

A Snapshot of Heaven on Earth (Part 4)

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon explores the characteristics of the early church as a model for contemporary Christian community and practice.

Duration: 43:34

Scripture: Psalm 119:11, Matthew 6:33, Acts 2:38-47, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 10:25

Topics: "Heaven"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the early church's devotion to the apostles' teaching and fellowship. He highlights the significance of verbal learning in the absence of written scriptures. The speaker also addresses the need for encouragement and support within the church, using the example of a woman facing a difficult situation. The sermon concludes with a discussion on the power of the Word of God and the impact it can have on individuals and the church as a whole.

Transcript

We started a month or so ago, a study in the book of Acts. And we heard in the first chapter how Jesus promised that power would be poured out on the disciples. They should go and wait in Jerusalem.

And then we've studied how the Holy Spirit descended on them and the church was born. And we studied last week, we had a sermon on a sermon, didn't we? It was Peter's first sermon of all people, Peter. And it was the first Christian sermon, the first presentation of the gospel, we studied that.

What was its content? And anybody remember Acts 2.38? Repent and be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. So we learned a lot of interesting things. And now we come to a short passage, which I wanna preach by the grace of God differently than I've preached in the past.

This is a passage that I've talked about a lot in my life, studied a lot. It's a snapshot of heaven on earth. It's the first picture that we have of how the Christian church functioned and what the life of it looked like.

Now this was a problem we said from the very beginning, isn't it, when we studied the book of Acts? Because for example, all the visitors that we have in the balcony and downstairs that are visiting for the first time, if you talk to them, probably they all have their own church experience. They're Nazarene, they're Baptist, they're Assembly of God, they're Presbyterian, they're Lutheran, they're whatever,

Salvation Army. And because of the strong impression of our experiences, we often define things not by what God intended them to be or as outlined in the Bible, we define them by the traditions of our denomination or how we grew up.

And because we all tend to egotism and pride, we glorify the way we've been raised. So if we're Puerto Rican and we grew up in a Puerto Rican Pentecostal church, that's the way church is. No, no, no, no, no.

If African American Church of God and Christ, that's what church is supposed to be like. No, we're white Southerners and Southern Baptist Church, no, that's what church is supposed to be like. And very few of us have the humility and the faith to go to the Bible and say, God, change my concepts of what things are so that I'll think the way you think and I'll see things the way you see things.

I don't wanna just perpetuate my traditions and how I grew up because that was accidental. My mother's here today and she and my dad lugged me to church. If I duplicated and tried to replicate everything that was practiced in that church, it would not be nice at all.

In that case, the church was racist, all white, with no openness to people who were other. Unfortunately, that still goes on today. But that's not what God intended church to be.

Do I get an amen? To God, there is no black church, white church, Baptist church, no denominations to God. He just looks down and he sees his people and we're his people. Can we say amen to that? And we root for each other.

So, Peter preached the sermon. The people were pricked in their hearts. His sermon penetrated.

Nobody went away saying, wow, wasn't he clever? What an orator that guy is. He's a fisherman? Dude, that dude can preach. No one said anything like that.

They were touched by the word of God and they said, what must we do? And that's the sign of gospel preaching. It's supposed to penetrate the heart because out of the heart comes the issues of life. If the word of God held by the Holy Spirit doesn't penetrate our hearts and want us to change and be different, then we just had a sermon and we just had a service, but we really didn't, and entertainment and noise or real quiet or lightning candles, whatever.

We had a tradition. We really didn't have what God intended. So then the Bible says 5,000 people were baptized because Peter said, here's what you gotta do.

Repent and as a sign of your faith, be baptized in water in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then you'll receive the same gift that you've seen us receive, this endowment of power from on high. And now we have that snapshot of heaven on earth.

I would've loved to have been back there. Not without problems, as we'll find out, but this is the golden age of the church. And let's look at it.

Spirit's been poured out. Peter preached. Church starts.

What did it look like? Let's look at the snapshot. They devoted, the believers, all 5,120 of them, they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, that word is koinonia, and to the breaking of bread. That's probably communion, but as we'll find out later, they ate their meals together.

They devoted themselves. That means they persistently were taken up with what? The apostles' doctrine, teaching, and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

All the believers were together, had everything in common. They had like an early communism. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he or she had need.

