

Where Can I find Immanuel Prayer in the Bible?

Jessica Handy

Alive & Well, Inc.

Revised July 2018

Where can I find Immanuel Prayer in the Bible? This is an excellent question, and one I am asked often. I appreciate being asked this question because it's important to evaluate everything we do in light of God's Word. When we do, we are putting ourselves under God's authority and aligning ourselves with the truth.

Methods of Interpretation

Before I answer the question directly, however, I want to address what may be a significant assumption underlying the question. It's the assumption of a particular method for interpreting the Bible. When people ask where to find Immanuel Prayer in the Bible, they are usually expecting an answer that comes from within their own interpretive method. That's not a wrong thing to hope for, but if the person asking and the person answering are using different methods of interpretation, they will likely misunderstand each other and create confusion rather than clarity. So I want to start by addressing interpretive methods.

Historically, the Church has recognized a range of scripture interpretation methods as falling within acceptable (orthodox) Christian faith and practice. On the conservative end of the spectrum falls more literal interpretation. Individuals, churches, and denominations that settle furthest on this end of the spectrum include those who believe that everything in the Bible is strictly literal (e.g., seven days of creation are literally seven twenty-four hour periods of time) and that we should do nothing unless we can find it in scripture (e.g., organ music cannot be used in church because the Bible never mentions organs).

On the other end of the spectrum falls the more symbolic interpretation. Individuals, churches, and denominations that settle furthest on this end of the spectrum include those who believe that large sections of the Bible are symbolic or parabolic (e.g., Adam, Eve, the serpent, the fruit, and the garden are symbols of a truth God wants to communicate rather than actual historical figures) and that scripture must be constantly reinterpreted in light of contemporary cultural realities (e.g., though Jesus' inclusion of women seems minimal to us, it was actually radical for his day, so we should continue the radical trajectory of pushing the boundaries of women's roles in society and the church).

To add concrete examples, the Church of Christ tends toward the literal end of the spectrum, and the Episcopal Church toward the symbolic end, yet they are both generally accepted as part of the global, historical Christian Church.

Given this framework, someone from the Church of Christ who is asking "Where can I find Immanuel Prayer in the Bible?" is likely seeking a very specific example of a Biblical figure (ideally Jesus or one of the apostles) using the same kind of Immanuel Prayer process we use today and seeing good fruit result from it (more people being saved, turning away from sin, etc.). If someone from the Episcopal Church asks "Where I can find Immanuel Prayer in the Bible?" they are probably seeking a different kind of response. They want to know in a much more general way whether Immanuel Prayer helps people love God and others more. Because different

people are seeking such different things when they ask, it is difficult to answer this question outside of a personal conversation.

That said, I will attempt to address a response to each end of the spectrum, and to those who land somewhere in the middle. Most people will find all three parts of my response valuable, but feel free to skip ahead to the part you're most interested in.

Response to the More Literal Interpreter: Immanuel Techniques

Immanuel Prayer does not show up in the Bible in exactly Dr. Lehman's techniques, or format, in its entirety. I invite you, however, to consider three things before dismissing Immanuel Prayer as unbiblical:

- 1. There *are* specific examples of God and Jesus modeling various *elements* of the Immanuel Prayer process.** The following two examples are not an exhaustive list, but they represent the way we can find elements of the Immanuel format, or techniques, in the Bible:

One key element of Immanuel Prayer is that we seek God's perspective on our own lives and our personal history. As we come to see our lives the way God sees them, we gain a new understanding of his role in our lives, we grow in knowledge of the truth, we discover that past events that caused us pain no longer hurt in the same way, and we are freed to forgive and move forward in a new level of freedom and Christ-like character.

Joseph experienced these same effects when he gained God's perspective on his past. Joseph must have been hurt when his brothers mocked his dreams, not to mention the physical and emotional pain when they sold him into slavery. He was betrayed by his own brothers and lost his family, his home, and his comfortable role as the beloved son. In exchange, he was falsely accused, imprisoned, and sent before Pharaoh with his life on the line.

