

# Prayer Power

by Jim Cymbala

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*Jim Cymbala's sermon 'Prayer Power' emphasizes the necessity of desperate and prevailing prayer for divine intervention in our lives and communities.*

**Duration:** 30:13

**Scripture:** Isaiah 64:1, Matthew 28:19

**Topics:** "Power"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker recounts the story of Peter's miraculous escape from prison as an example of God's intervention in difficult situations. The speaker emphasizes the power of prayer and the need to rely on God when faced with seemingly impossible circumstances. He shares a personal story of his own experience of praying for his daughter's spiritual awakening and how God answered his prayers. The sermon concludes with a call to the congregation to pray fervently for their loved ones and to trust in God's ability to break chains and awaken hearts.

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## Transcript

When we took over the church, I was informed by the pastor who left when he was transferring things to me, and my mother-in-law voted at the time to close the church. There had been a lot of problems. It was down to just a small handful of people.

There was less than \$3 in the checking account, and just the last thing he told me as a little blessing, I guess, for me, was one of the ushers is robbing from the offering. That was his parting shot. I was like, what? He said, yeah, because the tithing envelopes add up to more money than is actually in the offering.

And there were only three ushers, but I didn't know who. It was so hard that the first Sunday that I was there, there were two services at that time, we used to go much later than we do now, 11 o'clock in the morning, 7.30 at night. When I stood up to speak in the 7.30 service probably no one in this building except for my wife was there, maybe Chrissy.

It was so hard. There was such a darkness. Satan was making some move to destroy this church.

Inexperienced pastor, young, that I stood up. I can't tell you what I was supposed to preach about, but it wasn't a good sermon, I can tell you that now. And I started to speak and a choking came in my throat and I felt like someone was stifling me to speak.

I looked out at the audience, the handful of people that were there, and although they were there, all I could feel was a dark curtain in the spirit realm. That's all I could feel. I maybe did three minutes of some kind of jabbering.

And then I just stopped and I said, I can't preach here, something's wrong here. I don't know much, I'm new to all of this, but something's wrong, we really need God. That's the truth, that was my sermon.

I broke down and wept and said, we really need God. I called the people forward to pray. As we prayed and prayed, because I didn't preach, as we prayed and prayed, the Holy Spirit came in some palpable way.

And I was just praying, God, what are we gonna do? There can't be a church here. This is some kind of den of iniquity or something. And as we were praying and praying and praying and pressing in and praying, a young man ran to the front and threw himself at the altar.

And it was the usher who was robbing all the money. I never said anything. I'd be embarrassed to say that in a meeting.

How could you say that? You'd lose the confidence of all the people. He grabbed me, whispered it in my ear. I said, okay, just don't usher anymore, you know, in case you backslide.

And then for the first months, that happened a lot. Not just because I couldn't preach very good, I couldn't. Don't do so good now.

But I just would call the people to pray. Why? Because when Satan is fighting against you, certain things don't turn around with 30-second prayers. Or 60-second prayers, or claiming a promise.

Now, that happens at times. But you have to discern prayer. You have to understand what's happening around you.

There's no formula to prayer. Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer, which is really the disciples' prayer, as a model prayer. But we know from the Bible that other kinds of prayers were offered.

And tonight, what I wanna do is go back, even though there's a lot more people, and we're to the top of the balcony here with all of you, I wanna go back and challenge us to go back to the kind of praying we need to go back to if we're gonna see God change people's lives, New York City, America, the world. How many wanna see God come and do just something amazing? Chicago, we have people here from Pennsylvania and Iowa. Look, look, if it would just happen by preaching and handing out Bibles, it woulda happened by now.

It woulda happened by now. If it would just happen by PowerPoints and slickness and smoke coming up while the praise and worship is going on, it would have happened by now. So there's an element missing, and that's the element of God coming in answer to desperate, prevailing prayer.

Desperate, prevailing prayer. I cannot make you feel that. But I know Pastor Tim didn't build that church in Detroit that he was at before God sent him here without desperate, prevailing prayer.

Nothing is built that really stands and is strong for God without desperate, prevailing prayer. Here's one simple example. You might be aware of it.

