

# Book of Acts Series - Part 25 | Giving God a Chance

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala emphasizes the importance of humility, counsel, and openness to truth through the example of the Bereans in the Book of Acts.*

**Duration:** 49:21

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:18, Acts 17:10

**Topics:** "Book Of Acts"

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## Description

In this sermon, the pastor addresses the length of church services and how it varies from church to church. He shares anecdotes of people expressing their opinions on the duration of services. The pastor also recounts a conversation with Ravi, who had been suffering from back pain for 10 years. Ravi shares how he experienced healing after a friend prayed for him and received a message from God. The sermon emphasizes the power of prayer and the importance of seeking God's will in our daily lives.

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## Transcript

Last week in our study in the book of Acts, we have Paul on his second missionary journey. We find out that he's with Silas now. He's with Timothy, a younger convert.

He's with Dr. Luke, who ended up writing the book of Acts. And they're traveling from major city to major city, almost always, major metropolises, spreading the gospel now for the first time in Europe. They're in Greece, and wasn't that wild what happened last week? We talked about founding the church in Thessalonica, and there were 37 people visiting us on that day, and they all lived in Thessalonica.

That was amazing. We found out what happened in Thessalonica, how some believed, but then others were jealous of Paul and Silas, especially Paul, and the influence they were having in the synagogue as they won people to the faith in Christ, and they stirred up trouble, and the brethren got ahold of him and said, "You gotta get out of town before this gets nasty." He then traveled southwest, slightly south-southwest, about 50 miles. They came to a place called Berea, Berea.

There's a famous Bible movement of handing out Bibles called the Berean Bible Study Movement, Berean Bible Movement, named after this town. What was it about this town that would be linked to the Bible and Bible study? Well, we're gonna find out. It's just 10 verses.

God put it in here. He's not talking in the book of Acts about what Peter was doing now, or James, or John, or about what happened with Matthew or some of the other disciples. God the Holy Spirit has us focused on Paul, and Luke is inspired to give us this account, so we're just gonna read it and say, "What are the lessons?" "What can we learn from it?" That's how you have to read the Bible.

What did it mean to the people who went through it, and then what are the lessons for us today? Let's read. As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away from Thessalonica to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue.

That was their policy. They always went to the synagogue first. Now, the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Many of the Jews in the synagogue believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. When the Jews in Thessalonica, they wouldn't let it rest. When the Jews 50 miles away in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they wouldn't let it go.

No, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up. The brothers, the believers, we don't know how long he was in Berea, but the brothers, the Christians, immediately sent Paul to the coast. But Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea.

The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens and then left him with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible. I just want you to look at a little side point here that I'd like to bring in verse 14 and 15. The brothers, the Christians in Berea immediately sent Paul to the coast.

Why? Because they were scared for his life. But Silas and Timothy stayed at Berea. So the group has been broken up.

The men who escorted Paul brought him to Athens, the largest city in Greece, and then left with instructions and then left with instructions from Paul for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible. You might say, what's in those verses? It's just a bunch of transportation. Ah, there's a lot of lessons in there, which I just want to talk about before we get to the one thought I want to bring about what made the Bereans more noble.

They were more noble than the people in Thessalonica. Why were they more noble? I want the Brooklyn Tabernacle congregation to be more noble before God. What makes people noble? But first I want you to notice this, that although Paul is the greatest of all the apostles, when things got stirred up in Berea and the brethren got around him and said, you gotta go, he relented and went with their opinion.

No matter who you are in life, no matter what position God raises you to, you gotta be open to the counsel of other people who love God and love you. Paul could have said, hey, don't tell me where I'm going. I'm staying here because I got the word of the Lord.

I'm staying here. No, they said, you gotta get going. You gotta get out.

And he said, I'll do it. He listened to a group of new believers. Maybe Silas and Timothy were along with that group and they were saying, go.

And he said, I submit to your opinion. I will go. Nobody is so big and nobody is so famous and nobody has such a big church or has written books or is a famous preacher or evangelist.

Nobody is too big. No believer is too old in the Lord, too veteran, too seasoned, too experienced that we all don't need to listen to what other people are saying. Now that was very profound and it got no amen at all.

And the reason is, I'll tell you the reason it is, because most of us don't listen to anybody. That's why the amen was slow in coming. Most of us live our private little lives because we saw our parents live that way and we're locked into a little social vacuum and we feel we should do, we do, and we don't bounce it off of anyone because we don't care what other people think.