Every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. For a while, it seems, that they went at the times of prayer, then this seems to be done away with later, when the persecution arose, but at the beginning, they gathered every single day in the temple courts, probably praising God, but of course, they were praising that the Messiah had come, while other people around them were saying, we hope the Messiah does come. They broke bread in their homes, that means they had their meals, and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

Not only were they happy, they were sincere. Praising God, full with joy, and enjoying the favor of all the people, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Now, that's heaven on earth.

Let's read verse 46 and 47 again. Every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes, they had meals in their homes, and it seems as if, just look at here at me, everybody, it seems as if communion in that time was celebrated, we're gonna celebrate communion a couple of weeks here on a Sunday, communion was celebrated as part of the meal.

They had a regular meal where they ate, and then they would celebrate communion at the end. That's the way it seems to have been done in the early church. But they were eating their meals together with glad and sincere hearts, they were praising God, and enjoying the favor of all the people, and the Lord was adding to their number daily those who were being saved.

So they were witnessing, they were sharing Christ, people were getting saved, they were happy together, they were eating together, they were rejoicing together. Oh, somebody just had a real bad time, and something happened, and they would pool their resources together to try to help that person. They devoted themselves constantly to the word of God, i.e. the teaching of the apostles.

They were in the sharing koinonia, they were sharing in, they shared Jesus together, they shared music together, they shared meals together. See, the early church was not go to church on Sunday and then disappear to the next Sunday. That was, if the apostles came and saw what's going on in America, for example, in a lot of churches, they wouldn't know what that is.

Pop in for an hour, an hour and a half, on Sunday, go home and have nothing to do with church the rest of the week. To them, that would be like, what are you doing? What are you talking about? That's not the church. No, they continued steadfastly, not only in the teaching of the apostles, but in the fellowship.

They were one. Come on, that's what I'm talking about. We're one.

Like a gang, like we said last week. Jesus was the head of the gang, and the gang kept meeting together, and everyone was happy. The initiation was baptism, and if you believe the Salvation Army, they even had a gang sign.

Everybody hold up one finger. That's for Jesus, come on. That's a gang sign.

Not all this stuff in here and all that. Just that. They shared together in the fellowship.

Before I get to my few little points, because they are very few, but I think different than I've ever preached this. Is that the picture of church that you have? See, churches that have, they're usually smaller, and they have a place for it, that have a meal after the service. That's probably closer to what they had.

Because it wasn't just see each other at the door, God bless you, see you next Sunday. No, it was family, this is it, because there's such persecution that they were soon gonna have, but already they were following Jesus. In other words, of someone who had just been killed two months earlier.

Crucified publicly in Jerusalem. So you lost family fellowship. You lost a lot of stuff.

So God provided another family for you. We're not supposed to be a church. We're supposed to be institutional.

We're supposed to be a family. How many say amen? Amen. Turn to somebody on your side and say, you're part of my family.

Come on. Come on, you're part of my family. You're part of my family.

You're part of my family. I'm proud you're my sister. You're my brother.

You're my brother. Now we're doing that. It's one thing to do it, it's another thing to live it.

How many say amen? Amen. And they continued breaking bread, eating meals together. They opened homes to each other.

Granted, you'll say, oh, the pace of life was different and all of that, but it just shows they practiced hospitality. They ate together. They would have gone to restaurants together.

They would go to the BT Cafe downstairs after the service. Why do you think I pressed the church and the church leadership, please, let's have a cafe downstairs? You think, why would I care that you eat a meal down there? I don't care about the food that you eat. I want you to eat good food, enjoy it.

I know from counseling all these people that there's people right now that are so lonely in this church. They don't have anybody. They don't have anybody.

They have nobody. They have no one cares about them, no one who talks to them, no one who's interested in their life. If they don't find it in the church, would you please tell me where they're gonna find it? So that's why the early church was a fellowshiping church, eating together church, sharing as needs came up.

All selfishness was broken down. They so related to one another that if one of my wife's sisters or brother was in trouble, my wife would say, how can I help you if there was some disaster? That's because they're family and that's how the whole church was. How can we help you? They continued together in prayers.

They prayed together. Notice, they studied the word of God together carefully, even though they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They didn't say, wow, the Spirit's come.

We're filled with the Spirit. We even spoke in tongues, in languages we didn't know. Wow, this is awesome.

