

The Secret

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon highlights the essential role of prayer in overcoming temptation and maintaining spiritual strength.

Duration: 36:51

Scripture: Luke 22:31

Topics: "Christian Living"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor emphasizes the difference between the world's idea of strength and the biblical concept of surrender and trust in God. He encourages the congregation to express their need for God and rely on Him for strength. The pastor refers to Jesus' experience in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he prayed for strength and was ministered to by an angel. He highlights the importance of prayer and the need to prioritize time with God in our lives.

Transcript

I'm happy that we're all here because I want to talk to you maybe the most important sermon I could preach as a pastor. Certainly I think it's one of the callings God has put on my life and it's merely called today, The Secret. This is the secret.

Once you become a Christian, this is the greatest secret in the world. So I want you to listen, kids. I want you to listen, adults.

And let's see what God will do for us today. Lord, I ask for your anointing on my lips. I ask you to give us hearing hearts, ears to hear what the Spirit would say.

I ask you to give us focus and let nothing distract us. And I pray your name will be glorified. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Come, Holy Spirit, now as we lift up Christ. Amen. Amen.

At the end of Jesus' life on earth, a lot of things were coming to culmination. He had been telling his disciples what would happen to him. They did not fully understand him giving up his life, being rejected and suffering, dying on a cross.

They certainly did not understand when he said, and I will rise again. But the Bible tells us that they went up into a room that someone had made available for them and prepared for them to celebrate the Passover meal. Jesus was crucified during the Passover season, the Jewish holiday remembering the exit from Egypt, where God said, put the blood on the doorpost, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you.

You'll be exempt from punishment, although you deserve it for only one reason, the blood on your doorpost. That's what a Christian is. Christian is not someone who lives a life that earns acceptance with God.

It's someone who has gained mercy from God, who has humbled themselves, repented of their sins, and asked Christ to come into their life and be their Savior. As he taught and washed the disciples' feet, he was fulfilling a lot of things. And then he left after singing a hymn.

I'm putting a lot of the accounts together. He left and he went out to the Garden of Gethsemane. John tells us that very possibly he was teaching and speaking while he was walking with them.

But he got to this garden or farm, which is outside of Jerusalem, and it's a place that he used to go to pray. And that's why Judas led the soldiers there, because he knew the habits of Jesus, and that one of the habits of Jesus was that Jesus would regularly pray and he would choose the Garden of Gethsemane to get alone and to spend time with his Father. The mystery of the two natures in Christ, that he was fully God but fully man, is something that we can't understand.

And it really is highlighted when we find him praying. If Jesus is God, why would he pray? But Jesus is man, needed to pray. And there's a mystery we won't fully understand until we're in heaven.

Judas knew his habits and led the soldiers there to the Garden of Gethsemane where he was arrested. But as Jesus approached that garden, a lot of things were happening psychologically, emotionally, ended up having a physical manifestation to him, because now he was going to fulfill the reason he came to earth. He didn't come to earth to merely teach.

He didn't come to earth to merely be an example to us. He didn't come to earth to do miracles. He came to earth to die.

John the Baptist prophesied that when he first saw him. Behold the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world. But that sacrifice had to die.

But not only did the sacrifice have to die, and now in another area we don't understand, he had to die for the sins of the world. What does that mean? He had to be the innocent substitute. He had no sin.

He's the only one who could die for someone else's sins because he had no sins of his own to die for. But this meant that when he approached the cross, all the sins of the world would be laid upon him. We do not understand this.

We just receive it by faith. All the sins of the world were going to come upon him, and then God would strike him and punish him. Not for a sin, not for many sins, but for all the sins of the world.

What that meant to him, what that did to him, the spiritual pressure of that was something that we say reverently, he began to not only sense it coming, but he began to be tremendously exercised, almost that he died before he got to the cross. As he approaches Gethsemane, and he goes with his 11 disciples.

Judas had already left and was now arranging his illegal arrest.