And yet the Bible says, in the multitude of counselors, there's wisdom. In another place, the Bible says, in the multitude of counselors, there's safety. But most people, most couples, most husbands don't even listen to their wives and their wives' opinion.

All right, women, stay, hold steady. Well, at least I'm getting some amens from this sermon here. And that's why it's so quiet.

Because most of us live on our own little isolated island and we're not gonna let anybody in. We don't have any close spiritual friends, prayer partners. No, we make our own decisions.

And if anybody intrudes or, God forbid, disagrees with what we wanna do, we then make them the enemy. Oh, I thought you loved me. Do we not? But Paul, he listened to the believers who said, get out of town.

He deferred to their judgment. Because whatever God is showing you, he will never just show you alone because then you'll get deceived easily. When you become the judge and the jury for what God is speaking to you, you can easily get deceived because that's the height of arrogance.

I'm the only one who can tell me what God is saying. One day years ago, at a funeral service here on a Sunday of my late friend, Pastor Bolkstaff, we met and I had an idea of something to do in the service during the service. It was odd, it was a funeral, but it was the last service of the day on a Sunday.

And I had an idea of doing something and I prayed probably too hastily and moved ahead. The pastors left the room, but then one of the pastors was sent in by the other pastors and they said, Pastor Cimbala, the men just want you to know, don't do what you're planning to do. Don't do it.

They all feel there's that, don't do that as part of the service. There's nothing horrible, but we don't feel that at all. Immediately, I said, it's gone.

Because who would I be to say to these men, no, I'm the only one who knows what to do. I'm the only one who hears from God. There are a thousand crazy people running around New York City today.

Cross that out, delete. There are 10,000 crazy people running around New York City, going from church to church and you can't speak to them because the minute you correct them, they say, God told me. And when you say to them, who confirms that God told you, they get quiet.

The Bible says, obey them that are over you in the Lord. That's pastoral authority. Here, Paul is deferring to believers.

The Bible says, humble yourselves and submit to one another in the fear of the Lord. I asked one time to a crazy person who disrupted a meeting and they had to pull a woman out of our former building campus. And in the lobby, I was trying to see if I could talk sense to her and help her.

And I said, the Bible says, who's obeyed them that are over you in the Lord? And she said, I do. I said, well, who's over you in the Lord? Jesus. I said, no, he is the Lord.

He can't be over you in the Lord. He is the Lord. So I just want to say to all of you here, you can waste your life being an isolated loner.

I mean, even the Lone Ranger had Tonto. Some people just run their whole lives listening to no one they know. But what if you're mistaken? Can all of us be the judge and jury of what we do? I have not only pastors here that we discuss major decisions, but I have a group of friends that I call on the phone and are constantly pastors and leaders and Bible teachers, authors around the country.

And I bounce off of them things that are going through my mind or heart. And I know that they have the independence to say to me, I don't think that's right at all. Or did you ever think of this, Jim? Did you ever think of that? So I just want to say to you, this was an important thing to me that Paul deferred to the judgment of believers instead of just saying, hey, yo, I am in charge.

I am the apostle. Did you all see the Lord on the road to Damascus? No, I saw him. No.

He will guide the meek in the way that they should go. Our pride is what stumbles us. And a lot of you behind me and a lot of you in front of me, that's the life we basically live.

We don't bounce things off of anyone. We live in this self-contained bubble of God speaks to me, God leads me. But who confirms that? The Bible says, let everything be established in two or three witnesses.

So can't you find someone that you want to bounce things off of, that you can share? Not someone who's going to blab your business out in the street. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about somebody that you could talk to and pray with and say, I've been feeling this major move.

I'm thinking of leaving my job. Would you pray with me about it? Because that's a major move. You know how many people we counsel that made moves just counseling with no one? And now when the bottom falls out, they say, pray for me, pray for me.

I need Jesus. People make career decisions. Ministers leave churches and do all kinds of crazy things.

And then when it doesn't work out, I say to them sometimes, if they ask me for prayer or counsel, who did you talk to before you did this? Nobody. I thought God was with me. Well, God will be with us, but he's given us the body of Christ to help us along the way.

Can we all put our hands together and say amen to that? I know that's a sensitive thing because especially in New York, I've learned there's all kinds of isolated private people. They're not going to talk to anybody. They're not going to tell anybody anything.

It's all private. It's not wise. Also notice this.

When he left and deferred, he told Timothy and Silas, you stay behind. Well, what if they said, no, we don't feel like staying behind. No, he was in charge.

So he said, stay behind. And they went, yes, sir. When I was in the Naval Academy for a year, ours is not to reason why, ours is but to do or die.