We don't need to study the word of God. We don't need to listen to the apostles preaching. We're filled with the Spirit, not at all.

People who are filled with the Spirit study the Bible the most. And people who don't study the Bible, they have some faulty experience with the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible. Don't you think if he's controlling my life, he'll lead me to the book he wrote? Well, of course he would.

So they had this interesting balance of spirit and word and then they continued steadfastly in prayers. They prayed together. They had meetings, it's almost certain, like we're trying to have on Tuesday night, devoted mainly to prayer.

They prayed together. Because the church that prays together, yeah, there's something about praying with another person that just binds you to them. It's humbling.

You know, we both need God. So I don't know what your church experience is and you're not interested in mine and I wouldn't want to share it with you totally, although I've had some great experiences in church and saw some wonderful things. But here it is in Acts chapter two.

Here's the portrait of the church like the way God intended it to be. So let's just review it in our mind till I get to a little turn in the road here. The church devoted themselves, not to the things of the world.

The thing that mattered most to them was the apostles' teaching. How can I learn more about Jesus? Remember, no Bibles in that day. So everything was learned verbally.

No scriptures to hand out. So they learned everything verbally. Did you talk about fellowship, how important it is? There's a woman in the choir that her husband walked out on her, a violent person, I think often is mind, but violent too.

And she's frightened for her safety and her two children's safety. You don't think she needs encouragement? If you met her, you don't even know. You would just hug her and say, oh, she's beautiful, and she looks great, and everything is everything, but you don't know the ache, the stuff that's going on.

That's why the body of Christ is so important. Do I get an amen for that? Because no one knows any of the battles anyone is in fight, fighting including me. You just look up here and see me.

You don't know the battles I fight, stress I'm under, tax of the enemy. You don't know anything about that. So the church devoted themselves to the word.

They devoted themselves, they were like family, didn't matter, they were one. They devoted themselves to worship. They took communion together, remembered the Lord's death till he came again.

They ate meals together. They were happy together. They were unselfish.

They somehow, they were ready to just give things away, and you know only God can do that. They devoted themselves to prayer, to waiting on God, petitioning God for different needs. In that atmosphere, the Lord poured out special supernatural grace upon the apostles, and they were able to do signs and wonders which made people know that this Jesus, that this church is worshiping, he is the real deal.

So there they were, happy together, sharing together, praying together, learning together, everything together, and that was the early church. That's what God must intend church to be. Why would he put that

in the Bible? It's amazing to me that as I travel around and talk to ministers and even theologians, that if people, they will argue till three in the morning that you must only define Jesus by what we find in scripture.

You can only define doctrine by what's in scripture, and I totally agree with that. But when it comes to what church should look like, then suddenly they depart from the Bible. No, that's not the way we do it.

Why would I be interested in how you do it, or how I did it? Didn't God lay out here what the church should look like? And they were on top of that, a witnessing church, because daily, not through mass crusades, daily people were being added to the church because it must be that everybody was sharing Jesus with no Bible, no New Testament. They were sharing their experience with other people, and God was adding to the church those that were being saved. And they were witnessing about someone who two months earlier had been crucified, and the crowd screamed, no, release Barabbas.

Crucify Jesus. That's what the crowd was screaming. And Pilate and the Romans went along with it.

The religious establishment had plotted it, and now they're telling other people about Jesus. You talk about guts. So that's the picture.

Now, there's a couple ways to look at that. We could look at it and say, wow, wow, wow. We got a ways to go, and we do.

Or you that are visiting. You look at that prayer meeting. No, our church couldn't have a prayer meeting.

Nobody would come. Or fellowship, openness to all people, sharing. No, no, no, no, no, no.

That's not the church I go to. But be that as it may, what I'd like to say to you today is there's two ways to look at that. There's one way to look at it and say, you know what, gang? Come on, let's pray, and let's start fellowshiping more.

Come on, Sopranos, give it up now. Share with your other Sopranos a little bit more. Be interested in the Altos.

Don't have that Soprano spirit that you usually have, but share with the Altos. And guys, share, and come on, let's start studying the word. You know what, we're gonna run a series on Thursdays or whatever, because we gotta study the word more, because why? Because the Bible says they continue steadfastly.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the word of God, and how many churches today? Did you know that every day in America, I was just told this by the people who publish the NIV, every day in America, 1,200 people stop reading the Bible. 1,200. Just don't read the Bible.

