



How to Pray in a Crisis outlines how God can use a crisis to draw His people near to Him. This four-step guide will help you understand the nature of prayer and how it can lead to spiritual renewal in your life. Learn to pray with conviction, competency, community, and in a way that inspires others.

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DECIDE TO LET GOD BIRTH FRESH CONVICTION¹

*At least five times the Faith
has to all appearances gone to the dogs.
In each of these five cases, it was the dog that died.*
G. K. Chesterton

*I never want to let fear of the unexpected
cause me to institutionalize lukewarmness.*
Jim Cymbala

Imagine sitting down one morning at the kitchen table. The sun streams across the room inviting you to another ordinary day. Coffee in hand, you grab your phone,

glancing at your favorite news app with little anticipation except to discover more depressing stories about economic woes, international conflict, crimes of various varieties, and more political punditry. Suddenly, a riveting headline arrests your attention.

From *USA Today*:

**Conversions to Christianity Multiply Exponentially,
Church Leaders Cannot Explain Why.**

With curiosity on high-alert, you begin a search for similar stories. Unexpectedly, the news reports leap off the screen. You can't believe what you are seeing.

From New York City:

**Five Rabbis Leave their Synagogues for
Christian Church after Dramatic Conversion**

From Minneapolis:

**Dozens of Islamic Leaders Renounce
Their Faith to Join Christian Movement**

From Orange Country, Calif.:
**Local Buddhist Priests Cause Stir
by Declaring that Jesus Christ Is God**

From Salt Lake City:
**Mormon Leaders to Discard Extra-Biblical
Documents in Dramatic Shift of Core Beliefs**

From New England:
Recent Surveys Show Sales of Bibles Up 200%

From *Time* magazine:
**Leading Atheists Embrace Evidence for Jesus'
Resurrection, Offer Public Apologies to Christians**

A mix of excitement and disbelief grip your core. You have prayed for this, although not always in faith. You have longed for this kind of breakthrough in your own church, wondering if it would ever come. You recall that, in recent days, you have seen an unusual uptick in prayer on social media and fresh stirrings of the Spirit among the people in your church. But now this. It seems the prayers of God's people over decades of desperate intercession are

now coming to fruition, redeeming opponents of the gospel and transforming communities across the landscape.

And it has come just in time. Society is on edge as racial divide is dominating the news. Various studies have pointed to a dramatic downturn in the spiritual influence of the church. The cultural indicators have screamed a thunderous warning that America is in a rapid post-Christian spiral. Believers have actually been portrayed as the obstructionists in a secular society defined by tolerance toward everything, except absolute truth. A widespread health and financial crisis has threatened all the norms of life around the world.

As you read these reports you cannot escape the thought that something truly supernatural has quietly emerged. You've heard about the Great Awakenings and their impact on society in previous centuries. Could this be the inauguration of a similar work of the Spirit? What might this mean for your family and community in the future? Could this become a wave of extraordinary grace to calm our worries over job loss and anxiety about health concerns? Is God pouring out divine unifying power to resolve racial divides in the nation? Might the Holy Spirit be working powerfully to give comfort to the lonely, peace

to the uncertain soul, and new purpose to those who have simply given up? What role should you play in this rising tide of redemption?

COULD IT HAPPEN?

Could a moment like this happen in our lifetime? I would propose that it could indeed. Not only has it happened in our not-so-distant history, usually birthed in seasons of economic downturn and societal desperation, but this kind of transforming gospel impact is recorded in the New Testament.

A SUPERNATURAL HIGH POINT

I invite you to ponder with me what I believe is the greatest “revival” moment in the New Testament narrative. Transcending a difficult environment of persecution and threat, one that would soon go from tough to tougher, the early Christians form a fearless gospel community. In Acts 6:7 we read these words:

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in

Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

Read that again slowly. Absorb the incalculable impact described in this one succinct sentence. It is notable that for the first five chapters in the book of Acts, thousands were being “added” to the church in Jerusalem. In Acts 6:1, the text says they were “increasing in number.” Some scholars believe the church could have had as many as 20,000 men and women as chapter 6 commences.² But by verse 7, it says that the number of gospel-transformed

lives had “multiplied greatly.” Put away the calculator. The numbers were officially off the chart. The Spirit was on the move. The gospel was going viral.

