

# Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire-I Interview: Jim Cymbala

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's story of how he became a pastor without formal training and how the Brooklyn Tabernacle grew into a thriving church through the power of prayer and obedience to God's direction.*

**Duration:** 13:47

**Scripture:** Psalm 37:4, Jeremiah 33:3, Matthew 6:33, Philippians 4:6-7, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 4:8, 1 Peter 5:7

**Topics:** "Interview"

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## Description

In this video, Harold Harper introduces an interview with Pastor Jim Symbola of the Brooklyn Tabernacle. The pastor's church has grown from a small congregation to a thriving community that makes a significant impact in the New York area. The church's success is attributed to the pastor's vision for prayer and the congregation's commitment to it. The interview highlights the power of prayer and the role it played in preparing the church to minister in the aftermath of the September 11th tragedy.

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## Transcript

Hello and welcome to another edition of For Faith and Family with Dr. Richard Land. I'm Harold Harper, and ever since September 11th, things have obviously changed. I don't think a week has gone by when I haven't thought about the families that have been affected by the tragedy.

Then I thought about an interview that we conducted not too long ago with a pastor about his church, making a huge difference in the New York community. They have a prayer service every Tuesday evening, and the auditorium is always full. At the same time, it hasn't always been that way.

It was interesting to see how this church started with a small handful of members, and now has become an incredible church making a huge difference in the New York community, now packed out with four services on Sunday morning, and they have overflow rooms set up for a Tuesday night prayer meeting. Can you imagine that? It all started because a pastor had a vision for his congregation, a vision to call his church to prayer. As a result of that, he is now able to minister in an incredible way in the New York area.

The pastor's name is Jim Cimbala, and today we want to share with you the interview we recorded a few years ago. At that time, he had just written the book, Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire. Since the time of the first interview, it has been one of the top requested programs here at For Faith and Family.

I believe that's because it's always amazing to hear a testimony of what God is doing in someone's life, but it's even more so amazing to see what God is doing in this particular church. For me, it's been refreshing to go back and listen after September 11th, because it's easy to see that God put this vision on this pastor's heart and began preparing this church so that it can make a huge difference in light of what has taken place on September 11th. We thought it would be interesting to you, that you would enjoy it.

So let's go now to an interview we recorded earlier with Dr. Richard Land and Pastor Jim Cimbala. Folks, I'm excited that I'm able to bring you the story of spiritual triumph and of the power of prayer that we're going to be sharing together today. I have with me Brother Jim Cimbala, who is the pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

He has been pastoring there since 1972. And at that church, his wife Carol directs the Grammy Award winning Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir. He's the author of two books, Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire, and Fresh Faith.

And it is a truly amazing story. Brother Jim, thank you for being with us today. It's my joy to be with you.

Brother Jim, I spent some time in the New York City area. I went to college at Princeton in the mid and late 60s, and I used to find myself in the New York City area to go to ball games and to just spend time in what is a very exciting place, a very challenging place, a place that unfortunately in the 20th century has not been one that readily has been identified with great spiritual movements. And yet it's an amazing thing that has happened at your church and what God has done in and through your ministry there at the Brooklyn Tabernacle since 1972.

You've gone from a membership of a little more than 20 to 6,000, and God continues to move in a mighty way in your church. And I want you to share with our listeners how that came to be in a few minutes. But I was a history major in college, and those who are regular listeners to our program know that I am a strong believer in, if you want to really know and understand anything, anyone, or any event, you have to understand the history of it.

And so Brother Jim, tell us how you came to understand God's call on your life to be in full-time ministry. Well, it was unusual. I didn't go to seminary.

I didn't go to a Bible school of any kind. I married my former pastor's daughter, Carol, who is very, very gifted in music. She's won two Grammy Awards now, but she can't read or write music technically.

Never been trained. Couldn't then. Still can't.

And we married, and about a year later had our first child, and I was working in the business world. But there was a huge gaping hole in our life that we were unfulfilled. We knew there was something else God had for us.

Now, for a few years, even while I was in college, I was reading and studying. I was a history buff also, but began to dig into theological books and studied and read and never stopped. God was doing something in my life, but I just couldn't picture where this would go to.

I just figured I could help in a local church but never be a leader. I wasn't trained, now had a baby. But to make a long story short, my father-in-law, my late father-in-law, was overseeing a little church in Newark, New Jersey.

And the pastor left, and he said, You know what? I know it's a big step, and you've got a lot to learn, but you've got to start somewhere. How about you and Carol considering it? So the next thing you know, we're pastoring a little church in Newark, New Jersey. And then the Brooklyn Tabernacle, which was in a run-down part of downtown Brooklyn, less than 20 people in this ramshackle building, they asked me, which was a pretty sad state of affairs when they were asking someone like me to come in for four Sunday nights to preach and give them some meetings and maybe revive the church a little bit, see God revive it.

On the second Sunday, the pastor up and quit. He resigned. And my father-in-law was also overseeing that church.

And he said, you know, the debate was, what do we do now? And my mother-in-law at that time said, You know what? Let's just let it close. They're operating in the red. There's a handful of people.

The thing has gone through so many trials and tribulations. But my father-in-law said, You know, Jim, who knows what God's going to do? Would you mind trying to watch over both churches, the one in Newark and the one in Brooklyn? So for one year, we did, instead of a bad job at one place, we did a bad job in two places. We doubled our pleasure.