And in a lot of churches, weird things can happen, and preachers can preach really crazy stuff, and they get away with it because no one knows the Bible. So how would they know? Like, no, that's not right. That's not right.

And everything I say, or anyone who ever stands behind here, you do not accept it. You judge it by the word of God. Is he talking, is that preacher talking smack, or is that minister telling the truth as it is in Jesus? So we could look at that and say, you know what? Let's organize something, guys, pastors.

Everybody go to somebody's house for a meal this week. That's it, it's gonna be a logistical nightmare, but let's do it. Or like, somebody bring salad, then somebody bring the main course, somebody bring the pastries, and let's organize.

Why, why are we organizing it? Because they eat meals together. Let's replicate the church. Let's replicate the church.

Hey, you know what? We've been weak in prayer. Let's have a prayer meeting. Or how about this, choir? How about your own personal prayer life? You know, Jesus was the Son of God, and he was out there praying before the sun came up sometimes, and continued all night in prayer before he chose the 12 disciples.

Come on now, we got, if Jesus was praying, why don't you and I spend more time alone with God? Come on, and you hear a sermon, you get all psyched up. Come on, you know what? Let's just take three things, and I close. Let's take the Word of God, the Bible.

How many promises have you made yourself? I'm gonna get into this book. Man, why am I always, I'm texting the universe, but I have no time for the Word of God. I got my iPad, I got every gadget, I know everything, and now God is talking to me in the Word, and I don't read it.

But I say I love him, but I'm not interested in what he says. That's strange. I'm not interested in the letters he sent me, but I love him, oh, I love the Lord.

Come on, strike up that praise and worship song. Come on, I wanna worship God. But during the week, I don't have time for what he wrote to tell me.

Warnings, encouragements, promises. And we've all been convicted about that. And we do what I just suggested before a lot of us.

We say, that's it, no, no. Pastor Hammond, no joke now, I'm gonna get in the Word. You know what, it's this translation.

I gotta get a different translation. I gotta get a Bible with the red, Jesus speaking in red, because this black stuff is not working here at all. I gotta get a yellow underliner.

I gotta get some help. I gotta get deep in the Word. You've never done that? Yes, you have.

You've never done that? Yes, you have. Come on, how many have ever said, I need more Word in my life? Come on, come on, be honest. Don't lie on top of not reading the Bible that much.

That would be bad. Haven't we done that? Sure. Let's take the other thing that stands out there.

They were a church that prayed together. They constantly prayed. These apostles had walked with Jesus, and yet they were following His example and His words.

Ask and keep on asking. Seek and keep on seeking. Knock and keep on knocking.

It will be open to you. So how many times have we privately, and this is for church too, but let's make it individual. You know what, I gotta spend more time with God.

This is crazy. Man, I go to every kind of movie I watch. I watch all kinds of stuff.

I read movies, I know everything going on. I followed that trial down in Florida. I know everything about that lady.

And that baby died. I know every angle. I know what the lawyers said.

I know what everyone said. Galatians? No, what is Galatians again? What's Galatians? Is Galatians on trial? Was that one of the witnesses? No, no, Galatians is a book in the Bible. There's no Bobby Galatians that was in that trial.

It's a book in the Bible. We got time for all of that, but the word and prayer. And do our lives suffer for it? Yeah, well, of course.

Because faith comes by hearing. And hearing by what? So then people struggle, and they don't have much faith, and because their faith is weak, they get discouraged. So they come early on Tuesday and want you to pray for them that God would increase their faith.

And you will pray for them, but you wanna break it to them gently that unless they start filling themselves with the word of God, they'll never have strong faith. They could have the Apostle Paul pray for them. So, so, that goes for all of us.

I hope you that are clapping are deep in the word. I really do. So, so we suffer.

We have no time for God and his word, and then we wonder why we get irascible and we fly off the handle, or we get panic attacks from this and that. And then other people that we've read about and we know about, they were full of the word, and the minute a problem came, the word of God just was so strong in them that they said, no, wait a minute. He just said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

I was just reading, I'm reading through the life the two-volume work written by his son of J. Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China in the 1850s who started China Inland Mission. And the two verses that he based his whole life on was Ebenezer, the word Ebenezer from the scripture, which means to this point, God has helped us. How many can say about your own life, Ebenezer, up to this point, God has been with you? Wave your hand at me if God has been faithful and helped you to this point.