And think of how desperate the church was in Acts 12. Look at it. It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.

He had James, the brother of John. That's one of two of the original, James and John. He had James, the brother of John.

John is the one who wrote the book of Revelation, the gospel of John, and first, second, and third John letters. And he had him put to death with the sword. Killed him, muerte, dead.

When he saw, notice how evil he was. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, probably the leaders, he proceeded to seize Peter also. Now that's the main presiding elder of the church in Jerusalem.

This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover.

Remember, there was Passover, and then there were seven days of unleavened bread. And that completed the holiday, which is often called just Passover, but it went on. So he was gonna kill him, but he didn't want it during the holiday.

It wouldn't look good. Oh, how evil we can be, and yet religious at the same time. How evil we can be.

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. One translation, I believe it's Weymouth's translation, says this, and a steady stream of prayer kept going up to God. They shut down everything and said, we're gonna lose Peter.

He just killed James. We're gonna lose Peter now. How do you think they prayed? How do you think they prayed? Taken away, gonna be in prison, and gonna be executed.

They knew that because James had been executed. So they shut down everything, and they flat out prayed. This, of course, was an instinct of the early church, because the Lord had said, ask and you shall receive.

Seek and you'll find. Knock and what? It will be opened unto you. Jesus had taught them men ought always to pray.

And not give up. Which meant that you don't get every prayer answered in five seconds. And the temptation is to pray for a while, and then when you don't feel it or see it, you stop praying.

That's the battle. But earnest, fervent, hot, fiery prayer. Not emotionalism.

The organ wasn't working up the people. They had no organs. They were just desperate that God would intervene.

So look what happened as they kept praying. The night before Herod, time went on, and now the night before Herod was to bring him to trial. Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance.

So he is secure. He's not going anywhere. He's sleeping.

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. Quick, get up, he said.

And the chains fell off Peter's wrists. Then the angel said to him, put on your clothes and sandals. And Peter did so.

Wrap your cloak around you and follow me, the angel told him. Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening. He thought he was seeing a vision.

He had just been woken up. He was in that in-between area. He said, is it real? Did you ever wake up in the middle of the night? You're not sure, is this happening? Am I up? Is it a dream? They passed the first and second guards and then came to the iron gate, leading to the city.

It opened for them by itself. And they went through it. And when they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him.

Then Peter came to himself and said, now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating. Now I know. The chains are off.

I'm out of the prison. The gate opened by itself. And when he went back to his own people, guess what they were doing? Still praying.

They prayed through. They actually saw the answer come while they were still praying. Amazing story.

Now if this story means anything, it means this. The way it's written by Luke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts, it's this. Peter was visited because the people prayed.

If that isn't true, then nothing's true in the Bible. The whole story is told that he's hopeless. They have no money.

They have no ends. They can't get him out of prison. They can't post bail.

The guy is gonna die. And they get desperate because after you lose James, their thought must have been, well, all the leaders are gonna get killed off. All the leaders are gonna go.

So this was not, we'd like to see this happen. No, they were desperate. And because they prayed, that happened.

They prayed. Now are there mysteries to this? Yes, there are mysteries to this. The timing of it, how God does it, when God does it, the sovereignty of God is still intact, but if we know anything, we know that God answers prayer.

How many believe that? Just lift your hand up. God answers prayer. How he does it, when he does it, I'm not asking you about the mysteries.

Those are only learned when you pray. Don't go to a symposium. Just pray, and God, the Holy Spirit, will teach you about it.

Now, first of all, I just want you to notice here. How can I, Holy Spirit, how in the world can we pray tonight about certain things that have a miracle on the other end of them unless the people are stirred up and are

desperate? But I can't make you desperate. I don't know what to say.

The problem in America today, and why we see more miracles and more prayer in other places, they have less plan B, C, D, and E. There's less other options. My daughter Chrissy was telling us about her recent visit to Cuba, and she was telling us, wasn't it Cuba, where they have no painkillers. So she met someone over there while they were ministering, or she was, and the lady had just come out of surgery and had like a scar, and just asked her, do you have like an aspirin? Nothing.

