

Prayer as Conversation with God as Seen in Scripture

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Chuck Swindoll writes – “prayer is one’s personal conversation with the Almighty that includes both expressing our concerns and listening for his response.” (p.104 So You Want to be Like Christ)

The following verses are examples of conversation with the Almighty in the context of prayer that are seen in the Bible. Excluded from this list are the many verses that could be added that would demonstrate conversation with the Almighty that takes place in the context of divinely inspired visions where there is not explicit wording to indicate that the person was in prayer prior to the vision.

There is no need to read an “audible” conversation into these accounts, as God is perfectly able to communicate through the still small voice of the Holy Spirit; however, since the voice of God can be manifested audibly neither can that be ruled out.

1. Ex. 32:31-33

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.” NIV

2. Ex. 34:8-10

8 Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshipped. 9 “O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes,” he said, “then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.” 10 Then the LORD said: “I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you.” NIV

3. Ex. 17:4-5

4 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.” 5 The LORD answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.” NIV

4. Num. 14:13-22

13 Moses said to the LORD, “Then the Egyptians will hear about it! By your power you brought these people up from among them. 14 And they will tell the inhabitants of this

land about it. They have already heard that you, O LORD, are with these people and that you, O LORD, have been seen face to face, that your cloud stays over them, and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. 15 If you put these people to death all at one time, the nations who have heard this report about you will say, 16 ‘The LORD was not able to bring these people into the land he promised them on oath; so he slaughtered them in the desert.’

17 “Now may the Lord’s strength be displayed, just as you have declared: 18 ‘The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.’ 19 In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now.” 20 The LORD replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. 21 Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, 22 not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times.” NIV

5. Num. 27:15-18

15 Moses said to the LORD, 16 “May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community 17 to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.” 18 So the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. NIV

6. Deut. 9:25-10:1

25 I lay prostrate before the LORD those forty days and forty nights because the LORD had said he would destroy you. 26 I prayed to the LORD and said, “O Sovereign LORD, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 27 Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin. 28 Otherwise, the country from which you brought us will say, ‘Because the LORD was not able to take them into the land he had promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the desert.’ 29 But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm.” 10:1 At that time the LORD said to me, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones and come up to me on the mountain. Also make a wooden chest.” NIV

7. 1 Kings 3:7-12

7 “Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. 8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of

yours?” 10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 11 So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, 12 I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.” NIV

8. Amos 7:2-3

2 When they had stripped the land clean, I cried out, “Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!” 3 So the LORD relented. “This will not happen,” the LORD said. NIV

10. Josh. 7:6-11

6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads. 7 And Joshua said, “Ah, Sovereign LORD, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan! 8 O Lord, what can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies? 9 The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?”

10 The LORD said to Joshua, “Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? 11 Israel has sinned; they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep.” NIV

11. Ezek. 11:13-15

13 Now as I was prophesying, Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. Then I fell facedown and cried out in a loud voice, “Ah, Sovereign LORD! Will you completely destroy the remnant of Israel?” 14 The word of the LORD came to me: 15 “Son of man, your brothers—your brothers who are your blood relatives and the whole house of Israel—are those of whom the people of Jerusalem have said, ‘They are far away from the LORD; this land was given to us as our possession.’” NIV

12. Acts 10:9-14

9 About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. 10 He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. 11 He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” 14 “Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” NIV

13. Acts 22:17-18

17 “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell in to a trance 18 and saw the Lord speaking. ‘Quick!’ he said to me. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ NIV

14. 2 Cor. 12:7-9

7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” NIV

From these biblical examples, the many more that are like them and my own experience of being led by the Lord in decision making I conclude that God does respond to the prayers of his people outside of the text of scripture itself. It may be through an impression laid on the heart of an individual or in some rare cases a vision or an audible voice. Indeed there are no restrictions of what God can do.

It must be affirmed however, that the guidance that God will give to an individual will never contradict the teaching of scripture nor should we consider guidance that comes to an individual from the Lord on the level of God’s revelation, the Bible.

2015 addition:

How does this relate to the currently popular “Jesus Calling” devotional book?

Sarah Young in her book “Jesus Calling” indicates that the words written are Jesus’ words to her and through her to the reader. It may be that this is a simple literary device on her part meant to enhance the reader’s experience of the material. However, we must resist the idea that her words are literally the words of Jesus. We must understand her book to be the same as we would understand any Christian book or sermon. That is, we believe that ultimately God is the source behind a biblical sermon or book, but the words are that of the author or preacher. The listener or reader then must be like the Berean Christians who examined what they heard to make sure it conformed to the teachings of scripture.

While the devotional content of Jesus Calling may be excellent, we caution that to represent the very words of any source other than the Bible as the very words of God gives the writing an air of authority that must be questioned. We would ask participants

here at Quail Lakes Baptist Church to keep this perspective if they include Jesus Calling as a portion of their devotional reading.