See, so that would help him through all these difficulties. Sleeping upstairs above a tea shop on some little street in a place called Fung Po, I think. And the temperature for like two weeks in a row, the lowest it got was 91 during a thunderstorm, 104 was the highest, no air conditioning, no fans, just had to sleep.

No nets to protect them, insects all over them. But fighting it off and enduring because he was full of that verse and then the other verse. Jehovah-Jireh.

So everywhere he had in his house, Ebenezer, Jehovah-Jireh. This far God has helped us, the Lord will provide. And he has lived by that.

That thing got so into his spirit and into his heart that no matter what came at him, he was somehow able to endure. Amazing man. But amazing man because God's grace was operating in him, God's word was operating in him.

So we suffer. We suffer when we don't have the word of God. We suffer when we don't spend time with God.

When the things of this world become so real that just sitting in God's presence, laying in God's presence, walking in God's presence, you don't have to talk. Prayer is not talking all the time. Prayer is just recognizing God's presence and waiting.

I'd rather wait and get two sentences that the Holy Spirit prompts with faith and pray those two sentences than it just be jabbering. You ever catch yourself just jabbering in prayer? It sounds hollow. But just time with the Lord.

They continued, notice, in corporate prayer. This was, they were praying corporately, not only by themselves, going into a closet. Remember what Jesus said, when you pray, don't do it publicly on a street corner.

Go in some secret place so no one can see you pray. Then your Father will reward you openly. And then corporately, they were continually praying.

Wouldn't part of the reasons for the weakness of the Christian church witness right now in our country would be that most churches don't pray together. They don't call out to God together. Worship has replaced prayer and waiting on God and petitioning God.

And worship is wonderful. You can't worship too much. But oh my goodness, we need to pray too.

That's what they devoted themselves to. Let's say the last one. Have we not all made resolutions about the Word or about prayer? I'm gonna spend more time with God.

I've made all kinds of resolutions in my life. Haven't you made resolutions? Let me tell something secret about you. I'm gonna reveal something secret about you all.

You made resolutions, and you kept it for a few days or a week or so, and then it broke down. And then you made a fresh resolution. And then you made a fresher resolution.

You heard of fresh wind, fresh fire? I'm gonna write another book, fresh resolution. Just, I'm really gonna do it now. And then after you get beat down and you violate your resolution, then you get discouraged, and you don't even try anymore.

And that can lead to what the Bible calls backsliding. Because you cut a Christian off from the Word of God, which is his food, and time with the Lord, which is his air to breathe. And you get sickly.

How about the third thing? Under intense pressure, they were sharing Jesus and talking to people. How many times have we heard people say, we gotta start witnessing, go into all the world and preach the gospel. Let's organize this thing, and I'm not against any organizing of anything.

But how many times have we said, I'm gonna start witnessing. This week, I'm looking to talk to someone about Jesus. And then it doesn't happen, or you start and you get intimidated, then you don't say what you should have said, you're not bold, you lose the opportunity, you hear the Holy Spirit actually whispering in your ear, talk, ahora, now, and you don't.

And then you go home defeated. There's no one here ever been defeated in their spirit? I'm talking about the Christians now. So what do we usually do? Preachers preach this and say, come on, gang, here's how the early church looked.

They sought the Lord, they were in the word, and they witnessed, come on, what's wrong with you? So let's get this thing together and mean business with God. It don't mean business with God, and why even come to church, and so on and so forth. But all it leads to is resolutions, which you're gonna break, and I'm gonna break, because we're looking at the thing the wrong way.

This passage of Scripture is not there to tell us, these are new laws, like Moses had laws, these are new laws, now obey them. That's not what this Scripture is about. This Scripture is about, look at what God, the Holy Spirit does when he's in control.

It's not Elisha trying to do anything, because Elisha can't do anything. This is not about, come on, gang, let's get going, come on, get a good motivational speaker and a good organizational approach to this, and we can get going. We're gonna replicate the early church.

No, you can't, because they didn't do it because they were supposed to do it. They did it because the Spirit was working. Notice what the last verse says as I close.

And the Lord was adding to the church daily those who were being saved. But you see, the Lord was doing everything. Only the Lord can give me a desire for the Word.

Left to myself, I'll never open this again. Pastor Simba, you should be ashamed of yourself. It's true.