We don't know for sure what kind of mountaintops and valleys Joseph experienced in his faith during those years in Egypt, but certainly he had to come to grips with his past in some way. Did he simply ignore it, putting it behind him as if it had no impact? No. We can tell from his tearful response to his brothers that he remembered and was emotionally moved by his history with them. But – amazingly – his tears were not an expression of anger, despair, grief, or bitterness. Rather, they were tears of love and redemption. Why? He says to them, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Gen 50:20). Somehow during those years he had come to see his life the way God saw it, and that gave meaning and purpose to his pain. He recognized and acknowledged the harm they caused, but because he saw God's redemptive purposes in it, he was able to respond with forgiveness.

In fact, Joseph goes beyond forgiveness to reassurance, kindness, and generosity, telling the same brothers who betrayed him, “So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children” (Gen 50:21). God allowed Joseph to see his own story – and his brothers' stories too – the way God saw them, and the result was redemption and healing: tears of joy and love rather than bitterness; reconciled relationships; peace for his father; and provision for the line of Abraham, God's chosen people. This kind of healing and redemption is what we

seek from God in Immanuel Prayer. We ask for his perspective on our lives, and we consistently see this kind of fruit. (For more about the fruit of Immanuel Prayer, see the section titled “Response to the More Symbolic Interpreter” below.)

Jesus models a second element of Immanuel Prayer when he responds to Peter’s denials. When we use Immanuel Prayer specifically in order to find healing, we have a two-fold focus: on a memory when we sensed God with us in a caring way, and on a memory when we had a hurtful experience that caused us pain. When we are able to focus on both of these experiences at once, we find that God often allows us to begin to see his presence in the hurtful experience just like we see it in the positive experience. We begin to see the hurtful experience from his perspective, and to experience the same kind of healing and redemption that Joseph experienced.

Jesus models this two-fold focus when he restores Peter. In the early morning before the cock crowed, Peter denied Jesus three times. He did so while warming himself at a charcoal fire just outside the room where Jesus was being questioned (John 18:15-27).

When the time comes for Peter’s restoration, Jesus greets Peter by providing a miraculous catch of fish on the Sea of Galilee. This would have brought back a flood of memories for Peter, not least the memory of another miraculous catch of fish just before Jesus called him the first time (Lk 5:1-11).

So Jesus starts with a positive memory. But he has also arrived in the early morning and built a charcoal fire on the beach (John 21:9). The description “charcoal fire” is only used two times in all of scripture – at Peter’s denial and at his restoration – so it is surely significant. On the beach, Jesus intentionally creates a setting that will remind Peter not only of his original call to follow Jesus, but also of that devastating moment of denial. Instead of “putting the past behind him” as if it never happened, Jesus directly addresses the hurt Peter has caused to Jesus and to himself. Jesus then invites Peter back into ministry three times, once for each denial.

Thus Jesus brings up the past hurtful memory, but he does so for the sake of redemption and he does so in the context of another, positive memory. In this way he helps Peter see his past sin and shame in the redemptive way Jesus sees it. The denials really happened, and that can’t be changed. But Peter has been called to ministry and is still called. He need no longer suffer in shame, for he is still loved, included, and trusted to care for Jesus’ “sheep.” Again, this is the kind of remembering, re-seeing (seeing afresh through God’s eyes), and redemption that God models for us in scripture and that we experience in Immanuel Prayer.

- 2. Even though it is not in the Bible exactly in the form Dr. Lehman has created, scripture is full of verses and general principles that support the use of Immanuel Prayer.**

We live in a world very different from the world of Jesus' day, and we are often involved with things the Bible doesn't address directly. But we still have to decide whether to surf the internet, invest in the stock market, use contraceptives, or allow guitars in church services. Because we don't find those things directly addressed in the Bible, the only method we have for deciding whether these things are acceptable is to look for similar or parallel things (i.e., a lyre instead of a guitar) or general biblical principles (i.e., what does God say about the role of music in culture, in worship, and in its impact on our minds, hearts, and souls).

We can use a similar approach for Immanuel Prayer that we do for these other things that aren't directly addressed in the Bible. Even though it is not in the Bible exactly in the form Dr. Lehman has created, scripture is full of verses and general principles that support the use of Immanuel Prayer. I will address these verse and principles in "Response to the Moderate Interpreter: Biblical Principles" below.

3. **Immanuel Prayer produces the kind of fruit God desires.** I will provide evidence for this in "Response to the More Symbolic Interpreter: Good Fruit" below.