As he approaches the garden of Gethsemane, he knows he has problems that he has to walk through. Talk about going through a valley. None of us know what a valley is compared to what Jesus was now facing.

But he also, as always, was caring about his disciples and put together with the other accounts, we know that he left eight of them a little further away and took Peter, James, and John a little closer with him. And then he left them and he went and prayed by himself. We pick up Luke's story and as he first is talking to Peter, either at the last supper or on the way to the garden of Gethsemane, and let's look at it in Luke 22.

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. Now, the bad thing about the English language is that if I point to all of this section and I say, I want you to stand up, you would understand by the context that I meant you all, all of you. But if I said to my brother here or to brother Stephen, I want you to go up to the office with me, everyone would know that it's just one person.

But it's the same word, you. In English, we have no understanding except for context whether the you is singular or plural. In this case, it is not singular, it's plural.

So the Bible is reading here, Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, now it's specific to Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back after you've taken a fall, when you've turned back, strengthen your brothers.

But he replied, Lord, I'm ready to go with you to prison and to death. Peter didn't know himself, did he? Jesus answered, I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me. Later on, Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives and his disciples followed him.

On reaching the place, he said to them, pray that you will not fall into temptation. He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them and he 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. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. And when he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, this is the eight of them probably, exhausted from sorrow.

Why are you sleeping, he asked them. Get up and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. As the great writer A.W. Tozer pointed out in one of the only sermons I've heard him speak that was put on tape, probably the reason that the disciples all fled and the reason that Peter ended up denying the Lord three times and that Jesus was left totally abandoned by his closest friends, the reason for that was not a lack of teaching, was not a lack of praise and worship songs that they had sung together with Jesus, but the reason for it was they didn't do what Jesus told them to do, which is the secret.

They didn't pray. A lack of prayer when he told them to made them weak and like jello, made them cowards, made them even in Peter's case go, Jesus, I don't know who you're talking about. To save his own skin, he threw Jesus under the bus, as they say, just to escape ridicule or arrest himself.

And the reason for that weakness, the reason for them all fleeing, the reason for that breakdown, he had been with them for three and a half years. Could you have a better pastor or a better teacher than they

had? No. It was they didn't obey his command that he gave them when they got to the garden, which was pray so that you don't enter into temptation or pray that you will escape what the temptation wants to do to you.

He didn't say pray that you will escape this hard moment that we're all gonna go through, that he knew they would have to go through, but hard moments in life, choir members and ladies and gentlemen, hard moments in life often become periods of temptation to us to do a couple things, to give up on Jesus, to believe that he doesn't care about us, to believe that he's not taking good care of us, to believe that he's not around and present with us, to not believe that he has a plan for our life and that he's still gonna work it out, to stop believing that he's faithful and will come through in the end. Hard times in life become periods of strong temptation to us to lose our faith. Now, if Jesus told the disciples, pray so that you don't enter into temptation and let the devil have a victory and try to ultimately extinguish your faith, if Jesus said prayer was the only answer, he didn't say, guys, before we do this, let's sit and have a teaching session.

You know, there's a time for everything under the sun. Modern day Christianity has become predominantly a teaching religion and there is a time to teach. I'm trying to do it now by the grace of God, but there's a time for everything under the sun and sometimes teaching is not in order and neither is singing.

You gotta flat out pray. You gotta get alone with God. You gotta open your heart to God because Jesus said, pray so that you won't enter into temptation.

There's a program for fallen pastors to try to restore pastors who have broken down in some way or another and gotten into affairs with people in the church or whatever, and in every single case during a given two or three year period, every single case of every pastor who had broken down when the question was asked, what was your daily prayer life like? It had broken down and that gave room for Satan to come down. They never found one pastor who was spending regular time with the self-control that only God can give, spending time with God in his word, listening, praying, pouring out his heart. Not one pastor who did that who ended up making a wreck of things, but in every case, there was a person, male or female, who had broken down according to what Jesus warned the disciples.