In my carnal self, why would I be interested in the Word of God? And you're just as carnal as me. But when the Holy Spirit starts to work, you start to long for this thing. You wake up in the middle of the night, and you say just one verse.

God, give me just one. I'd rather have it than necessary food. And then God gives you discipline because the battle with the Word is time.

And we all live on tight time schedules, don't we? And we have tried to do, get over that. We haven't. What God is saying to us in this passage is don't make any resolutions.

And don't try to study the Bible either. Because the minute you try, you're gonna go through that cycle. Try, fail, be discouraged.

Try, fail, be discouraged. Come on, have some of us not been on that merry-go-round for a long time? You don't have to say amen. I know that's a sensitive question.

But I'll speak to God. God, all of us have been on that merry-go-round. How much better to come to God today and say, God, I give you the power to do this.

My need of spending more time in the Word. You do it. You do it.

Wait a minute. Isn't Christianity all about what God does and not what we do? Isn't that strange that everything in the Bible that leads up and accompanies our salvation, we always give God all the glory and all the credit. But then when it comes to certain things, it's okay.

I'm gonna try, I'm gonna show that I mean business. Isn't that strange for all of us that we live that way? In other words, who drew you to Jesus Christ? Who convicted you of your sin? Did you convict yourself of your sin or did God convict you? Who made Jesus real to you? Did you make Jesus real to you or did God do that? Who washed away all your sins? Did you wash away all your sins or did God wash away all your

sins? Who wrote your name in the Lamb's Book of Life? Did you write your name in the Lamb's Book of Life or did God write your name in the Lamb's Book of Life? Who sealed you with the Holy Spirit? Did God seal you with the Holy Spirit or did you seal yourself with the Holy Spirit? No, I think I read somewhere in that book that God sealed you with the Holy Spirit. Who put joy in your heart when they were eating with gladness of heart and joy and sincerity? Who can only do that but God? Who's the only one that can help us persevere? Who's the only one that can give us love for another human being? God.

Isn't that amazing? God gives us the Holy Spirit, God does all of this and then when we come to stuff that we think is really important, we go, vow, promise, resolution, break it, discouragement, new vow, back to the altar, that and then and it's on. It's like a cycle. Some of us were reading the Bible more 10 years ago than we're reading now.

So what did all your vows do for you? What did all your promises do for you? How much better to say, God, they were only doing that because great grace was upon the people. God was doing things in their lives, working in their hearts and the next thing you know, you just start doing it. When I fell in love with my wife, I had a summer job.

I was in college and I took the whole first paycheck that I got and I spent it on buying clothes for her and jewelry that, she didn't like one thing I got her. Wasted the whole paycheck, but she was gracious. She kind of like half smiled, but I knew she was saying, this guy wouldn't know nice clothes if his life depended on it.

Why did I do that? Do you think someone told me to do that? You think my parents taught me to do that? When you have a girlfriend, go take your first paycheck. No, I did it because it was in me to do it. You and I are not gonna do anything unless it's in us to do it.

We're not under the law, we're not under, let's struggle to obey, we're under God. Work in us, make us the people you want us to be. When the spirit of God starts taking control, you and I will start to pray in the most unusual places and we'll persevere in prayer and we'll get burdens for prayer.

I spoke to a young lady who's going through a time of struggle in her life, very terrible story. And I told her that I was in another country preaching recently and as I was preaching, telling the people about the power of God in answer to prayer, she came in front of me as clear as my hand is in front of me. And I started pouring out my heart for her and crying as if she was one of my own grandchildren or children and I said to her, that must be amazing.

God must wanna do something in your life because trust me, I wasn't thinking about praying for you. But see, when God is working, he'll put burdens on your heart, you won't be able to sleep at night. Come on, can we put our hands together and say amen to that? When God's spirit and his grace are working in our lives, we gravitate to the word of God.

We gravitate toward prayer. Prayer meeting on Tuesday, we can see God do awesome things. Just think, we're gonna hand out cards this Tuesday from critical needs all around the world and you're gonna have a chance to be part of it.

You're gonna pray for someone. It'll make a difference possibly for all eternity. You'll be part of it.

See, but God has to make that real to you or otherwise it's nah, American Idol's on, I think that night, I can't be, no, I can't do that. Yankee game's on. See, this was all happening because there was a strong

current of the spirit.

