



Defining Prayer



What is prayer in the Bible?

Prayer in the Bible is how believers of God talk to him.

It's how they make their praise and requests known.

The Scriptures are filled with beautiful examples of people crying out to God and asking for his strength, guidance, healing and more.

As a Christian, I can learn from the prayers in the Bible.

They can encourage me, as I read answered prayers and give me hope that God truly does hear my prayers.

This leads to what is the purpose of prayer is.

If we don't understand the purpose of prayer in the Bible, how can we understand the purpose of prayer in our own life?

By understanding how prayer is used in the Bible, you can better understand why Christians pray and what exactly they pray for.

The Purpose of Prayer for Christians

The purpose of prayer in the Bible is to make your praise or request known to God.

Through prayer, men and women of God were able to ask Him for deliverance, mercy, healing, and miracles.

The reason Christians pray today is for the same reasons why people prayed in the Bible:

To speak to God and ask for healing, forgiveness, and direction.

Praying is how Christians grow a deeper relationship with Christ and how they know the direction he wants their life to go in.

Jeremiah 33:3 New International Version

3 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

I have confidence that God hears what I pray and I hope these Biblical examples of prayer will encourage you to believe that God hears what you speak to Him when you pray!

5 Examples of Prayer in Scripture

As we read stories about how people in the Bible prayed, we can be reminded that God longs for us to pray to Him so that He may answer us.

Abraham's Prayer for Sodom & Gomorrah

The story of Abraham pleading on behalf of Sodom:

Genesis 18:16-33 (NIV):

Abraham Pleads for Sodom

16 When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way.

17 Then the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"

18 Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.[c]

19 For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

20 Then the Lord said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous

21 that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.”

22 The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the Lord.^[d]

23 Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare^[e] the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it?

25 Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

26 The Lord said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

27 Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes,

28 what if the number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five people?”

“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”

29 Once again he spoke to him, “What if only forty are found there?”

He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”

30 Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if only thirty can be found there?”

He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”

31 Abraham said, “Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord, what if only twenty can be found there?”

He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”

32 Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?”

He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”

33 When the Lord had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and Abraham returned home.

Abraham “ The Negotiating,” with our Lord

Sodom and Gomorrah were two cities filled with wickedness, sexual immorality: rape, homosexuality, and premarital intercourse.

These people lived without any regard for the law.

On the other hand, Abraham was a man of God, therefore, God told him about his plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because of their exceedingly grave sins.

Abraham replied with a request for mercy, he said, ““Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?”

Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike.

Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?””

Abraham asks God another question, would he destroy Sodom and Gomorrah if he found 50 righteous people within the cities?

Graciously, God says for the sake of 50 righteous people, he would spare the cities.

But, Abraham was not done with his request for mercy, he goes on to ask what if there were 45 people, then 40, what about 30, and all the way down to ten people.

Again, God declares he would not destroy the city if ten righteous people can be found.

God did not find ten people within Sodom and Gomorrah who were righteous.

Genesis 19:23-25 New International Version

23 The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.

24 Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven;

25 And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.



Abraham's prayer for mercy is powerful because he easily could have shrugged off the people within Sodom and Gomorrah and assume they are all wicked in God's eyes.

On the contrary, he cries out to God asking him to spare the city if there are just ten people who are righteous.

This story taught me that I can speak daring prayers while asking for God to show mercy.

Often times, we like to stay comfortable with what we pray, but stories like this one show us that we can pray boldly knowing God is just and will do what is right!

Jacob's Prayer for Deliverance

The story of Jacob asking for deliverance



Genesis 39:9-12 New International Version

9 No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

10 And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

11 One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.

12 She caught him by his cloak and said, “Come to bed with me!” But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

He was about to meet with his brother, Esau, and was fearful.

You see, Jacob had taken Esau’s blessing years ago and believed his brother would kill him.

In the midst of his fear he prayed to the Lord saying, “Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children.

But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’”

When Jacob finally reunites with Esau, he is not killed, instead, they both embrace each other and wept.