Just cut her, and then let her go. No painkillers. Nothing.

So they pray there about headaches. They pray about pain. They pray about everything.

Because what's the option? There's no plan B. There's no healthcare. There's no insurance. There's no hospitals you go to.

You're covered and all of that. And when there's desperation, then a kind of prayer comes up, like came that night. How in the world, young as I was, inexperienced, with money missing from the pitiful offerings, with a black cloud over the church, what in the world were you gonna do but cry out to God? Could you tell me what else I should do? Should I teach a new chorus? Should I, what could I do? What can we do but cry out to God? And there's no other answer for my situation back then but God.

I had no plan B. What was plan B? I had no plan. All those years ago when Chrissy was away from the Lord, what was our plan B? Tell me our plan if God didn't intervene. When was I gonna give her a verse, tell her about the Lord? She knew about the Lord.

She had been serving the Lord. She was a model child growing up. But when your kid is on a road to a disaster, only God can intervene.

Here's the plan. Here's the plan. In answer to prayer, the summary thing that you have to notice is when they prayed, something came from heaven and intervened into the cell.

Do you follow that? In other words, they prayed, and in answer to their persevering, fervent, fiery prayer, God sent something from heaven. In this case, it was an angel. But it could be a dream.

It could be a vision. It could be whatever. In Chrissy's case, it was a dream, but it came from God.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that there's a prayer that prays through, overcomes every discouragement, overcomes distractions, a wandering mind, overcomes what time is it, and all of that, and just says, God, I'm not gonna let you go until you do something. The world has yet to see what God will do in answer to that kind of prayer. We've seen some answers, but we don't understand what God will do when people get desperate.

They were desperate. Desperate. So something came from heaven.

Don't you have someone, a son, a daughter, a child, a situation, your own marriage, your own whatever, your own backslidenness, your own extended family, your own mother or father? If Christ were to come tonight, where would they spend eternity? And what are we thinking about? What are we worried about? And we got people we love who might go into a Christless eternity? The Bible says when Zion travails, she gives birth. No travail, no birth. Tell me one mom that just, when she was giving birth, was going, na, na, na, na, na, na, na.

Tell me when the baby's coming. I'm doing my nails here, na, na, na, na, na, na. No, no, no, no, no.

There's a law. When we travail, when we cry out to God, God's gonna hear us. You will seek for me and you will find me when you seek for me with all of your heart.

And most of us have wishes. We'd like to see something happen. But where's the promise for that? Where is there a promise in the Bible, whatever you wish and you'd possibly like to have happen, I'll help you.

No, it's whatsoever you desire, you desire. So Satan keeps us tepid and keeps ministers up on the platform who don't stir people to desire holy answers from a holy God, and thus prayer dies and we're left with what? What are we left with? A light shone in the darkness. Don't you know somebody that's living in darkness that needs a light shone from heaven into their life? It happened to Chrissy in sleep.

It can happen when your loved one or your friend is in the shower. They could reach down like a case I know and they picked up a bar of soap and the glory of God because someone was praying shone into the shower stall. And they broke down and they lifted their hands and they came back to God from a life of blatant homosexuality.

After having served God as a minister, notice this, the chains were broken. Do we not know anyone? Listen, look at me, look at me. They gotta find Christ.

They gotta turn to Christ. Unless someone, are not we, us that are here, aren't some of us products of someone praying somewhere? How many had someone pray for you before you became a Christian, right? Some of us were ornery as could be, rebellious but someone didn't give up and they kept praying. So chains are broken.

Light comes from heaven. The angel slapped Peter and woke him up. You don't know anyone who's sleeping? You don't have some Christian relative who's sleeping? I prayed with a woman here tonight.

She said, yeah, I received Christ but I've drifted away. She's asleep, she knew it though. When someone's asleep, they're not praying for themselves.

Peter wasn't praying for himself. The whole answer came not from his prayers. This is the power of intercession.

They're praying for him, he's sleeping. God answers them and delivers him. What an awesome God we have.

