripture makes it clear that it is possible for people to bless one another without talking to God (see Genesis 14:19-20 or Genesis 24:60 for example), there is no clear evidence of prayer here. **NOT INCLUDED**

**Jn. 9:31** - We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will.

**Explanation & Decision:** Even though the individual speaking is not an apostle or other spiritual leader, the aspect of talking to God is clear here. **INCLUDED**

**Jn. 14:15-17** - “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

**Explanation & Decision:** The question centers around when Jesus will be asking the Father. If this request were to take place while Jesus was still in his human body, then it would clearly be prayer. However more than likely, based on other Scriptures, this request took place after Jesus had finished his earthly ministry and ascended into heaven. **NOT INCLUDED**

**Ro. 8:33-34** - Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right of God and is also interceding for us.

**Explanation & Decision:** This scripture refers to the present ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven, therefore verbal communication is likely. Even though it is useful to study the ministry of the Son of God in pleading our case, our Lord Jesus Christ is not speaking to the Father who is unseen, as would be appropriate for this study. **NOT INCLUDED**

**I Co. 15:57** - But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Explanation & Decision:** Even though this is a fine line, the apostle Paul here seems to be expressing a thankful heart, rather than actually talking to God. **NOT INCLUDED**

**II Co. 1:20** - For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.

**Explanation & Decision:** Here, the “Amen” is spoken “by us.” More than likely, it is being spoken to the Lord, thus qualifying as prayer. **INCLUDED**

**Pp. 3:1** - Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

**Explanation & Decision:** Since it is possible to rejoice in the Lord by dancing, singing songs of praise, or by other means, this verse does not necessarily refer to prayer. **NOT INCLUDED**

**I Th. 3:11-13** - Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

**Explanation & Decision:** This passage, like several others, starts with the word “may,” followed by a wish or a desire. In such instances, although it is possible to be lifting this wish or desire up to the Lord in prayer, more than likely the author is just sharing a yearning on his heart rather than talking to God. **NOT INCLUDED**

**II Th. 3:18** - The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

**Explanation & Decision:** Even though the apostle Paul here does not use the word “may” to start off with this wish or desire, the principle is the same as if he had. See the explanation under I Th. 3:11-13. **NOT INCLUDED**

**I Tim. 1:17** - Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

**Explanation & Decision:** Was the apostle Paul talking to the Lord in this verse? It seems primarily to be a statement of what he feels is appropriate, rather than his actually talking to God. **NOT INCLUDED**

**I Tim. 5:22** - Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

**Explanation & Decision:** In Scripture, the laying on of hands is not always necessarily accompanied by prayer (it could be accompanied by speaking a blessing, for example). **NOT INCLUDED**

**Heb. 12:17** - Afterward, as you know, when he [Esau] wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

**Explanation & Decision:** If it had been written that “he sought God with tears,” that would have been a different story. **NOT INCLUDED**

**I Pt. 2:23** - When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

**Explanation & Decision:** Jesus' entrusting himself to the Father in this verse primarily seems to be an attitude of the heart, rather than talking to God. **NOT INCLUDED**

## Text of Prayers in Blue - Specific Scripture Passages

**Mt. 6:9-13** - "This is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.'"

**Explanation & Decision:** This passage of Scripture seems to be primarily a teaching, rather than an actual prayer. In other words, Jesus here seems to be instructing his disciples rather than talking to God the Father. **NOT IN BLUE**

**Ro. 10:1** - Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

**Explanation & Decision:** This passage seems to reveal, primarily, the writer's heart's desire, and therefore the emphasis is not upon the words that were used in speaking to God. **NOT IN BLUE**

**I Co. 14:16-17** - If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say “Amen” to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

**Explanation & Decision:** “Amen” means “so be it,” which would mainly indicate agreement with the speaker. However, because the context is clearly prayer, it seems likely that the “Amen” really is being spoken to God. ***IN BLUE***

**Eph. 6:19-20** - Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

**Explanation & Decision:** These are primarily requests being made by Paul to the Ephesians, not prayers unto God at the time of their being written. ***NOT IN BLUE***

**Col. 1:9** - For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

**Explanation & Decision:** This is primarily a report of what has been prayed, rather than a text of what has been prayed. ***NOT IN BLUE*** (This also applies to passages like Col. 4:12-13 and Jas. 5:17-18)

**Col. 1:10-12** - And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

**Explanation & Decision:** This passage of Scripture mainly gives the reason for the prayer, not the words that were being used in talking to the Lord. ***NOT IN BLUE***