Pray so that you won't enter into temptation. Pray. Before we talk about what that prayer looks like and what is the power of prayer, let's just notice a couple other things here.

Jesus himself couldn't make it unless he prayed and he reverently barely made it. Jesus himself, faith with pressures that you and I can't understand, he didn't want to read a book. He knelt and the other gospels tell us he ended up prostrating himself.

So you can pray when you stand, you can pray when you sit, you can pray on your knees, or you can prostrate yourself. The position is secondary. The point is, if Jesus had to pray, what does that tell us about ourselves? I'm not expecting a lot of amens from this message because it's going deep into all of our lives, isn't it? I'm just wanting us all to listen to the word of God.

If Jesus himself said, I can't make this, I can't do this thing unless I somehow get strength. And notice that when he prayed and prostrated himself and prayed, an angel was sent to strengthen him, which is the answer that we all need from every prayer. How many have found in life you can't make it sometimes unless help comes from heaven? Lift up your hand, lift up your hand, if you've had moments like that.

Are we all in the same boat here? We can't make it. You cannot make it unless you get help. This case, it was an angel sent that ministered to him.

And being in more anguish as the moment came forward. Remember, he knew that probably knew that this would cut him off from fellowship with his father to bear the sins of the world would mean he would be estranged from his own father. Jesus, the son of God, the lamb of God, precious Jesus would be cut off and counted as a sinner.

He would not only be cursed, he would be a curse for us. And to manage and navigate through that, he realized, I got to pray. There's a time for everything under the sun.

There's a time to have sports. There's a time to read the newspaper. There's a time to eat a meal.

There's a time to be with your family. There's a time to read the Bible. But there must be a time when we have to pray.

Because Jesus said, pray so that you don't enter into temptation. And they fell asleep and didn't do it. And the rest is history.

They all fled. And when he needed them most, they were nowhere to be found. And Peter was so vulnerable that he ended up denying the Lord.

Also, can you notice this? The one who thought he needed help the least was the one who needed help the most. Peter's boasting to Jesus, don't tell me that everyone's gonna forsake you. I don't receive that.

I'm ready to go to prison. I'll go down. I'll die with you.

And then the Lord says to him, no, before the cock crows, you're gonna deny me three times. You're gonna say you don't even know me. That tells us that one of the enemies of our own soul is our self-confidence and independence that we don't need God.

That pride that makes us like, no, I got this thing under control. Pessimistic, what do you think? I'm just some novice. I've been walking with the Lord for 20, 30 years.

No, the real spiritual giant is the one who walks every single day with, Lord, I can't make it without you. Can we put our hands together and say amen to that? Lord, I cannot make it. But that is not a natural tendency.

That is a spiritual gift. That's the gift of humility that knows I need the Lord. Like those arrows we talked about, the fiery arrows of the enemy.

We need the shield of faith. So we learn here that the one who needed help and strength the most is the one who's boasting and is cock sure. Pride, cockiness in a preacher, a pastor, a singer, a choir member, a deacon, or a Christian of any kind is just the saddest thing because pride cometh before a fall.

That spirit of independence rejects God's help for God resists the, but he gives grace to who? What is it about prayer that defeats the devil? People just say, when I was growing up, pray. I hope to help you kids listen to me and adults. I hope to give you maybe some hints of how you could, as I'm learning from the word of God and through experience, how to pray better.

And what is the essence of prayer? Why is prayer so powerful that Jesus said pray so you won't enter into temptation? In Ephesians six, after it gives all the armor that we're to put on, the whole armor of God, part of the armor, or maybe gluing everything together and pray at all times, in all seasons, on all occasions with all kinds of prayer and pray in the spirit. So you can put on the helmet and the shield of faith. But if you and I don't learn to pray, this is the great weakness in most of our spiritual lives, because this is the point of attack for the devil.

