

# Pray

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala emphasizes the critical role of prayer in overcoming temptation and strengthening one's faith in God.*

**Duration:** 26:29

**Scripture:** Luke 18:1, Luke 22:39

**Topics:** "Prayer"

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## Description

In this sermon, the pastor emphasizes the importance of spending time with God in prayer. He encourages the congregation to not only read the Bible, but also to open their hearts and pour out their emotions to the Father. The pastor highlights the significance of prayer in facing temptation and strengthening one's faith. He uses the example of Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he faced the temptation to avoid the cross. The pastor concludes by emphasizing that spending time with God in prayer allows the Holy Spirit to reveal Christ to our hearts and helps us overcome temptation.

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## Transcript

What I want to read from is a very poignant passage at the end of Christ's life. Let's look at our verses, which are found in Luke chapter 22. This is after the Last Supper happened.

Jesus went out, as usual, to the Mount of Olives, which was outside of Jerusalem, and his disciples followed him. Upon reaching the place, a garden, he said to them, Pray that you will not fall into temptation. He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down, and prayed, Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done.

An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him in some way we're not aware of. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow.

Why are you sleeping, he asked them. Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. Then later on, we read, Then seizing Jesus, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest.

Peter followed at a distance, and when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, This man was with him, but he denied it.

Woman, I don't know him, he said. A little later, someone else saw him and said, You also are one of them. Man, I am not, Peter replied.

About an hour later, another asserted, Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean. He had an accent from up in the north. Peter replied, Man, I don't know what you're talking about.

And just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter, and then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him. Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.

And he went outside, and he wept bitterly. This is going to be short, because I want to do it. I don't want to talk about it so much.

I need to do it today. There's no doubt, it seems, all commentators and experts agree that it would have been a lot better situation for the disciples that night if they had obeyed what the Lord said and prayed. When he was arrested, they all fled.

And that's a bad testimony for people who had been with him for over three years. There's no doubt about it that Peter probably would have not denied the Lord if he had obeyed the Lord. At that moment of crisis, Peter folded like a table and denied that he even knew the Lord.

And we know from other accounts that he cursed the third time. He was so frustrated and upset. That all probably would have been different if they had just, before the moment came, prepared their hearts and steeled themselves for that moment of darkness by doing what the Lord had encouraged them to do, pray so that you won't fall and give in to temptation.

This temptation wasn't Oxycontin or drugs of another kind or alcohol or a woman, a man. This was to stand strong and attest your faith and confirm your faith in Jesus Christ. It's like when you play a basketball game, the practice that you have, and the shape you get in, and the skills you learn, and all that you work on in practice during the week will determine how you play.

Everybody in the stands is just going to watch how you play. But anybody who knows anything about sports knows that it's the practice part, getting in shape part, the thing nobody sees. Then what people do see comes out better.

But the real secret was what you don't see. It's like a tree or a plant. The tree might look great and all of that, but the secret is in the roots.

Unhealthy roots, bad roots, the tree will not look very good and might die. But the roots are hidden under the ground where nobody can see it, but it's the secret of the tree. So it is in spiritual things.

It's the hidden part of life that determines what we end up acting out and living out and what people get to see. So the moment is familiar to all of us, isn't it? Jesus has the last supper, serves them the bread and the cup, and then he goes to the garden where he wants to pray. I want you to mark those words.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, felt he couldn't make it unless he prayed. Not a new convert, not someone getting baptized next Sunday. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God yet man, man yet God.

He couldn't face this moment without preparing himself through prayer. He told the disciples as he went to the garden, now you pray. He said it at least twice.

Here in Luke we have two repetitions of it. Men, you pray. I'm going to go private by myself, but you pray.

Why? So that you'll be strong and you won't fall into temptation. You pray. And we know that twice he came back by getting fuller accounts, and they might have tried, but they fell asleep.

And they weren't prayed up, and they didn't spend time with God, and thus when the soldiers came, they were nowhere to be found. The story in Luke tells us that after Jesus first prayed and before he went to see them sleeping, he got an answer for his prayer. And that's what prayer is about, getting answers from heaven.

And what was the answer he got? An angel appeared and strengthened him in some way that we're not familiar with, or it's left unsaid. So he prayed, and sure enough help came from heaven. That's what God will always do when we pray.

That's a law we all have to remember. When you pray the right way, sincerely from your heart, there will always come something from heaven to help you. Might not be an angel.

Might not come within five minutes. Something is going to happen because God answers prayer. God regards prayer.

God honors and holds prayer in such high esteem that they're kept in bowls in heaven. The question was asked in Revelation, and what's in there? Oh, those are the bowls where the prayers of the saints are kept, every prayer. He's tracking every prayer.