And then God began to deal with my wife and I that we were to resign where we had a stable salary. Where things were more organized. And throw all of our energy and all of our lives into this inner city, interracial, surrounded by problems work at the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

And that's what began our time there. Now, Brother Jim, how old were you at the time, at this time? Let's see. That would be, I was about 30, 31 years old when I went to the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

So here you are, 30, 31 years old, and a young wife, family, and you have established ministry there in Newark. And God tells you that he wants you to go into an area that can only be described as one of urban blight. Right.

The way we started in the work of the Lord was very different than what a lot of people have in their minds now. I didn't know anything. I was desperate in my need for God.

I was constantly studying, living in the word of God, building a library that has become quite large. And all the hardships and difficulties we just took as well. This is what the work of God must be.

The first year we were at the Brooklyn Tabernacle, we earned \$3,800 for the year as a salary. And that was in 1972. \$5,500 the next year.

So we had to get second jobs, and I did a little coaching, and my wife worked in a school. And we lived by faith, and sometimes a woman in the church would drive all the way to where we lived. We moved soon to Brooklyn, but when we were still in New Jersey, she would drive out, leave eight bags of groceries on the porch, ring the doorbell.

By the time we opened the door, she was driving away, and there was some food. And God was constantly doing things like that. But no, the thought was never money.

The thought was, here's a chance to see God work. You know, a lot of the stuff that we talk about in church is always about what God once did 100 years ago, 200 years ago, the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, the Relch revival, D.L. Moody, Charles Finney, whatever. When I had a phase,

my dilemma was, well, wait a minute.

I've watched people's lives go by, and I've watched churches go nowhere for 20, 25 years, talking about what once was or what will be one day. How about right now? I mean, isn't Jesus alive? Am I not surrounded by alcoholism and drug addiction? Heroin was big then in the early 70s. Crack cocaine hadn't come in yet.

Black people, brown, yellow, red, gangs, murders, urban blight. So if there was any place to see God glorify himself and the gospel prove itself powerful, here it was. It's like Spurgeon said.

If you want to show beautiful diamonds, you don't lay it against a white linen. You put it against black velvet because the contrast brings out the luster of the diamonds. And that's the way God works, always has done that.

Where there's the worst situation, if we do it according to the Bible and trust God's power, he'll do things that will make the world stand back and say, how in the world did that happen? And then God can get glory. Now, Brother Jim, what was the turning point in the life of the church in your ministry there? Oh, that's easy. The church grew to about 100 people, Richard, as we struggled along.

And I got very sick. I got maybe walking pneumonia, bronchitis. I don't know what it was, but I was coughing so violently, so sick.

No insurance, no doctor, no money, nothing. I got so sick, I couldn't even sleep in the same bedroom with my wife because my coughing was so convulsive. So I got the idea.

My father-in-law was living in Florida, offered to fly me down so I could just rest in Florida and get my strength back. I went down to Florida to rest. And about the second day down there, I went on a fishing boat, not to catch fish.

I mean, I'll throw the line in the water, but I wasn't interested. I just wanted to sit in the sun and rest and be out in the water and get well. And I went to one side of the boat where nobody was.

There were only maybe 20, 30 other people on the boat, a huge boat. And I began to pray and talk to the Lord. It kind of went like this.

I said, Lord, what do I do? You've got me in this situation. I haven't been trained. You didn't let me go to seminary or Bible school.

My wife got a little choir started and is playing so beautifully, but she doesn't have a clue what she's doing either. And now there's books out about get buses. And that's the secret to church growth is get buses.

But I said, there's buses all over New York City already. I mean, if people want to ride a bus, they don't need to get buses from a church. They'll just jump on a bus.

Other books are saying, no, cell group meetings, home meetings, cells. That's the secret. Small groups is the secret to church growth.

And then just like today, we have user friendly, secret sensitive, do theater, do all of that. And I said, Lord, I'm in the inner city. I haven't been trained.

What do I do? I mean, you can't have me there for nothing. I just don't want to hold the fort for 20, 30 years and see nobody get saved because that doesn't match up with your word, as we see it in the book of Acts and the epistles. So what do I do? And I just began to weep.

I was desperate. And really, a lot hasn't changed since then because I still haven't been trained. And now I'm facing bigger problems, challenges.

And not to be mystical, and I don't want to say this lightly, but I had a tremendous experience with the Lord as I waited before him on the side of that boat. And what the Lord spoke to me in a very, very clear way was, if you and your wife will just lead the people to pray, I will take care of every sermon you need to preach, which I was very insecure about. I will take care of all the money that you need to live on personally and that your church will ever need.

And third, there'll never be a building large enough to contain all the people that I'll send in if you just lead the people to pray. So I came back and told the church, look, I've met with God, and this is nothing new. This is not some new revelation that can't be backed up by Scripture, of which we have so much today.

We're going to pray, and the barometer of the church is going to be our Tuesday night prayer meeting. And now, sometimes on Tuesday nights, we'll have with children over 2,000 people flood the theater that we meet in now. They go in overflow rooms.

There's lines outside the building two hours before the meeting begins, people just coming to pray. And any good thing that's happened in the church, anything the choir has done, myself, any book I've written, any...

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