We have an executive here from Macy's who's a member of our church. What if he tells his employees, here's what I want us to do today. And they go, I don't feel that.

I don't feel that sales program. Chaos. What if we have a huddle at Madison Square Garden when I was playing basketball with the University of Rhode Island and the coach says, okay, here's the play.

There's 11 seconds left and he gets the chalkboard and he writes out the play. Do you think he said to anybody, let's vote on this? No. Did he say, what do you feel about that, Jim? What's your deep inner vibe on this whole? Here's the plan, let's do it.

That's how the body of Christ works. We're an army. And people defer to those in leadership because he wasn't dictatorial.

He was showing his humility by going away based on the sentiment of the people. When he said to Silas and Timothy, stay, he was saying the people need you here. They need more instruction.

I gotta get out of town. I'm the one that's the target of their persecution. But you stay here.

And they stayed. That's how any ministry has to work. There has to be authority and submission.

You parents, when you raise your children, you give them instructions. Do you ask them to vote about it? Do you say, what do you feel about that, about cleaning up your room? One time I was going through the room of one of my children when they were little and they were famous for just having the messiest room in America or possibly all of North America. And I was trying to just make head or tail and I opened up a drawer and inside was a peanut butter and jelly sandwich from about a week before.

And when I gave the instruction, clean up your room and make it, I didn't wanna vote. There had to be authority, not because I was a dictator, because that's how life works. If everyone does what's right in their own eyes, how would we get anything accomplished? This is why a lot of people don't get involved in ministries in the church, because they can't follow order.

They love God, they're quoting verses, God is good all the time, they give you a bump and everything. But when you say, now you go and do that, why, why should I? Who put you in charge? Oh, your friends with the leadership, that's why. They can't work with anybody.

There are people like that all over the place. The body of Christ is held back because everybody's so contrary and independent. I was with Carol in a conference years ago and the choir director, sitting with all these choir directors, and they said to Carol, so what's your attendance percent in your practices? So she said, I don't understand what you mean.

So they said, no, how many, what percent of your choir comes to practice? So I remember, she hit me under the table. You ever have that happen to you, you that are married? Yeah, that or the look, either one works. And she hit my knee as if to say, I don't know what he's talking about.

So I said, sir, we're a little lost, what do you mean? He said, no, but in my state, in this large denomination, in my state, it's 62% attendance, a choir coming to practice. But mine is almost 70%, we feel we're doing good. I just wanna know, what percent is your wife's choir? She went, well, 100, because unless they have

an excuse, if they don't come to practice, we'll ask them to leave the choir.

If you wanna sing in the choir, you have to practice with the choir. If you're sick, you're out of town, we understand that. But little more than half the choir showing up to practice, but they wanna be there on Sundays so they can put the robot and sway and whatever.

Imagine, could anyone run a business that way? And that's something that we see in the Bible. They submitted to authority and they had a team spirit and they knew, in this situation, I'm not in charge, God's given leadership to Paul, so I'll do what he says. And then when he got to his next place in Athens, the Bible says he told those that came with him, go back and tell them as soon as they feel it's possible, come back and join me.

And nobody was like, who are you to tell me what to do? It was working together cohesively. Don't we all need to hear that? Oh, it got very quiet here with that. Well, you watching on the webcast, would you say amen, please, for me, because I'm getting nothing here in live audience.

No, so what have we learned here? People should learn to bounce issues off of other people's hearts and minds because in the multitude of counselors, there's wisdom and safety. I wonder if you have a counselor, an advisor, someone you pray with. Always remember, when you feel led to do something, God will never just show you and hide it from the entire world.

The Bible says, and it seemed good to us and the Holy Ghost, not me and the Holy Ghost, us. That's a safety for all of us because we've all missed it. Have we not all missed it? Come on, have you never made the decision that you thought was right and it blew up? If you have ever had that happen like me, lift your hand up high, okay? And God knows that, that we're human and we can make mistakes.

So he puts, if we're humble enough, if we're humble enough. Of course, if we know everything, then God has to let us go until he can get our attention. The Bible says that the people in Berea, compared to Thessalonica, were no more noble, maybe more noble than even in Philippi.

Then Thessalonica, they were more noble. Why were they more noble? Why they were more noble was because the word is an interesting word in the Greek. It's hard to interpret with one word.

The translations differ on it. But they were less prejudiced than the people in Thessalonica. Because what keeps God's message and his promises and his working from our lives is because we're not noble enough and not objective and open and childlike enough to receive it in a noble spirit.