Every time you kneel, every time you walk, every time you lift your heart, a 10-second prayer, a 50-minute prayer, every prayer is registered. Prayers never die. Prayers keep circulating before God.

Prayers don't dissipate like a gas would. Prayer just, it's incredible. As someone has said, prayers are kept that way because whatever God can do, prayer can do because prayer hooks us up with God himself.

God's power now is connected to prayer. Notice that when they were going to face this hour of temptation, Jesus didn't say, study the word so that you don't fall into temptation. Studying the word is an important thing.

But notice for the immediate need, Jesus said, pray that you won't fall into temptation. You won't give in. They didn't obey that, and we know the rest of the story.

So Jesus came and was strengthened after he prayed by an angel. Then it says he prayed even more fervently, more earnestly. Now he was facing something that we don't fully understand because his holy soul, his holy spirit, his precious body had never known sin, had never been contaminated with sin.

He had never known guilt in his life. And now coming upon him in a way we don't understand, he knew why he was sent. He wasn't sent to do miracles and teach only.

That was secondary. He was sent to take on the sins of the world. Just think taking on the sins of this audience and you watching on the webcast.

Forget the world. Just every sin you and I have ever committed, the ones people know about, the ones no one knows about. Every lie, every uncleanness, every prejudice, every bit of anger, every hasty word, every act of covetousness, every angry thing, they say, ah, you idiot.

And all of that stuff, all of those sins, every uncleanness, every foul thing, everyone's ever done here, all of it was laid upon him. And that's nothing. It was everyone who ever lived was put upon him.

And he shrank from that in a natural way. So his prayer was, don't let me back away, God, if there's a way which shows his humanity, if there's a way to escape this, remove this cup from me, but nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done. And the disciples then came.

He came to the disciples and they were sleeping. And we know the one that the boasted the most that he would never deny the Lord. It's followed up later in that chapter, as we read, that Peter not only fled, he then later followed, but at a distance, he was afraid.

So what happens when we don't pray? And then what is prayer? And then I'm done. What happens when we don't pray, no matter, even if we read the Bible, even if we go on YouTube and listen to gospel music, and even when we sing in the choir, or we're a pastor or whatever, what happens when we don't pray is all the spiritual realities that are mentioned in the Bible, all these realities, these promises, the person of Christ, the fact that he's alive, the fact that all power is in the Holy Spirit, the promise, I will never leave you nor forsake you, the promise that all things work together for good to them that love God. All of those things no longer are realities to us when we don't pray.

They are concepts. They become concepts. It's not that we don't believe them.

They're just concepts in our mind. And when the enemy comes, or temptation, or pressure, or whatever it is, concepts can't hold you. It has to be real to your soul.

Jesus has to be real. You have to be able to sing and know it. He touched me.

Oh, he touched me. And oh, the joy that fills my soul. Something happened, and now I know he touched me and made me whole.

When we spend time with God, when we pray, God, the Holy Spirit, begins to reveal Christ to us, to our inner person, our heart, not to our mind, to our heart. And all these things become real, the reality of eternity, the insignificance of money and earthly pleasure. But otherwise, these things are affirmed in our minds, but they don't grab you.

They don't hold you. When temptation comes, the flesh gives in because that's what seems real to it. But when we spend time with God in prayer, notice what Jesus said, pray that you don't enter into temptation.

He said that prayer and overcoming temptation are strongly linked together. People who pray and spend time with God are stronger when temptation comes, because they've been with God. They've been strengthened by God.

They've been encouraged by God. The things of God are real to them. The Holy Spirit has been poured out more plenteously in their life, so thus they're just stronger in the Lord.

Remember what Ephesians 6 says, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. That implies that we can be Christians and not be strong. Why would there be a command, be strong if everyone's strong all the time? Obviously not.

So be strong in the Lord. And then it talks about the armor that we're to put on. And then later Paul writes and says, and pray at all times with all kinds of prayer in every season.

Be instant in prayer. Always be reaching out to God in prayer. And thus, if we don't, we get fearful.

We get weak. Our faith can fail. Now, Jesus had taught prior to this about prayer.

In fact, just in the week of our reading, you remember how he valued prayer and what he taught about prayer. On his last trip into Jerusalem, he went to the temple. Do you remember that reading, everybody? He went to the temple and he cleansed it with a whip.

He kicked out all the money changers and the people who were making a buck, and he had turned it into a place of commerce. And he cleansed it and he said, is it not written, my house shall be called a house of what? A house of prayer. You've turned it into a den of thieves, we read in the other accounts.

