

# ***FRESH WIND, FRESH FIRE***

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***“THIS IS THE CLOSEST TO HEAVEN I HAVE EVER BEEN  
IN MY LIFE. I DON’T WANT TO LEAVE HERE.”***

**Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: The Greatest  
Discovery of All Time**

# THE GREATEST DISCOVERY OF ALL TIME

During countless Tuesday night prayer meetings I find myself encircled by the sacred sounds of prayer and intercession filling the church, spilling into the vestibule, and overflowing from every heart present. As the meaning edges to a close, I overhear mothers petitioning for wayward children... men asking God to please help them find employment...others giving thanks for recent answers to prayer... tearful voices here and there. I can't help but think, *This is as close to heaven as I will ever get in this life. I don't want to leave here. If I were invited to the White House to meet some dignitary, it would never bring the kind of peace and deep joy I sense here in the presence of people calling on the Lord.*

The sound isn't forced, as if the crowd had been worked up into a religious frenzy. Rather, it is the sound of people freely expressing their hearts' needs, desires, and praises.

What I'm hearing on those Tuesday nights is not unusual or peculiar to our church. Far from being a new invention, this kind of prayer has ancient roots. It goes back before Christ, before David, even before Moses organized a formal worship system with the tabernacle. The first mention occurs all the way back in Genesis 4:25-26:

*Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men became to call on the name of the Lord.*

Think about that. Until then, people had known God mainly as the Creator. He had made the Garden of Eden and the rest of the world as far as their eyes could see.

Now came the beginning of the first collective relationship with the Almighty. Before a Bible was available, before the first preacher was ordained or the first choir formed, a godly strain of men and women distinguished themselves from their ungodly neighbors by *calling on the Lord*. Cain and his posterity had gone their own way, independent of God. By contrast, these people affirmed their dependence on God by calling out to him.

In fact, God's first people were not called "Jews" or "the children of Israel" or "Hebrews." In the very beginning, their original name was "those who call on the name of the Lord."

On some unmarked day... at some unnoted hour... A God - placed instinct in human hearts came alive. People sensed that if you are in trouble and you call out to God, He will answer you! He will intervene in your situation.

I can imagine one woman saying to another, "Have you heard about the God who answers when you call on him? He's more than just the Creator; He cares a response to our needs. He actually understands what we are feeling."

"What are you talking about? God does whatever he pleases people can't influence him one way or the other."

"No, no, you're wrong. When you call out to him, he doesn't turn a deaf ear. He listens! He responds. He acts."

"LORD, HELP!"

David Jeremiah, my longtime friend from Shadow Mountain Community Church near San Diego, has preached several times at the Brooklyn Tabernacle. Immediately after being diagnosed with cancer, he called to ask us to pray. Several months later he returned to visit us during an Outreach meeting we held at Madison Square Garden Arena. Later he preached at one of our Sunday Services. The whole congregation was delighted to see this wonderful Christian brother for whom we had all interceded.

Moved by the love and thanks giving his appearance produced, David later remarked about it from the pulpit:

"I called here as soon as I learned of my sickness because I knew of your emphasis on prayer. In fact, someone just greeted me in the lobby and remarked, "Pastor Jeremiah, we really cried out to God on your behalf. "that is why I called you. I knew you're praying wouldn't be just some mechanical exercise what a real calling out to God with passion for my need. And God brought me through the ordeal."

That is the literal meaning of the Hebrew word used countless times in the Old Testament when people called upon God. It means to cry out, to implore Aid. This is the essence of true prayer that touches God

Charles Spurgeon wants remarks that "the best style of prayers that which cannot be called anything else but a cry."

Isn't that what God invites us to do all through the Bible?

"call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3). God is Not aloof. He is not disconnected. He says continually through the centuries, "I'll help you, I really will. When you don't know where to turn, then turn to me. When you're ready to throw up your hands - throw them up to me. Put your voice behind them, too, and I'll come and help you."

After Moses came down from Mount Sinai, calling on God became an earmark of his people's successes. The patriarch spotlighted this most dramatically in his farewell address: "what other nation is so great as to have their gods near than the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?" (Deuteronomy 4:7) . the other nations may have had better chariots, better weaponry, but that wouldn't matter in the end. They didn't have what Israel had: a God who would respond when they called upon him. And know that there was no promise to help from God of Israel ceased calling out to him. Only defeat and humiliation would follow.