Because the Bible says when he preached to them from the Old Testament, probably using Isaiah 53 and other passages, see, I wanna prove to you that this Jesus I'm telling you about is the Messiah. He fulfilled those promises. And the Bible says they diligently went and looked in the Bible to find out if what Paul was saying was true.

And that's what you should do for every preacher, whoever preaches here or anyone you hear on the radio or television or any book you read. Never believe what anyone says unless it's backed up by the scripture. Preachers are not our guide.

The Bible is our guide. Everybody say amen. The Bible is our guide.

So when people are just talking kind of religious smack and they're not backing it up with verses and truth from God's word, you have to really be careful. They were noble because when he preached, they said, well, wait a minute. Let's find out if this is true.

And they started searching. Wait a minute, that does make sense. Yeah, he was wounded for our transgressions.

Yeah, we have this idea of the Messiah coming triumphantly, but that Isaiah passage is troubling. What, he was born in Bethlehem? Oh yeah, Micah said, out of you, Bethlehem, a father will come to save. Oh, and they started digging and searching.

They were open. They weren't locked in. They didn't block everyone out.

And that's what holds a lot of us back and the Church of Christ back around the country and around the world. We're not as noble and as open as we need to be. We're all victims one way or another.

We have to ask God to help us with prejudice. Not racial prejudice. This is a different kind of prejudice.

What is racial prejudice? Racial prejudice, of course, all prejudice is born of ignorance. All prejudice, white people, all prejudice, black people, all prejudice, anyone, that's a sign of their ignorance because prejudice only lives with ignorance. The more you learn anything about life, you can't be prejudiced because you learn everybody's the same.

But if you're narrow and bigoted and uneducated in the best sense of the word, you can have prejudice in your life. And what is prejudice? It comes from prejudging. Prejudice, prejudging.

So you have an opinion about someone before you've even met them and given them a chance because you've judged them already by what? Their color, their background, their denomination, their whatever. So that's it, you know. Oh, he's a Latino, I know Puerto Ricans.

Hey, do I know Puerto Ricans, yeah. No, he's not a Puerto Rican, he's an individual. No, I know white people, those nerdy white people.

I know white people. I know black, oh, those West Indians, ooh. That's ignorance expressing itself in prejudice.

We prejudge something based on data, which is in our head where we've made a stereotype and now we're not giving somebody a chance. We're not open to the truth about them because we've already prejudged them. In fact, a lot of people aren't even gonna take time to find out because they don't wanna be corrected.

They don't wanna have to face the fact that that was a very ignorant thing to do is to prejudge somebody. But this is different, this is not racial. This is worse kind of prejudice in a way because in certain places where Paul ran into it, it cut them off from the blessing of God and even salvation.

And when this prejudice exists in our circles as Christians, it really holds us back. Let me just give you two little fast ones and then one I wanna end on. There's the prejudice of ignorance.

You know, they say a little knowledge is a very dangerous thing. Why? Because, you know, you know a few things, I know a few things, and we make that the sum total of all knowledge. We're not gonna dig

anymore, we're not gonna search, we're not gonna analyze because we know.

I've read the Bible, Pastor. Oh, I know the Bible. Oh, I know the Bible.

And that ignorance makes us prejudiced and less noble and less open to things that God wants to show us because we're not open to new truth. Not new truth that's not in the Bible, but new truth in the Bible that we don't know, it's new to us. So there are a lot of you possibly and people watching and pastors, we don't read the Bible, we don't diligently search the Bible the way the Bereans did.

Why? Because I know, what are you talking about? I know, what do you think, I'm a fool? I grew up in church. Mother drug me to church, I know. I know.

What a prejudice that is. Oh, is that hard to get by. The prejudice of ignorance.

I don't wanna learn anything more because what I know is enough. And I'm judging everybody and everything that God even has for me by the little thimble full of knowledge that I have from the Bible. And that, the longer you go to church, the more susceptible you are to that prejudice of ignorance.

Oh, I know. Oh, I know. And you know 11 verses that you can quote and I know 10 verses I can quote.

And that's the sum total of everything God has for us. We're not gonna dig, we're not gonna study, we're not gonna let the word of Christ dwell in us richly, we're not gonna take time to do that, we gotta do more important things than that because we know what we need to know. Is that not the problem with a lot of us? Why is the psalmist praying, show me glories from your word, oh Lord.

Oh Lord, teach me your word. You find that in Psalm 119 over and over again. I mean, if you're inspired enough to be writing part of the Bible, why are you praying to God, show me new light from your word, teach me your commands, oh Lord.