If Jesus says that pray so that you don't enter into temptation, and if prayer has that power that can help us resist the devil, what do you think the devil would have as his number one target in our lives every single day? Not to pray. That's a given. You know, when you guard somebody in basketball, the first thing you try to figure out as you analyze an opponent, or you're playing paddle ball, or you're playing any sport, is you find out what the person's strength is and you take it away.

So, guys, you understand this. Women, listen and learn what we guys know already. So if a guy's a righty, no, lefties are more famous for this.

A lefty wants to go left and dribble and go to the basket and then throw up a shot with his left hand because that's his strong hand. Lefties in the NBA or in college or in high school are known, famous for just going left. And if you let them go left, they're going to beat you.

So what you do when you've played that person is you take away their left hand. You find out what their strength is. You are an all-star basketball player right now.

Face me. And this is his left hand. So if I just stand in front of him, he's going to go left and he's going to wear me out.

So when you play against a player like that, you stand and defend them like this because you say, you can beat me, but you're going to have to beat me going to your right. But I'm not going to let you go to the left. I'm going to whack at the ball.

I'm going to slap at you. I'm going to hit you in the face. See, we know.

We men know. That's all play. So what do you think Satan, as he guards us, what do you think he wants to take away? What Jesus just said, pray that you don't enter into temptation.

Prayer has some kind of power. So be busy. He doesn't like when you read the Bible, but even if you read the Bible and don't pray, he doesn't mind that because then your Christianity will be intellectual only.

It won't be going into su corazon, into your heart. You won't have communion with God. You just be learning.

Remember the people who crucified him knew most of the Bible. The religious establishment that planned his murder, they were quoting verses while they did it. So you can be nasty and know a lot of Bible, but you can't really pray and be nasty, not really pray.

What makes prayer so powerful? What defangs Satan through prayer? What is it that just holds him back, makes us victorious in temptation? What is it? It's not the magic of, you know, our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Or memorized prayers. But what is it about real prayer? The Bible says in James that Elijah was a man just like us.

He was a man of like passions. He knew what it was to be tempted. Do you know that one day he got so depressed, he wanted to end his life? I just read about a young woman.

She sent me a letter. I'm just thinking about her now. God help her.

She moved away from our church. She was struggling. She lives in another state now.

She tells me in a letter she's just tried to take her life twice in the last few weeks, but she stepped back from it. See how Satan is. He, the devil goes about like a roaring lion.

You know who wrote those words? Peter. You know, where do you think he learned that? In the Garden of Gethsemane. Satan goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

So here's the three things about prayer. Then we'll pray. What's the sense of having a lecture if we don't act on it? Don't be hearers of the word, but be.

The worst thing is you go home and say, man, that was good. What Pastor Simba brought out from Luke 22. That's good.

I took notes on that baby. I got it down now. And then we don't pray.

The deepest lessons about prayer you only learn by praying. No symposium, no conference on prayer. They have their place.

They can encourage you. You learn some principles. But the real secrets of prayer you learn by just being alone with God.

So here's what prayer does. Number one, prayer is an admission of need. This is what defeats Satan.

When you declare that you need God, you can't make it. This is contrary to what the world says. God's ways are not our ways.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts. You want to defeat Satan? The place of prayer is when you open up to God and you say, God, I, Jim Simba, I cannot make it. I do not have what I need spiritually, mentally, physically, emotionally, financially.

I need Thee every hour. I need you, God. When you and I come to a place and quiet down and stop being hyper and we say to God, God, I need you.

Already Satan is getting nervous because God resists the proud, but he gives grace to the humble. And when you and I say to God, God, I can't make it like Jesus. Jesus couldn't make it without prayer.

Brothers and sisters, please, for the sake of Christ and your soul and your family. What does that mean about Jim Simba if he could not make it without prayer? Whether it's 15 minutes a day or God giving you liberty for more or a couple times a day, you gotta find a place alone. I gotta find a place alone where I can express to God, not just say it.

Oh, that's true. Jesus said, without me, you can do nothing. Pastor, I know that verse.