Response to the Moderate Interpreter: Biblical Principles

Although Immanuel Prayer does not show up in the Bible in exactly Dr. Lehman's format, God and Jesus model some very specific elements of it. I offered two examples of this in "Response to the More Literal Interpreter: Immanuel Techniques" above.

Perhaps more helpful for the moderate than specific elements of the Immanuel Prayer process, however, are Bible passages that support the general principles underlying Immanuel Prayer. Even though IP did not exist exactly in its current form in Bible times, Immanuel is rooted in a biblical worldview and built on biblical principles, including:

1. God is always with us
2. God offers us a safe, loving, personal relationship with him.
3. God brings redemption to every aspect of our lives, including the physical, emotional, and social/relational as well as the spiritual.
4. God listens to us and communicates with us in ways we can understand.
5. God calls us to remember and share what he has done, and to give him thanks.
6. God's work always produces "good fruit."

Each of these principles is derived from God's self-revelation in his Word, as we will see next.

1. God is always with us.

Almost the entirety of Psalm 139 describes the way God knows every intimate detail of our lives, summing up his perpetual presence with the lines,

Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;

if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
 If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
 if I settle on the far side of the sea,
 even there your hand will guide me,
 your right hand will hold me fast. (Ps 139:7-10)

Not only does Jesus' name, Immanuel, mean "God with us" (Mt 1:23), but Jesus himself assures us that he will be with us "always, to the very end of the age" (Mt 28:20; see also Mt 18:20 and Jn 14:18, 23). The author of Hebrews also reaffirms God's Old Testament promise, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Heb 13:5; Dt 31:8; Josh 1:5).

2. God offers us a safe, loving, personal relationship with him.

God is not with us for the sake of tracking all our mistakes or making sure we stay in line. Rather, he is with us in love to protect, care for, and guide us - and because he delights in us.

As the Church's creeds affirm, our Triune God exists eternally in loving, personal relationship within himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These three persons perpetually experience and model the joy and self-giving of perfect love.

God also describes his involvement with people in relational terms. He explains it in terms of human relationships that evoke a similar self-giving love, a love that delights in, provides for, and protects the beloved. One human relationship that exemplifies God's love for us is that of a good parent with a precious child. He says through the prophet Hosea,

When Israel was a child, I loved him,
 and out of Egypt I called my son.
 But the more they were called,
 the more they went away from me.
 They sacrificed to the Baals
 and they burned incense to images.
 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
 taking them by the arms;
 but they did not realize
 it was I who healed them.
 I led them with cords of human kindness,
 with ties of love.
 To them I was like one who lifts
 a little child to the cheek,
 and I bent down to feed them. (Hos 11:1-4)

God also describes his relationship with his people as that of a faithful, tender husband with his beloved wife. After he punishes Israel for idolatry, which he likens to adultery, he relents and receives Israel back. He doesn't relent with bitterness but with tenderness and generosity:

Therefore I am now going to allure her;
 I will lead her into the wilderness
 and speak tenderly to her.

There I will give her back her vineyards,
and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
There she will respond as in the days of her youth,
as in the day she came up out of Egypt.
“In that day,” declares the Lord,
“you will call me ‘my husband’
you will no longer call me ‘my master.’” (Hos 2:14-16)

God delights in us (e.g., Zeph 3:14-17). God provides for us (e.g., Mt 6:25-34). God protects us (e.g., Ps 18:1-3). God does not shame us but honors us (e.g., Is 61:7). God assures us that we need not fear him (e.g., 1 Jn 4:18).

God also disciplines us, but it is because he loves us. It does not mean he doesn't want to be with us or that he isn't safe. Rather, he wants to be with us right in the midst of our sin, in order to restore us and train us in right living. His willingness to get dirty, and even to die, from the mess of our sin is the ultimate test of his love and desire for relationship with us. (e.g., Mk 2:15-17; Jn 4:39; Rom 5:6-10; 2 Cor 5:21) (See my blogs ["While we were still sinners"](#) and ["The thing Jesus wants most."](#))

3. God brings redemption to every aspect of our lives, including the physical, emotional, and social/relational as well as the spiritual.