Why is he praying that? Doesn't he know everything already? No, he doesn't. So we cut ourselves off from so much God has because we're locked into the prejudice of ignorance. And then some of us are locked into the prejudice of tradition, denominationalism, culture, the kind of church we grew up in.

I know how God works. I know how a meeting should go on. Why? Because I grew up in church.

And the church experience I had is the sum total of all that God can do. I know how people should sing, I know how people should worship, I know how they should pray, I know what a preacher should look like. Why? Because I grew up as a Baptist, as Assembly of God, as a charismatic.

I grew up in Kojic, Church of God in Christ. I grew up, however, and that's the way God worked. Just think of that.

People are missing what God could do because we already have prejudged and we have a box that he has to fit in. And what box is that? The box we made based on what we've seen in our little minuscule lives. I had someone tell me years ago, pastor, I like your church, I love the music, I don't mind your preaching, but your services, they're only like two hours long, an hour and 45 minutes long.

I grew up church, it's four hours. When are you all gonna have church? I said, look, what can I tell you? It is what it is. Every church has its own personality.

Others would say to me, I really felt the Lord in the meeting, but you carry on for so long. I'm used to like an hour, 10 minutes, I gotta get out of here, that's how I grew up. What are you wasting all this time for? And everybody's lifting their hands and the leader, your wife keeps leading the chorus over and over again, like let it go, let that chorus go.

So we're all judging things, and we all do. It takes a real man or woman of God to be sincere enough to say, God, save me from my ignorance and my prejudice and my pride, right? Because we all, we're all susceptible to that. So we have God confined, and when you talk to people like that, they know, listen, when you talk about how God can work and what God can do, it's like, oh, yeah, but it's not like what I saw growing up.

Oh, praise God. Down in Kingston, Jamaica, oh, did we have church, pastor similar, it wasn't this foolish American stuff. It was the real thing, or in Trinidad, or Puerto Rico, or Poland, or wherever.

Is that not true? And some of you here, I happen to notice someone, doesn't matter who, as people were standing while the choir was singing, and they were lifting their hands, it threw somebody, I happen to notice, off, and they were just like that, like, what are those? That's not what I'm used to. But did you know that's in the Bible? Lift up holy hands to God. If President Obama walked in here, we would all stand, the President of the United States walk in, we can't stand for God.

We can't express ourselves, we can't weep, we can't cry, we can't shout, all these things are in the Bible. Come on, can we say amen to that? But you see, we're not interested in what's in the Bible, and we're not interested in the spiritual results, what our rule of judgment is, is it what I'm used to growing up? Is it the way we do it? I once had a huge need, and someone introduced me to a woman who was worth like \$30 million, and she said, I hear you have a need, and then I gave the need, the church, your need, our need, and she said, well, you're a Baptist church, aren't you? I said, no, we're a non-denominational church. Oh, I'm sorry, you're really wasting your time, because I'm a Baptist, and Baptist money for Baptist projects, so thank you.

Now, you keep going for Jesus, son, but we're laughing, and some of us are just as bound by that. We've limited God to what we're used to, and the minute you try to put God in a box, you lose what God can do, because God, God the Holy Spirit is not gonna be held back by what we're used to. How many wanna break out of that and see God do new things in this church? They'll be biblical, they have to be, because the Holy Spirit never contradicts his word.

When anything happens that contradicts the word, no matter how euphoric it seems, it's not God. The Holy Spirit never contradicts the book he wrote. Never, ever.

But maybe some of you need to hear that word, and those of you watching on webcast, are you more a New Testament Christian who's searching the Bible, or are you more a denomination, a Lutheran, a five-point Calvinist, an Arminian, a tongue-speaking charismatic? I mean, if it's in the Bible, let's go for it, but let's not, any of us, be trapped in the prejudice that stops us from being noble like the Bereans. You know, I read last night in my devotions, Jesus said, except you become like a little child, you can't enter the kingdom of heaven. What are little children characterized by? Wide-open-eyed awe, plastic natures that can be shaped, excitement, openness, and what happens to us sometimes the longer we serve the Lord? We're rigid, we're closed, we're hard.

Happens to preachers like me, happens to anyone. We know, we know. And then we say goodbye to God's best blessings sometimes.

Let me close. There's the prejudice of ignorance, there's the prejudice and closeness that comes from tradition, church tradition. Oh, just thinking, because I'm editing this book that I'm writing that'll come out next year.

Oh, Deaconess, a woman, a deacon's wife wrote me a heartbreaking letter. Dear Pastor Cimbala, I read one of your books. You mentioned about prayer, and you have a prayer meeting in your church.