I believe that verse from John. I believe that. But prayer declares it before God and demons.

Oh, God, I can't make it. How many would lift up one hand and say, Pastor, it's true for me. I can't make it without God.

Just wave your hand at me. I can't make it. That's what prayer does.

Prayer defangs the enemy because when we say, I can't make it, God, I need your help, already we're moving in the right direction. It's when we cockily and we independently walk around thinking I got the world on a string. That's when we become targets for the enemy.

It's that independent, I don't need God spirit, which we act out by being prayerless. But when we say, I need you, a declaration of need, but it's something else. It also is an affirmation of trust when you really pray.

I'm not talking about saying prayers now. It says about Elijah and James, he prayed in his praying. The King James or the translation says he earnestly prayed.

But in the margin, it'll say that literally in the Greek language, he prayed in his praying. What does that mean? Sometimes when we say prayers, we're not really praying. We're reciting prayers.

He earnestly prayed. And when you earnestly pray from your heart, you're not only saying, God, I need you, which is the road to victory. But you're saying, I now affirm that I trust in you, otherwise I wouldn't be praying.

If I didn't trust in you, if I didn't think you love me and cared about me, if I didn't think you could help me in this tight spot, if I didn't know that you are faithful, I would never be here. So by praying now, Satan just know this, I believe that he loves me. Satan, you demons, I know he cares about me.

Stop your lying and your thoughts you're trying to plant in my mind. I not only need God, I trust in God. I have faith in God.

Can we say amen to that? That's what prayer does. That's what prayer does. I not only need you, God, I trust in you.

And a lot of us have the need part down in emergencies, but a lot of us then pray with a depressed spirit and we're all down and crying. But prayer is not just need, it's trust, it's faith. When you pray, believe that you will receive, God, I know that you love me and I'm gonna say it now.

That's the best place to be in the whole world because the worst place to be in the whole world is walking down the street saying, I don't need anyone, including God. See, our weakness makes us strong. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

My strength is made perfect, God said, in your weakness, he told Paul. So I need you. And I trust you.

I believe in you. I know you love me. Satan, get out of here.

He loves me. Yeah, but why are you going through all that? He loves me, get out of here. In my prayer, he loves me.

He loves me. Oh, listen, brothers and sisters, look at me. When you start saying, I need him, I need you.

And when you start saying, I know you love me and I know you're gonna help me. Satan is already packing his bags. He's gotta get out because come on, greater is he that's in us than the one who's in the world.

That's what prayer is about. One last thing. It's about I need.

Say, I need. I believe. See those things, if you only have I need, you'll be depressed while you're praying.

Some people come up here and I don't know what to do. I feel so inadequate because they feel their need, but the devil has blocked that he loves, that God loves them. So I need, I believe.

And then, I'm telling you, these are secrets. This is the secret. You want to get Satan on the run, he'll come back again.

There's no way to live a life and not be tempted, but to defang him and have victory over him. We regularly strengthen our spiritual life by spending time with the Lord, opening our heart. If you have to sing, sing it.

But you tell him, Lord, I need you. I wait in your presence with my need. I explain all that I need.

I tell you things in my heart. I can't tell anyone, even my best friend, my fiance, my husband, my wife. I can't tell anyone, my mother or my father.

I need you. I believe in you. I know you love me.

I celebrate the fact you love me. I praise you now for loving me. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

And now the last one. Oh, you want to totally just give the devil a boot? Listen what Jesus did. And falling on his face, he said, Lord, Father, if it's possible, imagine how that cup must have been for him to drink.

If it's possible, let this cup pass me by. Deliver me from what I have to go through, if it's possible. But nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.

Then he rose up and he had such strength. Wait, he had such strength that in front of Pilate, Pilate thought he was trying Jesus. Jesus was trying Pilate.

Herod thought he could mock Jesus. Jesus had the self-control to just be silent and take all the blows and everything. Never lost his control because it's not only I need, it's not only I believe, it's I surrender.