Jesus inaugurates his own ministry by reading from Isaiah 61, a passage that exemplifies the full scope of salvation that he offers:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (Lk 4:18-19)

Jesus “became flesh” (Jn 1:14) in order to redeem flesh. He took on a physical body because he wanted to redeem the physical as well as the spiritual. (More on this in my blog ["Taste and see!"](#)) Jesus showed that the forgiveness of sin is intimately linked to physical healing: “Which is easier,” Jesus asked, “to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’” (Mk 2:9; see also Ps 103:2-3). Forgiveness of sin is also linked to relational reconciliation. When Jesus pinpointed her relational brokenness, the woman at the well not only acknowledged Jesus as Messiah but in the process was transformed from the outcast to the evangelist for her whole village (Jn 2).

Like “shalom” in the Old Testament, the Greek word “sozo” (salvation) in the New Testament is used to describe a return to wholeness in all of its aspects – not only salvation from sin, but salvation from suffering, punishment, brokenness, sickness, demonization, and destruction. For example, Luke uses the word “sozo” to describe Jesus’ death on the cross, and he also uses it to describe all of the following:

- Jesus telling Zacchaeus that “the Son of Man has come to seek and *save* the lost.”

- Jesus teaching that those who seek to *save* their lives will lose them, and those who lose them shall *save* them. (Lk 17:33)
- Onlookers mocking Jesus on the cross, saying “*save yourself!*” (Lk 23:37, 39)
- *Physical healing* of the woman with the flow of blood. (Lk 8:48)
- *Deliverance/restoration* of the Gerasene demoniac. (Lk 8:36)

4. God listens to us and communicates with us in ways we can understand.

The Bible is God’s ultimate communication tool, and the standard by which we test all other communication from him. But it is clear from scripture that he expects ongoing, interactive conversation with his people.

The Old and New Testaments both distinguish between God and idols. One of the most common complaints about idols is that they “know nothing,” “cannot see,” and “cannot understand” (Is 44:18). They are mute (1 Cor 12:2). The implication, of course, is that God is not like that. Rather, he knows, sees, understands, and speaks.

The entire story of the boy Samuel revolves around the Lord speaking specifically *to* Samuel as well as *through* Samuel to the Israelites (e.g., 1 Sam 3:8-11, 19-21). Noah and Abraham also conversed back and forth with God (Gen 6; 18), and early church leaders asked for and received input from the Lord (Acts 4:23-31; 9:27; 10; 11:27-28; 13:2; 16:9-10; 21:10-14). Other specific examples from the Bible are too numerous to list here.

Lest we think communication with God is only for spiritual giants, the general principle of God speaking to his people is affirmed throughout the scriptures, including these verses:

People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. (Isaiah 30:19)

I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. (Isaiah 65:19, 24)

The gatekeeper opens the gate for [the shepherd], and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. (Jn 10:3-4)

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. (Jn 16:13-14)

5. God calls us to intentionally remember and share what he has done, and to give him thanks.

The verses below are self-explanatory and represent a perpetual theme in God's dealings with people. (For more on the role of thanksgiving in Immanuel Prayer, see my discussion post ["Enter His gates with thanksgiving."](#))

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. (Dt 4:9)

Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you. (Dt 32:7)

Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, and said to them, “Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, ‘What do these stones mean?’ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.” (Josh 4:4-7)

Let this be written for a future generation, that a people not yet created may praise the LORD. (Ps 102:18)

Those who sacrifice thank offerings honor me. (Ps 50:22)

Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of his works with songs of joy. (Ps 107:22)

Yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted, inhabited by neither people nor animals, there will be heard once more the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord, saying, “Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good; his love endures forever.” (Jer 33:10-12)

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (Jas 1:17)

6. God’s work always produces “good fruit.”

I will address this last point in “Response to the More Symbolic Interpreter: Good Fruit” below, identifying what “good fruit” means and giving examples of good fruit produced by Immanuel Prayer.

Response to the More Symbolic Interpreter: Good Fruit

Although Immanuel Prayer does not show up in the Bible in exactly Dr. Lehman’s format in its entirety, God and Jesus model some very specific elements of it. I offered two examples of this in “Response to the More Literal Interpreter: Immanuel Techniques” above. Then, in “Response to the Moderate Interpreter: Biblical Principles,” I proceeded to identify a set of biblical principles on which Immanuel Prayer is built, and to provide biblical evidence for these principles.