And my church is like in disarray a little bit, and it's in decline, and not many people are getting saved, and there's like a lethargy in the church, and the folks aren't excited about Jesus. So I went to the pastor, since I'm a deacon's wife, and I said, you know, I've just been thinking about this. I read something in a book, and then I checked out the verses.

Maybe we should emphasize more prayer in the church. Maybe you could preach about prayer. We could start a prayer meeting.

We had a little more prayer in the Sunday services, or worship, and all of that, and he interrupted her and said, stop! That's not the model we follow. We're not into prayer in this church. Exactly, as Jason comes to play.

We're into, God is moving by his spirit, moving in all the earth. We're into another model of church growth. They have all these models now that are going around that pastors are getting.

I just saw an advertisement on my way to Phoenix that came on my phone from a leading pastor, his name you would know. He has a church growth conference in the place where he lives, and here was the hook. It was his name inviting people to come, and here was the hook for the pastors to come.

Come and hear the most creative ideas from the brightest minds in America. Think of what that says. Not come and meet God.

Not come and hear preaching that's anointed. No, come and hear the most creative ideas way to do church from the brightest minds in America. I thought to myself, that's the first time in 2,000 years that Christian leaders are gathering not around God, but around man.

Men are the center, and when you follow one of those models, it doesn't matter what the Bible says. You're already locked, you're prejudiced. No, no, no, I don't care what the Bible says.

We're not into prayer, but God said my house shall be called what? A house of prayer. Not to hurt us, to help us, but the worst prejudice of all is the prejudice of unbelief. Did you know that Jesus couldn't overcome that prejudice? In other words, unbelief can get so strong that we can miss out on what God wants to do, even though he's sovereign.

We can miss out on what Jesus wants to do because it can't be done. It's not for today. I don't believe in that stuff, and that unbelief can tie the hands of Jesus himself.

You say, no, that can't be. Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. Yeah, but you gotta understand all of Scripture.

When he went to his own hometown, he could not do many miracles. Why? Because of their unbelief. Unbelief shuts down God's power.

Think of the prejudice of unbelief. You're not gonna believe God and be open to something because in your little heart, your little minuscule mind and my minuscule mind, we don't believe it can happen, even though God says with me, all things are possible. And that unbelief just stops us from praying great prayers and seeing great answers.

For some of you today, it could happen today. He's this close to you. If you would just have faith and not have that prejudice of unbelief.

I've never seen it done. That's a lot of fanaticism, rah, rah, rah, rah. And there's a lot of exaggerations there are, but then there's the true and the living God.

So I felt at a banquet table at the Marriott Scottsdale Camelback Inn, sitting opposite Ravi Zacharias, my friend, I felt God speak to me that I'm supposed to close the meeting by telling you this. Two things. Ravi said to me, I said, Ravi, how's your back? Because my associate pastor is going through a back problem.

Ravi, if you don't know who he is, he's born in India. One of the great, it was suicidal as a young person and now is one of the great preachers and apologists in America, defends Christianity, spreads the gospel everywhere, very unique man. So he's had back problems for about 10 years.

In fact, one time when he preached here on this pulpit, he said to me before I go, before he walked out, he said, just pray for me, Jim, that I can stand for the whole message. And while he was preaching, I noticed at one point he started leaning because he was going through agony. So I always ask him about his back because he used to play tennis and we talk about one day hitting, but he can't do it because his back.

He said, Jim, you won't believe what happened since the last time I saw you. He said, I have a friend from, I don't know where, some foreign, another country. He said, and he was in the city where, he was visiting Atlanta, and he said, he woke up in the morning and he said, I have a new habit, I'm not gonna talk to anybody, I'm not gonna step out of the bed until I talk to Jesus and ask him, Jesus, what should I do today? Who should I talk to? Show me your will for me today, Jesus.

So he said, he was doing that in the bed and the Lord, he felt, spoke to him. So he called me and he said, I have to meet with you. I have to meet with you, Ravi.

Ravi, I have to meet with you. I won't take up 15 minutes of your time, I know you're busy. He said, my day was busy, but I said, I'll meet you in a restaurant.

So he said, we met for breakfast or lunch and he's there. And he said, well, I'm happy that you thought of me and that you called and that we could talk for a little bit of time. He said, okay.

I was praying, and here's what God wants you to know. Two things God spoke to me to tell you. Number one, your ministry now is gonna have a greater anointing than it's ever had in all the years you've been ministering.