What was going on there? Well, when you gave your offering in Jerusalem, you had to give it in the currency of Jerusalem, but you might come from another place where let's say you had pesos, but you got to get the pesos into dollar. You had a Dutch guilder. You had a euro or whatever, and you had to pay.

Well, you had to change it, and they were making money on the exchange. And then there were animals that you had to buy for sacrifice, and these people were gouging because they knew they had you. So they charged you extra and they were making money, and Jesus just got the strongest, violent, most violent reaction found in the gospels is when he cleansed the temple because he said, no, my father's house is supposed to be a house of prayer, and you're making money.

That's how sacred prayer was. But you have to remember that his attitude wasn't pray because you're supposed to pray like I learned growing up. It wasn't, you got to pray.

What's wrong with you? You're supposed to pray. No one's going to get a life of prayer that way. He said, no, pray so that God can do for you what he wants to do for you because the first law of the kingdom is asking and receiving.

You have not because you what? Ask not. So what the Lord was teaching was not, Christians are supposed to pray. Come on, pray, so that it's like some meritorious act.

No, come boldly to the throne of grace so that you can receive mercy and grace to help you. For some reason, God has made a channel, and that channel is the channel everything from heaven comes down to our lives through that channel. And what is that channel? Prayer.

People who believe and pray. In fact, as E.M. Bounds has said, there's really two kinds of people in the world, not black, not white, not Hispanic, not all that, not old, not young. There's just two kinds of people, people who pray and people who don't.

That's how God looks at it. People who come to him and say, God, I need you. And then there's people who say, I don't need you.

I can manage on my own. Listen, if there's an emergency, there's a car accident, I might talk to you, but otherwise I can make it every day without you because I got this thing together. That's how God sees the world.

People pray, people who don't pray. And just think now the prayerlessness has you watching the webcast, you know that in the city you live, you can't find a church hardly that will have a prayer meeting or hardly any prayer in the Sunday services. Prayer is out.

Prayer is not an in thing anymore. It's like the deacon's wife who wrote me a couple of years ago, I mentioned in my book, the last book that I wrote, which is called Storm. And she wrote to me and said, you know, I read one of your books and you were pointing out some scriptures.

And I thought, that's why our church isn't growing and more people are in touch with the gospel. That's why there's such lethargy and the people, the finances are not good in the church. Everything's going sideways.

So I went to the pastor and I said, you know, pastor, I noticed that you hardly ever talk about prayer. And there's no prayer hardly in the Sunday service where people have a chance to let their heart go up to God. And then there's no prayer meetings.

And suddenly he cut her off, she told me and said, stop, stop. That's not the model church that we follow. We're not into prayer.

What could I write and tell that woman? Here was a Christian pastor of a Christian church who probably pounded the Bible every Sunday, but prayer was an off-limits subject. Not only did Jesus say my house should be called the house of prayer and now I'll close, but he also said, Jesus told his disciples a parable that they ought always to pray and not give up. Remember that? We read that this week.

I think that's the beginning of Luke 18. And he told about the unjust judge. Do you remember that? To encourage them.

Remember the story? This was an unjust judge, just couldn't care about anybody. And this woman kept coming and saying, I want justice. I want justice.

I got a case and you haven't heard it. And you're not adjudicating this thing in the right way. And he said, would you get out of here? But she wouldn't.

She kept coming back. And then she kept coming and coming. She was just like, this is overbearing.

And then he said, look, I don't care about her and I don't care about justice, but the woman might end up attacking me. That's how crazy she is. So I'm going to take care of her case.

And Jesus said, listen to what the unjust judge said. How much more will your heavenly father bring justice to those who cry to him day and night, who keep coming to him and saying, God, help me. I have no one else.

I have no plan B. It's you, Lord, I need you. Oh, I need you. And Jesus, of course, practiced that to such an extent that his disciples never said to him once, teach us to preach, teach us to teach, teach us how to do miracles.

But they must have known the roots that were underneath the ground. And they said to him, master, teach us to pray, how to pray and to actually do it. What happens when you pray? What is prayer? Prayer is when you open your heart, you humble yourself and you open your heart and you come to God with your needs.

There's a couple things important there. Prayer is from the heart. It's not the words you say.

You might not even say any words and just a tear comes down. And that's more than a hundred words. Because God is not listening just for the words.

He's looking for the heart that comes and says, I need you. Notice also that prayer is the ultimate act of humility. Proud people don't pray because prayer involves humbling yourself and saying you are there and I am here.

You are all powerful and I'm a mess. I need your help. So when pride gets in our lives, it's very hard to pray because I don't need God.

I don't need God. I got a little bit. I need him.