Whenever I'm walking in Jim Simbala, wanting to fulfill what I want no matter what, I become a target for Satan because I'm living separate from God's plan for my life. But the moment I say to God by his grace, in prayer, Lord, I not only reaffirm my need, I reaffirm, oh God, the fact that I trust you. But God, I surrender today to you.

Why don't you wake up tomorrow morning and just spend 10, 15 minutes with God alone and just say, God, I give you this Monday. Let your will be done. Don't let me say one sentence that's not your will.

Don't let me go to lunch or do anything with anyone unless it's your will. Show me your will all day long. I'll know it by the peace that you give me.

And when I'm rattled and I don't sense peace, I'm going to take that, that I'm going the wrong place. I don't want to go to any party. I don't want to watch anything.

I don't want to read anything. I don't want to do anything unless it's your will. But Pastor Cimbala, that would make my life so boring.

Are you kidding? That'll be joy unspeakable because haven't we all learned that when we wanted to have our way and forced it, it ended up exploding in us, on us. How many have forced to have your way like I have? And you feel so empty. You did your thing, but it was so empty, so empty.

And sometimes we force our way and it explodes on us. And we run back to God and say, God, have mercy on me and thank God for his mercy and his patience. But don't you think he wants to teach us, start with me first.

Let my will be done in your life. Now Satan is already on the train, leaving town. He's already gone.

Because when you say I need and you say I believe and then you spend time with him, when you say I surrender, if you're like me, he'll sometimes say to you, do you? And he'll start to put his finger on certain things that I might want to do. It could be a subtle thing. Sometimes he'll just tell you, don't be with those people.

Go back to your just hotel and be alone with me. Something in you wants to be with people, but you know the Lord is just saying, it's not good to come back and be alone with me. It could be sometimes to pick up your Bible, sometimes to say something to someone, sometimes to be quiet and not say a word.

Sometimes to walk away. Not my will, but that be done. That's the secret of the ages.

All the great men and women who have been a blessing to the world were people who knew how to spend time with God and say as I close, I need, say I need, I believe, I surrender, I surrender. Oh my goodness, what power there comes when you go down and you surrender. The world says, be strong, lift weights, be all pumped up and then you'll be strong.

The Bible says, no, go down, surrender, trust, express your need and God will lift you up and make you a giant. And you'll be able to take out 10,000 at one blow. Close your eyes with me.

If you're here today and I'm gonna dismiss the people in exactly like three minutes, 180 seconds, but if you wanna just spend an extra five minutes with me or whatever in the front because you know you're going through something right now and you need him. You need God. Remember what Jesus said, pray that you don't enter into temptation.

You're going through something right now. I got choir members who'll pray with you, deacons, I got prayer band people, deaconesses and they're just gonna gently stand with you and ask God for discernment how they can just pray and gently affirm you. But if you're going through something right now and you say, pastor, you read my mail.

You read my heart. Those of you listening to this sermon in some other way by the computer, this moment that you're listening to my word, this is your moment that God is saying, come to me and see what I'll do for you. But talk to me.

Don't shut me out. Everybody say out loud with me. Let's say the Lord's prayer together.

Our father. Which art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. On earth.

As it is in heaven. Give us this day. Our daily bread.

And forgive us our sins. As we forgive those. Who have sinned against us.

Lead us not into temptation. Keep us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom.

And the power. And the glory. For now.

And forever. Jesus, I pray that there'll be. A revival in our lives.

All the people, Lord. Daily spending time with you. Help us to defeat the devil in the number one place he attacks.

Give us self control. Help us to say no to certain things. So that we can say yes to more important things.

Change us day by day, Lord, we pray. Lord, bless the people that are here still. You know the needs of their life.

They need you today. They trust you today. They surrender today to you.

We all do, Lord. Give us grace to do it more and more often. Help us to love one another.

Even as you commanded us. So that everyone will know that we belong to you. We pray it in Jesus name.

Amen. Turn around and hug a bunch of people, will you?

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