There will be more power, more grace. There will be a greater anointing on your ministry than ever before. And Ravi said, Jim, since that day, not only on myself, but on the whole ministry that's around the world, he said, I can sense that happening.

He said, and then the man said to me, but secondly, God told me this, and I don't understand it, but I'm just gonna give it to you. Three, four, five. Ravi said, what did you say? He said, I'm telling you, I feel foolish, but I'm just telling you now.

God told me to tell you, starting now, your ministry is gonna be more used by God than ever before. And secondly, three, four, five. And Ravi said, that's been my problem for 10 years, L, three, four, five.

The man said, is it? And he laid his hand on him in the restaurant. And Ravi felt the presence of the Lord there at the table. He got up, they went to the airport.

He went through security with his traveling companion. And after he was sitting down, he has to kneel down to get his shoes on because of his back. He was sitting with his legs crossed, and the aide said to him, what are you doing? He said, what, I'm just putting my shoes.

He said, no, you're sitting, you're crossing your leg, you're bending over. And Ravi said, Jim, in eight months, I haven't had one bit of pain in my back after 10 years. Can we say amen to that? Come on, can we praise God for that? Next to him was a woman from Pakistan, and I close with this.

Next to him was a woman from Pakistan. Woman was talking to me, and she said, I'm from Pakistan, and I said, I gotta tell you something. And then the Lord just came as I was talking, and it was meant to be.

I said, about three years ago, I was sitting in a room, in a restaurant, and I was eating a salad and some juice, and I was reading on my Kindle, the Washington Post, and it was an article about a village in Pakistan that had been attacked by Muslims, and all the Christians had been assaulted, and they burnt down all the homes of every Christian, I think nine or 10 homes. And she said, yes. And I said, she's married to a Messianic believer who teaches some science at Rice University in Houston.

They were at that dinner. So I said, I was reading it, and I started, the Holy Spirit came upon me, and I started to weep for the Christians in a place called Gojo in Pakistan. And I wanted to stop because, you know, I'm eating a salad, I'm in a public place.

I couldn't. I started to convulsively sob and weep for my brothers and sisters. So I turned my face to the wall because I didn't want people to look at me.

I didn't want them to see that I was weeping. But I couldn't shake this burden. Her eyes are starting to tear up.

And I said, so I went home, but Monday night, it was a Monday, Monday night, I couldn't shake it. I woke up on Tuesday morning, Gojo, the Christians. I began to pray.

I said, God, what do I do? I want to help, but what can I do? I don't know anybody in Pakistan. What do I know? So I came to church and I brought my Kindle with me into the Tuesday night prayer meeting, which I've never done before or since. And I said, God, I don't know what to do.

So I took my Kindle up here and I read the article from the Washington Post and the New York Times also had it, attack in Gojo. And what they had spread was there was a wedding earlier that week. Two Christians got married and they had confetti and they threw the confetti on the couple and some of the Muslim Imams passed the message that that was the Quran had been cut up and that the confetti was cut up pieces of the Quran, which set a mob off, which then assaulted the people.

One or two people died. All the homes were burnt down. One family lost their dad.

So I read this article and I can hear you groaning. I could hear the palpable reply from your hearts. So I said, let's pray for these people in Pakistan.

I've never done this. I've heard of persecution everywhere in the world, but nothing's affected me like this. I don't know why.

I don't know what I'm supposed to do, but could we please pray? And all of you got up on a Tuesday and you started to pray. And I was in a spot right down here praying with three or four people. We're praying, oh God, protect the ones that have remained.

Give them courage. Don't let them deny Christ. And we're praying how they're gonna get their homes, how they're gonna get their clothes back, you know? So as the end of the prayer, I said to the Lord, Lord, what do I do now? I would like to send some money from our church to those people.

I don't know anybody in Pakistan. I don't know anybody, anything to do with Pakistan. I've never been there.

I'm walking up these very steps. And as I'm walking here and you all are starting to sit down in the prayer time, after the prayer time, Pastor Craig Holiday comes running down this aisle and he's waving his hand at me and he's saying, in the back, the lady in the back, the lady in the back. And I go, what lady? What are you talking about? He goes, no, it's Pakistan, Pakistan.

So I go, there's a woman from Pakistan in the prayer meeting tonight on a Tuesday night? He goes, yeah. So she comes up. He said, no, there's more.

So she comes up, she walks right up here as God is my witness. And she comes up and I put the microphone down and I said, who are you? And she says, my name is such and such. And I said, you're from Pakistan.

She said, no, I'm not just from Pakistan. I happen to be in America. I've never been in your church before.

But my husband and my son are right now in that town. They're the first responders to help the Christians that are in that town. So I go, no.