Can we just thank God for his awesome power? Come on, Lord, we believe, we believe, we believe, we believe, we believe, we believe. And finally, maybe you're in your own life wanting to see a door open and you've been pushing and shoving and fretting and worrying and all of that but did you notice when the angel took him out that says the last gate to freedom opened by itself and God has always seemed to make that real to me. Let me open your doors.

Don't work yourself up trying to push them open. God opens doors for ministry, for opportunities, for whatever. Now, they just didn't pray for two minutes.

That's why I'm ending now because some of us are five-minute prayers. We pray for five minutes and then, well, that's enough of that. I went to the prayer meeting but then we fall into the danger of being hearers of the word and not, yeah.

And Jesus, long before it was dawn, woke up and they couldn't find him because he spent time in prayer. We know before he chose the 12 disciples, he spent the night in prayer before he chose Jesus. As in Jesus, Son of God, while he was here on earth, he prayed.

Billy Graham says, looking back on his life, they interviewed him about eight years ago. Looking back on your long life, what would you do different if you did your ministry again? He said, I would do three things differently. I would pray more, I would pray more, and I would pray more.

I think Dr. Graham knows a few things. What do you think? I would pray more. Now, I have this burden for this relative of mine.

I know a man named R.A. Torrey who prayed for two men for over 60 years every day, and both of them got saved in their early 90s before they died. The effectual, fervent prayer. Sometimes you gotta keep at it because God has to build up your faith.

Sometimes you have to keep at it because you're not really focused. Sometimes the Holy Spirit has to show you things in your own life you gotta get rid of if you're gonna be powerful in prayer. For if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

So saying a prayer before God has really dealt with you, it's just a waste of time. And when history is over and we get to heaven, you know what, we're gonna find out about church history. The people who have moved the hand of God the most are not the preachers, it's the people who prayed.

It's not the well-known preachers and people who write books and win awards. It'll probably be the people in some prayer band someplace praying and saying, God, we won't let you go. Close your eyes with me.

Who has someone you love? Chains have to be broken and they have to be awoken spiritually. And you wanna pray for more than five minutes or so. People will be praying from the microphone as the Holy Spirit leads them.

But anybody here have someone, Pastor Simba, I am burdened. I have a situation that only God can fix and I am not gonna give up. I will not lose on this thing.

I'm gonna be more than a conqueror but I realize that what you're saying is true. You think the church in Atlantic Avenue changed from that one Sunday night? No, it didn't. But God gave us an encouragement because the thief was discovered.

But then on and on, I won't let you go until you bless me. And then when that blessing comes, you'll get a blessing on your children, your children's children. I believe blessings come from prayer that go from one generation to another because somebody prayed.

You got somebody you're desperate for. Get out of your seat and come up here. Just desperate.

Maybe they're going to hell right now. Yeah, like Jesus said, God answers prayer. I'm standing in here, this church is filled with thousands of people because God answers prayer.

Not because of me or Carol, because God answers prayer. Come on, say it with me. God answers prayer.

Say it again. God answers prayer. Pastor Delina, grab that microphone and just pray as the Holy Spirit leads you.

Come on, but before he says a word, everybody, hands up in the air. Start calling on God like we did that Sunday night back then. Tell God, God, come and help me.

Would you please come and help me? I want to pray like they did when Peter was in prison. God, give this church a spirit of prayer. God, give us a spirit of prayer.

We don't pray for two or three minutes. God, give us a spirit of prayer. Persevering prayer, Lord.

Oh, you can do it here. As we pray in Brooklyn, you can touch them in Dallas. As we pray in Brooklyn, you can do it in Miami.

As we pray in Brooklyn, do it in Los Angeles. As we pray in Brooklyn, Lord God, do it in Detroit. Do it in Montreal.

Do it, Lord God, in Baltimore. Do it, Lord God, in San Francisco. On this very night, we pray, raise them up.

Set them free. Open up jail cell doors and break off the chains in Jesus' name. Hallelujah.

Everybody stand up in the building. Call on God. Come on, everybody, wherever you are.

God, get them out of jail. Get them out of that jail, Lord. Get them out of that jail, Lord.