THE REAL FORCE!

Satan's main strategy with God's people has always been to whisper, "don't call, don't ask, don't depend on God to do great things. You'll get along fine if you just rely on your own cleverness and energy." The truth of the matter is that the devil is not terribly frightened of our human efforts and credentials. But he knows his kingdom will be damaged when we lift up our hearts to God.

Listen to David's confident assertion in psalm 4:3. "know that the Lord has set apart The Godly for himself the Lord will hear when I called to him. "that was David's

whole posture, his instincts, and especially his approach to Warfare. It doesn't matter what the Philistine armies have. If we call out to God, he will give us the victory. It would be back sign and don't call, then we can be defeated by a tiny Army.

I can almost hear David saying, "You can chase me, you can persecute me, you can do anything you want - but when I call him God, you are in trouble! The Lord will hear it when I call to Him."

Notice how God defines Wicked people in Psalm 14: 4. "will evil doers never learn - those who devour my people as men eat bread *and who do not call on the Lord?* "That is a divine definition of the ungodly. They will do many things, but they will not humble themselves and recognize God's omnipotence by calling on his name with all their hearts.

One of the greatest emotional writers said, "The main thing got to ask for as our attention."

Salvation is always impossible until a person humbly calls upon the name of the Lord (Act 2: 21), for God has promised specifically to be rich in mercy to those who call on his name (Romans 10:12 - 13).

"Call upon me in the day of trouble," God says In Psalm 50:15. "I will deliver you, and you will honor me." God desires praise from our lives... But the only way is fresh praise and honor which is as we keep coming to him in times of need in difficulty. Then he will intervene to show himself strong on our behalf, and we will know that he has done it.

Are we not all prone to be a little cocky and think we can handle things just fine? But less than trouble comes, and how quickly we face our inadequacy. Trouble is one of God's Great servants because it reminds us how much we continually need the Lord. Otherwise, we tend to forget about entreating him. For some reason we want to carry On by ourselves.

## HOW REVIVAL STARTS

The history of past revivals betrayed his truth in full color. Whether you study the Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, the Welsh Revival, the 1906 outpouring on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, or any other. Of Revival, you always find men and women who first outwardly groan, longing to see the status quo changed - in themselves and in their churches. They begin to call and God with insistence prayer begets Revival, which begets more prayer. It's like Psalm 80, where Asaph bemoans the sad state of his time, the broken walls, the rampaging animals, the burnt vineyards. Then in verse 18 he pleads, "Revive us, and we will call on your name."

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of prayer. Only when we are full of the Spirit do we feel the need for God everywhere we turn. We can be driving a car, and spontaneously our Spirits are just going up to God with needs and petitions and intersections right there in the middle of traffic.

If our churches don't pray, and if people don't have an appetite for God, what does it matter how many are attending the services? How would that impress God? Can you imagine the angels saying, "Oh, your pews! We can't believe how beautiful they are! Up here in Heaven, we've been talking about them for years. Your Sanctuary

lighting - it's so clever. The way the steps are coming up to the pulpit - it's wonderful...."

I don't think so.

If we don't want to experience God's closeness here on Earth, why would we want to go to heaven anyway? He's the center of everything there. If we don't enjoy being in his presence here now, then Heaven would not be heaven for us. Why would he send anyone there who doesn't long for him passionately here on earth?

I'm not suggesting that we are justified by works of prayer or any other acts of devotion. I'm not a legalist. But let us not dodge the issue of what heaven will be like: enjoying the presence of God, taking time to love him, listening to him, and giving him praise.

I have talked to pastor after pastor, some of them prominent and "successful", who told me privately, "Jim, the truth is, I couldn't have a real prayer meeting in my church. I'd be embarrassed at this moment of the crowd. Unless somebody is teaching or singing or doing some kind of presentation, people just won't come. I can only get them for a 1 hour service, and that only once a week."

Is that kind of religion found anywhere in the Bible? Jesus himself can't draw a crowd even among his own people! What a tragedy that the quality of ministry is too often measured by numbers and building size rather than by true spiritual results.