And there was a strong current of the spirit so that they were bold and they would talk to people about Jesus. Not because, Peter said today, every fourth person you meet, Peter said, you gotta talk to them about Jesus. No, it was the spirit just creating open doors, boom, chance to talk for Jesus.

So I wanna get some of us off the merry-go-round today. You know, if you have an ungodly habit, maybe you've learned about this merry-go-round called resolution, breaking, discouragement, try harder, break it, and you think that's what religion is. You know, try as hard as you can to live a good life because you believe in Jesus.

That is not the Christian life. The Christian life is to come with your problem with lust or your problem with selfishness or your problem with unforgiveness or your problem, whatever the problem might be in all of our lives, is to bring it to Jesus and say, Jesus, I can't beat this. I can't beat crack cocaine, but you're greater than crack cocaine.

So I give you my crack cocaine and by your grace, now you have to work it out because my struggle, how can the flesh cast out the flesh? How can Jim Simbala cast out Jim Simbala? If Jim Simbala's the problem, who's gonna cast me out? So we come now with, Lord, you know my laziness. You know my procrastination. You know all the stories I make up to justify my not reading the word.

I'm tired, Lord, I'm tired. I give it to you. Make me a man and make me a woman of the word.

Spirit of God, work in me. I trust and I wait. I trust and I wait.

Lord, I bring my prayerlessness to you. I bring my lack of desire to talk to you, to be in your presence, to listen for your voice. I bring that to you.

Change me, Jesus. I do belong to you, I do love you, or I wouldn't be in church this morning. So Lord, change me, Lord.

Lord, you know I'm shy and you know I get nervous because I'm afraid people might ask something I wouldn't be able to answer and I'm afraid to witness and I think whatever and Lord, I just give it to you. Now work in me. You know if someone's here today smoking, if you're in trouble with smoking, I just saw something that I felt the Holy Spirit speak to me about.

Did you know that you're killing yourself? I don't think God wants you to kill yourself. Did you know every time that puff, they found out what every puff does? And if you're, see that's the thing. You can't break smoking, but Jesus can break smoking.

It doesn't happen by fighting, it happens by releasing. I give it to you, Lord. Let's close our eyes.

We can't be like this Spirit-filled church unless we're Spirit-filled. You said in your word in another place, great grace was upon all the people. So then things happened because you were working.

And God for certain things, we release it and seem to acknowledge you've gotta do it. But then there's other things we try ever so hard, Lord. I have tried ever so hard, Lord.

We've made promises, resolutions, only to fall back again and again. But you said in your word that your strength is made perfect in weakness. It's when we come with our weakness and just give you our

weakness.

I hold up these cigarettes as a symbol, Lord, not just for this woman, but for all of us. We hold up to you today the area where we feel defeated in our lives. And we give it to you.

She cannot stop smoking. She just told me she tried so many times, Lord. But you can give her the grace to stop smoking.

You can work so that she hates the smell of it, Lord, that she gets sick when she even gets around a cigarette, Lord. You can give us holy desires for your word. You are the one who can prompt us to pray without ceasing.

You're the one who can make us bold to witness. So today we lay it down. We lay it down.

Not gonna try, not gonna make a promise. We trust and we wait expectantly to see the great thing that you will do in our lives and in our church. We pray that you'll give us more love one for another.

We pray that there will be an appetite for the word of God, that there will be joy among the people, that we will eat together, share together, help one another, slip \$20 bills in one another's hands as the Spirit prompt us, that we will minister to people, not organized, but by the Spirit leading us, Lord. And that way you get all the glory. Make us the church that would make you happy, Lord.

And we certainly can't do it in ourselves. We see the model, but we can't get there. But your grace is amazing and more than enough, Lord.

And so we ask your blessing now upon your people today. Our sister's not gonna smoke anymore because you're gonna do the work, Lord. It won't be her, it'll be you, Lord Jesus.

Can we put our hands together for our sister? Come on, my sister. You clap your hands because you smoked your last cigarette now. God, you do it.

Do it. And now let your smile be upon your people. Let your face shine upon us.

Make us glad. Make us sincere. Make us happy in you.

Make us pray filled with praise. You do it, Lord. Like you've done everything else for us.

Not only saving us, but keeping us and changing us from glory to glory. We pray all of this in Jesus' name. And everyone said.

Amen.

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