Jacob’s prayer was answered. Instead of Esau acting out in hatred and anger, he chose to love his brother and let go of the past!

In the end, Esau blesses Jacob by giving him some of his men.

This story of prayer and redemption is moving because we see first hand how afraid Jacob was to being blessed by the very man he feared!

I am blessed by this story and knowing that God hears our prayers even when we are afraid.

Moses' Prayer for Mercy



Exodus 32 New International Version

The Golden Calf

32 When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods^[a] who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”

2 Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” **3** So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. **4** He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods,^[b] Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.” **6** So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

7 Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. 8 They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

9 “I have seen these people,” the Lord said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people. 10 Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

11 But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. “Lord,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. 13 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” 14 Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

15 Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. 16 The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

17 When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, “There is the sound of war in the camp.”

18 Moses replied:

“It is not the sound of victory,
it is not the sound of defeat;
it is the sound of singing that I hear.”

19 When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. 20 And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

21 He said to Aaron, “What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?”

22 “Do not be angry, my lord,” Aaron answered. “You know how prone these people are to evil. 23 They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’ 24 So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

25 Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. 26 So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.” And all the Levites rallied to him.

27 Then he said to them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’” 28 The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. 29 Then Moses said, “You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day.”

30 The next day Moses said to the people, “You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

31 So Moses went back to the Lord and said, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold.

32 But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”

33 The Lord replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. 34 Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

35 And the Lord struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the calf Aaron had made.

Highlights of this Scenario:

Moses was on a mountain talking with God while the Israelites were making a golden calf to worship and have as an idol.

God spoke to Moses that his anger burned against the Israelites because of their sin.

Moses prayed back and said, “Lord, why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?

Why should the Egyptians say, “It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?”

Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, to whom you swore by your own-self:

11 But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. “Lord,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?

12 Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people.

13 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’”

14 Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.



After Moses left the mountain he found the Israelites dancing and worshipping the calf, therefore, God struck them with a plague.

Moses' prayer for mercy shows me that I can pray for people around me who are living in sin.

I can ask God to reveal Himself to them and have mercy on them while they are living far from Him!

Even though God couldn't have mercy on the Israelites because of their egregious sins, he still heard what Moses prayed.

Hannah's Prayer for a Son



The story of Hannah asking the Lord for a son comes from 1 Samuel.

Since Hannah was of old age and had yet to conceive a son, she was in deep distress and she cried out to God saying, “O Lord of Heaven’s Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you.

1 Samuel 1:11 New International Version

11 And she made a vow, saying, “Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant’s misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.”

Her prayer was spoken outside of the temple and the Priest Eli heard her and thought she was drunk.

She told him she was not drunk but had been calling out to God in her distress and sorrow.

1 Samuel 1:17 New International Version

17 Eli answered, “Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him.”

God heard her prayer and gave her a son who she named Samuel and after he was weaned she brought him back to the temple.

She found Eli and said to him, “I asked the Lord to give me this boy, and he has granted my request.

1 Samuel 1:27-28 New International Version

27 I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. 28 So now I give him to the Lord. For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord.” And he worshiped the Lord there.

The beauty of this story is that God heard Hannah in her time of great anguish and she conceived a baby boy.

Hannah held true to her word and gave up her son to serve with Eli in the temple.

I learned from this story that God hears my prayers when I am in a valley when I see a no way out I can still pray to God during this time and rest in the truth that He hears me.

As a young adult who has grown up in the church my whole life, I have been around people who pray and have taught me the importance of prayer.

I know that Christians pray to communicate with God, but recently, I wanted to dive deeper into the meaning of prayer in the Bible.

I grew a desire to truly understand what the Scriptures say about prayer and what I can learn from these prayers.

Jeremiah 33:3 New International Version



3 ‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’

I learned from this story that God hears my prayers when I am in a valley when I see a no way out I can still pray to God during this time and rest in the truth that He hears me.



Friends, Please remember that you can't buy your way into Heaven, or out of Hell.

Rev. Jesus Del Rio, Ed