Open that door. Break those chains. Wake them up, Lord.

Come on, just name that person to God. Just whisper that name to God. Sylvia, go ahead and pray.

Hallelujah. Call on God. Call on God.

God, we call on you. We're not letting go, God. We're not letting go tonight.

We are asking you, Lord. Get a hold of his heart. Get a hold of his heart.

Jesus, Father, we come tonight in the name of Jesus. We thank you, Father, that we do not come as beggars. We are ears of the kingdom of God tonight.

We thank you, Father, that you have given us the Holy Spirit. The very Spirit of God lives in us, O God. So, Father, tonight we have come, Lord, to bombard heaven.

We have come to hold on to the horns of your altar because we believe that all power belongs to the Lord. So, God, tonight we're asking that chains will be broken, O God, that shackles will be loosened tonight in the name of Jesus. You said the Spirit of the Lord is upon you, that you might proclaim liberty to captives, O God.

So, Father, tonight we have come to declare that the liberator has come, the deliverer has come, the freedom worker has come tonight in the name of Jesus, that you, O God, will go into hell tonight and you will bring him out in the name of Jesus. Father, the hardest of hearts, O God, you said you will make stone, my God. So, Father, tonight, break, O God, break, my God, break, O God, the hardest of hearts tonight in the name of Jesus.

Thank you, Lord. Hallelujah. Thank you, Jesus.

Every eye closed, Pastor Johnson's gonna take the microphone. Here's what we're gonna pray for now in this little season. We will win souls to Jesus in these days to come.

We're not gonna just talk and witness. He's gonna give us open hearts. He's gonna give us the words to say.

They're gonna penetrate like an arrow into people's hearts. We're gonna bring them to church. I don't care if we have to go the extra mile, but we are gonna give birth to new souls for Jesus Christ.

Put your hands together with me. Every one of us, come on, every one of us. Every one of us.

Hallelujah, hallelujah, Jesus. Lord, we give you praise tonight, Lord God. We thank you, Lord, for your faithfulness, Lord.

Even now, we sense your very presence here, O God. And Father, we desire, O God, to be used as vessels of honor for your glory, Lord. So even now, Lord God, I pray for a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit to abide and rest upon your people, O God.

Father, I pray, O God, that you would give us your heart, O God, give us your concern, your compassion, O God, for souls, O God, lead us, O God, lead us by your Spirit, Lord God. Father, we can't do it in our own strength, O God. We need you, Lord, for you said it's not by power nor by might, but it's by your Spirit, O God.

So Lord, anoint us, O God, to go forth in the highway and the byways to speak your word in season and out of season, O God. Give us a holy boldness, O God. Lord, let us not be afraid to open up our mouths, O God, but give us a holy boldness, O God, to speak your word, O God.

Use us, O God, while the souls are dying. Give us your burden tonight that we may go forth, Lord God, in your name to reach souls for your kingdom, O God. O Father, we need a fresh baptism of your love, Father, to see those souls that are dying, O God.

Father, open up our hearts that we may see as you see, Lord God. Let us cast the net out, O God, and bring it to harvest. Bring us souls into your kingdom, O God.

And Father, we lift up our unsaved loved ones, O God. Have mercy, have mercy, Lord God. Break the yokes, O God, the strongholds of the enemy, Lord.

We wait in expectancy for the harvest, O God, that's gonna come in. We give you praise tonight, and we bless your name. Glory to God.

We give you all the praise, all the praise, hallelujah. Thank you, Jesus. Oh, bless your name.

Close your eyes. Repeat after me. Dear God, as I speak your word, as I speak your word, as you lead me by your spirit, as you lead me by your spirit, stretch out your hand and do wonders and signs in the name of your holy son, in the name of your holy son, Jesus Christ.

I will speak, I will speak. But you must work. But you must work.

So that your name will be glorified So that your name will be glorified. And souls will be saved. And souls will be saved.

This will happen. in my life, through me, because I pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Everyone who believes it, just put your hands together with me. Praise God. Praise God.

How many can say hallelujah? Praise the Lord. How many know there have been breakthroughs tonight?  
Breakthroughs.

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