All this was occurring in a dynamic context of crisis. The young church was facing the heat of angry persecution. They were managing an internal uprising of complaint and potential division

as the widow-feeding program had malfunctioned. We

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also know that devastating famine would soon rock and redistribute Christians in the Jerusalem congregation.

But don't miss this astounding observation: a "great many" Jewish priests were being converted. Hard-liners. Opponents of the gospel. This powerful network of religious rivals who conspired to crucify Christ was now losing a significant number from their own ranks to a transformation found in the life of the resurrected Jesus. It would be like a modern-day salvation wave that engulfs some of the most notable atheists, skeptics, celebrities, domestic terrorists, and critics of the faith. Truly amazing. Truly God. Truly possible!

A NEW CALL TO AN OLD CONVICTION

Historically, many seasons of spiritual awakening occurred in a time of crisis.³ Why? Crisis is used by God to bring us to fresh places of humility, repentance, and essential conviction about the things that ultimately matter. Crisis can elevate a believer's focus beyond just *their* world to feel a sincere and compelling burden for *the* world. This conviction spurs a wholehearted persuasion that sets an uncompromising course of action and persistent effort.

This is the point where everything changes in our lives, families, and ministries.

Looking back on my own journey, I now know that the greatest seasons of growth occurred during the toughest of times. It may have been navigating one of numerous church crises, agonizing over a prodigal child, or trying to launch my current ministry during a huge economic downturn when our expenses far outweighed our income. We all look back and know the special grace and profound lessons of crisis, but we are ultimately wise to look around right now and know that God's school of spiritual excellence is still in session.

A CONVICTION OF RENEWED HOPE

I can't help it. Even in the hardest of days, I still wake up with a dream of another world-transforming movement of the Spirit. Looking. Longing for those headlines. Do you dream too? Could it happen again? Could it explode in our lifetime? Could unthinkable spiritual renewal supersede unprecedented societal upheaval?

Can we embrace a conviction that we each must participate in a world-changing explosion of faith even in

the midst of a world-shaking epidemic of fear? Could you be used by God to see the gospel spread like wildfire and countless lives changed? Maybe your heart is feeling a compulsion, as mine has, that the “next new thing” must be “the first old thing”—especially for such a time as this. As Os Guinness noted, “The church always goes forward best by going back first.”⁴ Crisis offers a reset for changing the way we pray, live, and influence the world around us.

A CONVICTION ABOUT DESPERATE DEPENDENCE

Before we look more specifically at the Acts 6 moment, I want to emphasize the broader reality of the book of Acts, which is best titled “Acts of the Holy Spirit.” We will see that at the foundation of all that unfolded in this incredible history of the early days of the church, there is a conviction about prayer.

Perhaps you’ve seen the popular acronym PUSH (Pray Until Something Happens). I define prayer as “intimacy with God that leads to the fulfillment of His purposes.” The early church was commanded by Jesus and convinced in their soul that intimacy (abiding in Christ) would

align, unite, and empower them to fulfill the Lord's purposes for their lives, individually and in community with one another.

- In the upper room, they prayed together for ten days until the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (see Luke 24:49, Acts 1:14).
- In their daily gatherings, they prayed in one accord so that Christ would be formed in them as true disciples (see Acts 2:42).
- On a daily basis, the leaders prayed, trusting to be led by the Spirit into the next unfolding chapter of life-transforming gospel ministry (see Acts 3:1).
- In Acts 6:4 the apostles uncompromisingly held to the priority of prayer, convinced that the very DNA of ministry must be marked by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.
- Saul, after his Damascus road conversion, instinctively prayed until God brought Ananias to pray for the restoration of his sight and the launching of his ministry (Acts 9:11–12).
- The Gentile Cornelius prayed in Caesarea while Peter prayed on a rooftop until God revealed to them the

expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

- The church prayed together earnestly when Peter was in prison, until God intervened in miraculous ways according to His will (Acts 12:5).
- The second half of the book of Acts is launched as united in prayer, and the Holy Spirit spoke to them and launched them into all the world with the mission of the gospel (Acts 13:1–3).
- When beaten and locked deep in prison, Paul and Silas prayed until God revealed His delivering power to keep them on mission for the sake of His name (Acts 16:25–34).

Like our spiritual ancestors, we can discover new opportunity in every crisis if we will pray until something happens.

OUR DECLARATION OF DEPENDENCE

It may appear on my tombstone, I've said it so often: "Prayerlessness is my declaration of independence from God." Conversely, prayerfulness is my declaration of desperate dependence on God.