Now I turn to the final evidence that Immanuel Prayer is biblical: the fruit it produces. For orthodox Christians, whether literal, moderate, or symbolic interpreters, the fruit (practical results, outflow, or consequences) of a teaching is an essential element of testing whether that teaching is from God. Especially for those on the more symbolic end of the interpretation spectrum, evidence of good fruit is often the most helpful response to the question, “Where can I find Immanuel Prayer in the Bible?” or “Is Immanuel Prayer biblical?”

The “fruit test” is based on Galatians 5:22, which says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control; against such things there is no law.” The fruit of the Spirit aren’t limited to this list in Galatians, however. Additional good fruit identified in other places of scripture include humility, truth, forgiveness, generosity, trust, etc.

So what kind of fruit does Immanuel Prayer produce?

Here are some examples. Each sentence is a hyperlink to the video or discussion post that tells the full story.

- [Muslims and Hindus recognize Jesus, receive his peace and joy, and begin learning to trust him.](#)
- [Howard, a pastor, is freed from his fear of failure and disappointing others into a new delight in ministering out of his true identity.](#)
- [Over time, Cindy discovers that God really does care about her, and she begins to experience more joy in her life.](#)
- [Jim encounters God’s redeeming grace in a powerful way.](#) (The video of Jim sharing his story is partway down our [“What is Immanuel Prayer?” webpage.](#))
- [Because of her experience with Immanuel Prayer principles, Lieza changes the way she disciplines her children, and it turns out to be more positive for everyone.](#)
- [Angela discovers she can not only forgive but also give to someone who has abused her.](#)
- [Jeremy’s prayer life is revitalized as truths he’s believed about God come to life for the first time.](#)
- [After a lifetime of fearing it, Kathryn is no longer afraid to be tickled.](#)

For more stories, check out our [Immanuel Testimonials Discussion Group](#), or read Karl Lehman’s book *The Immanuel Approach for Emotional Healing and for Life*. You can also watch videotaped Immanuel Prayer ministry sessions to watch these kinds of changes happening as people encounter Jesus. View them in our live demo series on Vimeo or by purchasing one or more of Karl Lehman’s live demonstration teaching video series.

Conclusion

As I conclude this response to the question, “Where can I find Immanuel Prayer in the Bible?” let me offer one final caveat. The fruit a *teaching* produces is not always distinguishable from the fruit produced by the *person applying the teaching*. God reminds us, “To the pure all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure” (Ti 1:15). There will always be people who misuse the Bible for their own ends, justifying things like slavery and putting heavy burdens on people like the Pharisees did. Although the Pharisees quoted scripture, they did not produce the fruit of the Spirit.

In the same way, there will always be people who misuse Immanuel Prayer, producing bad fruit or mixed fruit because of their own impurities. In fact, most of us have impurities and therefore our fruit is not wholly good. For example, I am much more compassionate than I was when I started my involvement in Immanuel Prayer many years ago, but I am still not as patient as God wants me to be. **Thankfully, as long as we are willing to admit that we are still in process, Immanuel – the God who is with us – continues to work out our impurities (sin, weaknesses, wounds, false beliefs, etc.) like a refiner of gold.** He often uses Immanuel Prayer to do that very thing our lives, if we are willing to acknowledge and face our own impurities and

offer them to him. Thus, a snapshot of the fruit of Immanuel Prayer in one person's life at one moment, though it may be helpful data, can hardly do justice to the whole process. Rather, the pattern of increasingly good fruit over time is a much better test of whether Immanuel Prayer is truly biblical.

Now may the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with the fruit of the Holy Spirit by the power of the Holy Spirit!

Jessie+

Additional Resources

Here are two other longer and more detailed resources on Immanuel Prayer and the Bible:

1. Karl Lehman himself has written a 30-page chapter of his book [*The Immanuel Approach: For Healing and for Life*](#) about the biblical foundation for Immanuel Prayer, the last third of the chapter addressing specific objections.
2. Patti Velotta's book, [*Immanuel: A Practicum*](#), also includes over 130 pages of Bible verses and passages about specific topics and questions related to Immanuel Prayer and whether it is biblical. I have not used these books as source material for my own writing, but their work both overlaps with my observations and extends them further.