

# *An Exercise for Studying Jesus' Inferred Prayers*

by  
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Questions for Individual and Group Use

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When Jesus' prayers are actually stated in the Bible, we know exactly what he was praying for. At other times, though, the Bible doesn't record what he said when he prayed.

In those cases, I've found it insightful to study what happened before he prayed, what happened as he prayed, and what happened afterwards. Putting these three things together enables us to draw conclusions about what he prayed. I call the conclusions *inferred prayers*.

Because the gospel writers weren't concerned with time sequence, I used a harmony of the gospels to determine what happened before he prayed and after he prayed. Here are those incidents of praying from which I drew inferences. Study these, and see what you think Jesus prayed in each instance.

### **Jesus prayed at his baptism** (Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-11).

Before this occasion of prayer, Jesus lived in Nazareth of Galilee with his family and worked as a carpenter. Starting at age 12, he went to Jerusalem in Judea for the Passover each year. At age 30, Jesus returned to Judea when the ministry of John the Baptist was in full bloom.

Why did Jesus go? (Matthew 3:13)

As Jesus was being baptized, what did he do? (Luke 3:21).

In response to his praying, what three things happened? (Luke 3:21-22, Matthew 3:16-17)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What does heaven opening mean? Did the sky really part?

In what form did the Holy Spirit descend? (Luke 3:22a)

What was the significance of the words Jesus heard from heaven? (Luke 3:22b) What would they have meant to you?

What did Jesus begin doing after his baptism? (Luke 3:23a)

How was this a major change from his earlier life?

When you put together Jesus' leaving home and beginning his ministry with heaven opening, the Spirit empowering him, and God's words of encouragement, what might Jesus have been needing as he prayed? For what was he seeking from God?

**Jesus prayed when his popularity swelled in Capernaum** (Mark 1:35-39, Luke 4:42-44).

The first year of Jesus' ministry was mostly spent in Judea where John the Baptist preached and baptized. After John was put in prison, Jesus returned to Galilee (Mark 1:14). He went home to Nazareth but was rejected there (Luke 4:16-31) so he went to Capernaum (Matthew 4:12-13).

At Capernaum, what did Jesus do that ignited his popularity?

Mark 1:21-22

Mark 1:23-28

Mark 1:29-31

At the end of that amazing Sabbath day, what did the people do? (Mark 1:32-34)

What did Jesus do the next morning? (Mark 1:35) Why did he need a solitary place for this?

After he prayed, what did Jesus say to those looking for him? (Mark 1:36-38)

After that encounter, where did Jesus go? (Mark 1:39, Matthew 4:23-25)

When you put together the press of the crowd, their wants and needs, Jesus' escape to a solitary place, and a change in ministry location, what is the inferred prayer?

**Jesus prayed after healing a leper** (Luke 5:12-16).

When Jesus was in a city, what kind of person approached him? (Luke 5:12)

What did this person want from Jesus? (Luke 5:12c).

What effect did the news of a man with a serious case of leprosy being healed have on Jesus' ministry? (Luke 5:15).

In reaction to the crowds surrounding him, what did Jesus do? (Luke 5:16)

Where did he go to pray? (Luke 5:16)

Does where he prayed have anything to do with what he might have been praying about?

What kind of work did Jesus engage in after he prayed? (Luke 5:17-26, Mark 2:1-12).

Was this work different from the kind of work he was doing before he prayed?

If the work was similar, what need then might Jesus have been expressing when he prayed?

**Jesus prayed when he was criticized** (Luke 6:12-16 and Mark 3:13-19).

As Jesus' popularity grew, a backlash of opposition developed against him.

Why were the religious leaders critical of Jesus? (Luke 6:1-11, Mark 3:1-6)

When Jesus continued to break the Sabbath rules, what was the reaction of the religious leaders?  
(Luke 6:11, Mark 3:6)

What might their intense reaction remind Jesus about the length of his ministry?

What action did Jesus take? (Luke 6:12)

What did Jesus do following his prayer? (Luke 6:13-16)

During that long night on the mountain, what must Jesus have been praying about?

**Jesus prayed following the feeding of the 5000** (Mark 6:45-46, Matthew 14:22-23, John 6:14-15).

When the disciples returned from . . . , what did Jesus invite them to do? (Mark 6:30-31)

Why did he want them to do this? (Mark 6:31)

How did the people respond to the attempt of Jesus and his disciples trying to get away? (Mark 6:32-34)

How did Jesus respond to the crowd? (Mark 6:34)

What need arose among the people? (Mark 6:35-38)

What miraculous act did Jesus perform? (Mark 6:39-44)

As a result of this miracle, how did the people see Jesus? What did they plan to do about it? (John 6:14-15).

How did Jesus response to their desire to make Jesus king? (Mark 6:45-46, Matthew 14:23, John 6:15).