As a preacher myself, let me be blunt here. Preaching itself can easily become just a subtle form of entertainment. When I stand at the Judgement Seat of Christ, he's not going to ask me if I was a clever orator. He's not going to ask me how many books I wrote. He's only going to ask whether I continued in the line of men and women, starting way back in the time of Adam's grandchildren, who let others to call upon God.

#### A PERSONAL TEST

All my talking about prayer faced a severe test several years ago when Carol and I went through the darkest two-and-a-half-year tunnel we could imagine.

Our oldest daughter, Chrissy, had been a model child growing up. Around age 16, she started to stray. I admit I was slow to notice this - I was too occupied with the church, starting branch congregations, overseeing projects, and all the rest that ministry entails.

Meanwhile, Chrissy not only drew away from us, but also away from God. In time, she even left our home. There were many nights when we had no idea where she was.

As the situation grew more serious, I tried everything. I begged, I pleaded, I scolded, I argued, I tried to control her with money. Looking back, I recognize the foolishness of my actions. Nothing worked; she just hardened more and more. Her boyfriend was everything we did not want for a child.

How I kept functioning through that, I don't know. Many a Sunday morning I would put on my suit, get into the car to drive to the Tabernacle early, ahead of Carol... And cry for the next 25 minutes, all the way to the church door. "God, how am I going to get through three meetings today? I don't want to make myself the center of attention. The people have problems of their own - they're coming for help and

encouragement. But what about me? I'm hanging by a thread. Oh, God, please... My first born, my Chrissy."

Somehow God would pull my nerves together enough for me to function through another long Sunday. There were moments, however, as we were worshipping God in singing, that my spirit would almost seem to run away from the meeting to intercede for Chris. Add to control myself to stay focused on the people in their needs.

While this was going on, we learned that Carol needed an operation - a hysterectomy. As she tried to adjust afterward, the devil took the opportunity to come after her and say, *You might have this big choir, and you're making albums in doing outreaches at Radio City Music Hall and all the rest. Fine, and your husband can go ahead to reach the world for Christ- but I'm going to have your children. I've already got the first one. I'm coming for the next two.*

Like any mother who loves her children, Carol was smitten with tremendous fear and distress. Her family meant more to her than a choir. One day she said to me, "Listen, we need to leave New York. I'm serious. This atmosphere already swallowed up our daughter. We can't keep raising kids here. If you want to stay. You can- but I'm getting our other children out." She wasn't kidding.

I said, "Carol, we just can't do that. We can't unilaterally take off without knowing what God wants us to do."

Carol wasn't being rebellious; she was just depressed after the surgery. She elected not to pack up and run after all. And it was at that low point that she went to the piano one day, and God gave her a song that has touched more people than perhaps anything else she has written:

In my moments of fear,  
Through every pain, every tear  
There's a God who's been faithful to me.  
When my strength was all gone,  
When my heart had no song,  
Still in love he's proved faithful to me  
Every word he's promised is true;  
What I thought was impossible, I see my God do.

He's been faithful, faithful to me,  
Looking back, his love and mercy I see.  
Though in my heart of question,  
Even failed to believe,  
Yet he's been faithful, faithful to me.

When my heart looked away,  
The many times I could not break,  
Still my God, he was faithful to me.  
The days has been so selfishly,  
Reaching out for what please me;  
Even then God was faithful to me

Every time I come back to him,  
he's waiting with open arms,  
and I see once again.  
He's been faithful, faithful to me....

Were we calling on the Lord through all of this? In a sense we were. But I couldn't help jumping in to take action on my own, too. I was still, to some degree, the point guard wanted to grab the basketball, put it on the floor, make something happen, press through any hole in the defense I could find. But the more I press, the worse Chrissy got.

Then one November, I was alone in Florida and I received a call from a minister whom I had persuaded Chrissy to talk to. "Jim," he said, "I love you and your wife, but the truth of the matter is, Chrissy is going to do what Chrissy is going to do. You really don't have much choice, now that she's 18. She's determined. You're going to have to accept whatever she decides."

I hung up the phone. Something very deep within me began to cry out. "Never! I will never accept Chrissy being away from you, Lord!" I knew that if she continued on a present back, there'll be nothing but destruction awaiting hurt.