She said, yes. I told the people, everybody in the church went, like that, I mean, what are the odds on that? You can't even make that up. For those of you who don't believe in the supernatural and your box has God in it because of what you've seen growing up, we pray with her, we rejoice.

You all collected, we collected \$10,000. We took it from the offering. And the CFO called over, vetted everything out.

It was legitimate, exactly as she said. And the money went. About three months later, on a Saturday night, about 9.30, the CFO, Steve Rhodes, calls me and he says, we got a problem.

I said, what's the problem? He said, the pastor we sent the money to, he's back in his village, but he has a real problem. Somebody has stirred up the mob and there's thousands of Muslims who are talking about death to Christians, death to Christians, death to Christians. Kill them, burn them down.

They're not allowed to live. He says, he didn't sound good. I said, I don't know what to do.

It's 9.30 on Saturday night. I don't know what time, seven, eight hours later over there. So we just like, let's pray.

So we, I prayed. So in the morning, I come to church. I'm up in my office just like I was today.

I pray with the prayer band just like I did today. They go down to the elevators. And then five minutes later, I come down to join the meeting.

And coming out of the elevator is Steve Rhodes, but he's pale and he's got his cell phone there. And he said, pastor, it's bad. The guy just called me.

They're up on the roof with their families. And down in the square, there's thousands of people ranting, working themselves up in a frenzy. And they're saying horrible things.

And they're up on the roof. I could feel the terror in his voice. Pastor, it's bad.

It's happening now, real time. They're up on a roof right now. They're hiding with their wives and their children.

How would you like to hide on a roof with people wanting to kill you? How would you like that feeling? It just stunned me. I came down. I walked right out through those doors.

I came up. Somebody was leading the praise and worship. I let the song end and I walked up, took the microphone, told the people, this is what's going down.

I told them the whole story. I said, what are we gonna do? We can just pray. So every one of you that was here that day, we lifted up our voices to God.

Oh, did we call on God. Not for ourselves, for our brothers and sisters in Pakistan, for people whose lives are at stake. And we prayed and prayed and prayed then went on with the meeting.

Later on in the day, Steve Rose walked into my office and we were chatting and I said, by the way, did you hear back from the pastor? He said, oh, that's why I'm here, I gotta tell you. I did hear back from him. I said, oh, thank God he made it through.

They didn't kill him. He said, no, it's not like that. He said, after I hung up with him and I told you and you had the people pray, he said, right after that, suddenly clouds started appearing out of nowhere, dark clouds.

And dark clouds just settled over that town. They just came, rain clouds. And as they're shivering and hiding up on their roofs, suddenly a downpour to beat all downpour comes.

A rain so heavy and hard that it dispersed more than 1,000 people who were gathered in this. Come on, can we give God praise and honor and glory? Come on, can we thank him? That God is alive. God is alive.

God is real. Don't say in your heart, God can't do that. Don't let unbelief prejudice you.

Have a heart open for the impossible because the Lord said, with man, those things are impossible but with God, nothing is impossible. Can we say amen one more time? With God, nothing is impossible. Close your eyes.

Close your eyes with me. If you're here today and you need a miracle, especially somebody with a back problem. If you're here up in the balcony or downstairs and you have a back problem, the same God who healed Ravi, the same God who heard our prayers and sent rain to disperse a crowd.

You say, no, that's just a coincidence. According to your faith, so be it unto you. But as for me and my house, we believe in the power of God.

I'm not gonna quit God for a minute. I'm not gonna put God in some little human box of my own understanding. Whatever the miracle is that you need and you need it, it's time sensitive.

It's not something that can wait around forever. You stand right now where you're seated. Just stand.

In the balcony, stand. By standing, you're gonna say, I'm gonna be noble like the Bereans were. I'm not gonna believe according to my box.

I'm gonna believe according to the word of God. God, while I was speaking, some people were convicted because their longing is to hear from you like that man did in his bed that morning and then bring healing and blessing to other people. Keep us open to heaven all day long.

Help us to come to church, yes. Listen to the preacher, yes. Read our word, yes.

But keep us open to the moving of your blessed Holy Spirit. Create faith in us. Lord, we believe, help our unbelief.

Save us from the prejudice of ignorance, tradition, culturalism, and most of all, the prejudice of unbelief. We believe and we rejoice in the God of our salvation. Now be with us today, Lord.

Blanket us with your presence all day long for we pray this in Jesus' name. And everyone said. Amen.

Amen. Let's give God one last magnificent hand clap of praise. Amen.

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