I mean, around the edges, I sometimes need a little help, but basically I got this thing down. So prayer is when you go up to God with your heart and you humble yourself and you just come into his presence and you say, God, I need you. I need you.

I need you. That's why as long as I'm living, I'll never stop singing. I need thee.

Oh, I need thee every hour. I need thee. I don't care if nobody's writing those kind of songs anymore.

I do not care about that at all. I don't care about the newest praise and worship song. Totally irrelevant to me.

I know what the Bible says is important. How many agree with me? It's important to every day. Say, lift up your hands with me and just say, I need thee.

Oh, I need thee every hour. I need thee. It doesn't matter what's popular.

That's the truth. How many recognize that? Just say, amen. You need the Lord every single day.

When we feel we don't need him, Satan has done a tremendous work of deception. When you don't feel your need of God, hmm, we're in a bad place, a bad place. So what happens? You go to God with your heart, not just with your mind.

You go to God with your heart. You humble yourself and you open up and you tell him your needs and you recognize you are Jehovah Jireh. Whatever I need, you have to supply.

What happens next in prayer? God has sworn when anybody prays to me, I will respond and begin to minister to them in some way. You got to understand this. Whenever we pray, you have to know God has sworn when people pray sincerely and they come in the light and they say, I need you.

I will respond. How? Leave it with him. When? Leave it with him.

But God has given his word. Ask and you shall receive. Everyone who seeks me will find me.

If you knock, it shall be open. How he'll do it, he will do it. If a church prays, God's going to bless that church.

If a man prays, God will bless that man. If a man prays over his children, God is going to bring something special into those children's lives. How many believe it? Say amen.

That is an absolute given. You have to believe that because that's what the whole of the Bible teaches, that when people pray, God reacts. But pastor, I was taught God is sovereign and he's going to do whatever he's going to do.

So what's the big thing about praying? What? You as a human being are going to determine what God's going to do. Listen, God is sovereign and God is on the throne, but the mystery of spiritual life is that the Bible says you have not because you ask not. How that all works, I don't know.

I leave it with God. But all I know is that men ought always to pray. Women ought always to pray and not give up.

So there's two things as we close. Is there something you've been praying about? And maybe because it wasn't answered, you've given up. I want to talk to you just for 30 seconds.

Don't give up. I said don't give up. It's always too soon to quit.

You never know when the next prayer is the one that pushes the wall over and the blessing will come. The son, the daughter will come back. Listen, you don't think I've ever fought with battles of discouragement, praying for this thing, that thing, a wayward child, other people, money, whatever the church needed.

God answers prayer. Say it with me. God answers prayer.

Or maybe you're here today and you're weak spiritually and the enemy's moving in to tempt you and to try to knock you down. I got to tell you, you got to pray. Yeah, come to church and hopefully we pray and we're going to pray now, but you got to learn, God, give me a life of prayer in my life.

What difference would there be in all of our lives? I know the hymn says sweet hour of prayer. I know that. But how about sweet 15 minutes of prayer to begin with? You got to ask God, God, bring me to a place where I get alone with you somehow and I can talk to you and let my heart go up to you.

Because if Jesus needed to pray, what am I insane? What am I crazy? What am I spiritually blind? He was praying, but I'm too busy to pray. You're too busy to pray. Cannot be, cannot be.

And remember, it's not to punish us, it's to help us. So if you're here today and you're tired, you've been praying and the answer hasn't come and you've been tempted to give up, but God is speaking to you today and encouraging you. He will come.

He will come. He will help you. Are you with me on that? He will help you.

It doesn't matter what you see at first. Notice what Jesus said, disciples ought always to pray and not give up. Why would you want to give up? Because the answer doesn't come right away.

And number two, if you just feel spiritually because of what's going on in your life that you need a strengthening from God, forget next week, forget tonight, ahora, now. You can get up out of your seat now. You can come up here and stand and I will pray with you.

Father God, we pray that starting today we're going to become men and women, men and women of prayer. You, Jesus, had to pray to face what was before you. How much more do we all need time with the father pouring out our heart, waiting in his presence, help us to keep reading the word of God, but help us to balance it, Lord, to put that Bible down and to just open our hearts, whether for 60 seconds, 60 minutes,

15 minutes, whatever it is continually, Lord, draw us to the throne of grace as a church, as individuals, as the pastor.

Make us men and women of prayer who receive great things from a great God because we pray great prayers in the great name of Jesus Christ. We thank you for talking to us today. He has promised he will answer when we pray.

Thank you for your love for us. Bless us now as we dismiss in Jesus name and everyone said aloud, turn around and hug, not handshake, hug three or four people.

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