Once again, as back in 1972, there came a divine showdown. God strongly impressed me to stop crying, screaming, talking to anyone else about Chrissy. I was to converse with no one but God. In fact, I knew I should have no further contact with Chrissy - until God acted! It was just to believe and obey what I preach so often-

*Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer you.*

I dissolved in a flood of tears. I knew I had to let go of this situation.

Back home in New York, I began to pray with an intensity and growing faith that never before whatever bad news I would receive about Chrissy, just kept interceding and actually began praising God for what I knew he would do soon. I made no attempt to see her. Carol and I endured the Christmas season with real sadness. It was pathetic, sitting around trying to open presents with our other two children, without Chrissy.

February came. One cold Tuesday night during the prayer meeting, I talked from Acts 4 about the church boldly calling on God in the face of persecution. We entered into a time of prayer, everyone reaching out to the Lord simultaneously.

An usher handed me a note. A young woman whom I felt to be spiritually sensitive had written: *Pastor Cymbala, I feel impressed that we should stop the meeting and pray for your daughter.*

I hesitated. Was it right to stop the flow of the service and focus on my personal need?

Yet something in the note seemed to ring true. In a few minutes I picked up the microphone and told the congregation what had just happened. "The truth of the matter," I said, "although I haven't talked much about it, is that my daughter is very far from God these days. She thinks up is down, and down is up; dark is light, and light is dark. But I know God can break through to her, and so I'm going to ask Pastor Boekstaaf to lead us in praying for Chrissy. Let's all join hands across the sanctuary."



As my associate began to lead the people, I stood behind him with my hand on his back. My tear ducts ran dry, but I prayed as best I knew.

To describe what happened in the next minutes, I can only employ a metaphor: *the church turned into a labor room*. Play sounds of women giving birth are not pleasant, but the results are wonderful. I'll do this when he writes, "my dear children, for whom I am again in the Pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..." (Galatians 4: 19 parentheses).

There arose a groaning, since of desperate determination, as if to say, quotation marks Satan, you will not have his girl. Take your hands off of her - she's coming back! "I was overwhelmed. The force of that vast throng calling on God almost literally knocked me over.

When I got home that night, Carol was waiting up for me. Besides the kitchen table drinking coffee, and I said, "it's over."

"What's over?" she wondered.

"It's over with Chrissy. You would have had to be in the repair meeting tonight. I tell you, there's a God in heaven, this whole nightmare is finally over." I just described what had taken place.

#### BACK FROM THE ABYSS

Thirty-Two hours later, on Thursday morning, as I was shaving, Carol suddenly burst through the door, her eyes wide. "Go downstairs!" she blurted. "Chrissy's here."

"Chrissy's here?"

"Yes! Go down!"

"But Carol - I -"

"Just go down," she urged. "It's you she wants to see. "

I wiped off the shaving foam and headed down the stairs, my heart pounding. So I came around the corner, I saw my daughter on the kitchen floor, rocking on her hands and knees, sobbing. Cautiously I spoke her name: "Chrissy?"

She grabbed my pant leg and began pouring out her anguish. "Daddy - Daddy - I've sinned against God. I've sinned against myself. I've sinned against you and mommy. Please forgive me- "

My vision was clouded by tears as hers. I pulled her up from the floor and held her close as we cried together.

Suddenly she drew back. "Daddy, " she said with a start, "*who was praying for me? Who was praying for me?*" Her voice was like that of a cross-examining attorney.

"What do you mean, Chrissy?"

"On Tuesday night, Daddy- *who was praying for me?*" I didn't say anything, so she continued:

"In the middle of the night, God woke me and showed me I was heading toward this abyss. There was not bottom to it- it scared me to death. I was so frightened. I realized how hard I have been, how wrong, how rebellious.

"But at the same time, it was like God wrapped his arms around me and held me tight. He kept me from sliding any farther as He said, "I still love you."

"Daddy, tell me the truth, who was praying for me Tuesday night?"

I looked into her bloodshot eyes, and once again I recognized the daughter we had raised.

Chrissy's return to the Lord became evident immediately. By the fall, God had opened a miraculous door for her to enroll at Bible college, where she not only undertook studies but soon began directing music groups and a large choir, just like her mother. Today she is a pastor's wife in the Midwest with three wonderful children. Through all this, Carol and I learned as never before that the persistent calling upon the Lord breaks through every stronghold of the devil, for nothing is impossible with God.

For Christians in these troubled times, there is simply no other way.