What sight interrupted his praying? (Mark 6:47-50, John 6:16-21, Matthew 14:24-31).

After Jesus rescued the disciples and arrived at Gennesaret, who was there waiting for him?

(Mark 6:53-56, Matthew 14:34-36).

Specifically what Jesus might have been praying is hard to infer in this situation because there is little contrast between what happened before he prayed and what happened afterwards. Rather a series of incidents are involved: the desire of the people to make him king, their pursuit of him and the needs of the disciples. In light of these things, what do you think Jesus was praying about when he departed to a mountain to pray?

**Jesus prayed before questioning the apostles about his identity** (Matthew 16:13-20, Mark 8:27-30, and Luke 9:18-21).

By this time Jesus was well into the last year of his ministry. Many followers had drifted away. They were disappointed that Jesus was not leading them toward a Jewish superstate. Opposition from the religious leaders had grown stronger, and Jesus was well aware of it.

When the Pharisees argued with Jesus and tried to trap him, what was his response? (Mark 8:11-

12) What might his deep groan or sigh indicate about His feelings?

Had those who traveled with Jesus caught on to who he really was (Matthew 16:5-12, Mark 8:14-21)? What emotion do you detect in Jesus' words to them?

What did Jesus do in response to his feelings? (Luke 9:18)

What questions did Jesus ask his followers after he prayed? (Luke 9:18-20, Matthew 16:13-20)

What was Peter's answer?

What did Jesus say to Peter? What emotion do you hear in his words? (Matthew 16:17-19)

What does the change in Jesus' emotions infer about what he prayed?

**Jesus prayed after a hard week of teaching** (Luke 9:28-36, Matthew 17:1-8, Mark 9:2-8).

Once Jesus talked with the disciples about who he was and praised Peter's response, what did he begin to teach his disciples? (Mark 8:31, Matthew 16:21, and Luke 9:22).

What was Peter's response to Jesus' teaching about what was ahead? (Mark 8:31-33, Matthew 16:22).

What was Jesus' response to Peter? (Mark 8:33, Matthew 16:23).

What hard teachings did Jesus then have for his followers? (Mark 8:34-9:1, Matthew 16:24-28, and Luke 9:23-27).

After a week of hard teaching, what might have prompted Jesus to head for a mountain to pray?

Who did he take with him? (Luke 9:28)

What changed occurred in his countenance as he prayed? (Luke 9:29a)

What happened to his raiment (clothes)? (Luke 9:29b)

Who appeared to him? What did they talk with him about? (Luke 9:30-31)

What audible words did Jesus hear God say? (Luke 9:35)

Would these things be encouraging to Jesus or discouraging or have no effect?

This experience on the mountain is often referred to as the "mount of transfiguration." Who was transfigured?

What does Jesus' hard teaching, the reaction of Peter, the supernatural manifestations, and God's audible words indicate about what Jesus might have been praying?

**Jesus prayed one day in a certain place** (Luke 11:1-13).

Luke 10 describes some of the things that were happening in Jesus' ministry: the sending out of the 72, pronouncing woes on unbelieving towns, the return of the 72, the telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and his visit with Martha and Mary. In other words, work as usual which is

why the King James Version uses the phrase “it came to pass” (Luke 11:1) to introduce Jesus’ praying once again. As he was doing what God called him to do, there was an observant need that called for prayer.

Where was Jesus when he prayed? (Luke 11:1)

When Jesus finished praying, what did one of his disciples ask him? (Luke 11:1)

Does this request mean that the disciples didn’t know how to pray or that they might be seeking some particular kind of prayer? (Luke 11:1b)

Jesus’ answer to the disciple’s request involved three parts. What were those three parts?

- (a) Luke 11:2-4
- (b) Luke 11:5-10
- (c) Luke 11:11-13

Jesus taught them a model prayer, shared a story, and presented an analogy. With these three things, what was he trying to teach the disciples about prayer?

When you put together the nature of Jesus’ ministry, where he was, the disciple’s request, and Jesus’ answer, what might he have been praying about in a certain place?

## **Conclusion**

Studying Jesus’ inferred prayers and what they mean will enhance your understanding of Jesus and give you a fuller picture of his prayer life. You will better understand what his life on earth was like, and you will see why he needed to pray. This knowledge should be an encouragement to you in your own prayer life. You might want to compare the insights you gained through his inferred prayers with Poinsett’s conclusions in her books about his prayer life:

*Reaching Heaven: Discovering the Cornerstones of Jesus’ Prayer Life,*

*Not My Will But Thine: Coming to Terms with Things You Can’t Change,*

*When Jesus Prayed: His Prayer Life as an Encouragement for Our Praying, and*

*Not My Will: Finding Peace with Things You Can’t Change.*