**WHEN WE ARE
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When we are confronted by threatening difficulties, we instinctively scramble to find a way out. But God may be calling us to find a way up. He often calls us to passionately look to Him in trustful prayer, submitting to His purposes, whatever they may bring. We tend to strategize a creative way to get over the difficulty, but

God is showing us the way down, in deeper humility with roots of reliance nourished in His sufficiency, come what may. John Baille prayed honestly, “When you call me to go through the dark valley, do not let me persuade myself that I know a way around.”⁵

A CULTIVATED DESPERATION

A Ugandan pastor speaking at a conference hosted by my church announced, “My message to America is desperation or devastation. The choice is yours.” His words are uncomfortable but undeniable. I have come to believe that desperation can come through crisis or cultivation.

God often allows the crisis, but we can also embrace a cultivated desperation.

The prophet Isaiah confessed in desperation, “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isa. 6:5). This declaration was not simply motivated by a circumstantial calamity or some low view of himself. It was prompted by a high view of God. Isaiah gave the reason for his passionate confession: “for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isa. 6:5). A consistent pursuit of God’s worthiness produces a deepening understanding of our neediness. Cultivated desperation. (We will unpack the full reality of this in chapter 3.)

A CONVICTION ABOUT FOCUSED LEADERSHIP

Returning to the account in Acts 6, we cannot ignore the connection between the Acts 6:7 impact and the Acts 6:4 conviction in the hearts of the apostles. Even though the people were demanding that the leaders fix the widow-feeding problem (Acts 6:1–3), they instead delegated the task to other capable servants so that they could maintain

focus on the primary conviction of church leadership. Acts 6:4 clarifies, “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” This direction was affirmed by the church, and seven men were selected to resolve the administrative dilemma.

**A CONSISTENT
PURSUIT
OF GOD’S
WORTHINESS
PRODUCES A
DEEPENING
UNDERSTANDING
OF OUR
NEEDINESS.**

This Acts 6:4 tenacity was the essential lifeline for receiving Christ’s direction and provision. They recognized that leading the church was a supernatural assignment, not a ministry enterprise.

They could not afford to move away from a full and focused experience of Christ’s person and presence to instead solve operational problems or implement a new program. Even when the pressing need of the moment held the potential of significant disruption and division, they were resolute.

**DEEPER CONVICTION
ABOUT THE HIGHEST PRIORITIES**

I’ve learned after decades of ministry that the prayer level of any congregation never rises higher than the personal

example and passion of the church leadership. Conviction must start at the core. Resolute leaders with conviction about prayer always conclude, “Our church must become a ‘house of prayer’ and we must personally precede it there. We can’t point the way, we must lead the way.” This conviction fuels life-giving prayer at a personal level, among the staff, the board, the various ministry leaders, and ultimately the entire church.

Today’s pastors face pressing dilemmas that can easily derail spiritual focus. The devil does not have to destroy church leaders; he only has to distract them. Times of crisis can accelerate the plethora of distractions. But crisis should ultimately compel leaders to double down on the convictions and ministry priorities that facilitate vital supernatural outcomes.

Leaders know that trying to breathe life into dying programs or driving the creation of new initiatives can consume inordinate amounts of pastoral focus and energy. Managing new demands and unprecedented approaches to ministry in the midst of the chaos of crisis threaten to drain every drop of vitality.

Unlike our highly strategized approach today, the early Acts 6 leaders knew that ministry was received, not

achieved. Prayer was not an escape from the pressing predicaments of ministry. Prayer was an engagement with the Head of the church, who alone had the wisdom, direction, power, and unifying grace to resolve thorny problems, undergird necessary focus, and empower weak vessels for powerful gospel impact.

My friend and fellow pastor Keeney Dickenson notes, “We pray in the context of ministry, but Jesus ministered in the context of prayer!”⁶ These apostles had seen, felt, and been forever changed by how Christ lived, taught, and implemented the gospel ministry. They were imitating the one who only did what He saw His Father doing, and who lived with divine spiritual insight and power every day, through His life of prayer. They dared not create a different paradigm. They had to walk in His steps through prayer and the ministry of the Word. So must every leader. Jesus did not call us to “figure it all out” but to follow Him.

There has never been a more critical moment in recent history for church leaders to humbly return to the core supernatural realities of ministry. Folks in the pew must also intercede and encourage their leaders to this end. Which leads us to the next core conviction.

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