

Book Review

Breakthrough Prayer: The Secret of Receiving What You Need From God

Jim Cymbala

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003). 237 pages. \$19.99 cloth

Reviewed by Rev. Larry Dilley, M. Div. Student and Enrollment Counselor, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary

Jim Cymbala wrote *Breakthrough Prayer* to encourage Christians to pray effectively so they might be better equipped to engage in a life of asking and receiving from God. Although Cymbala sprinkles Scripture references liberally throughout the book to support his thesis, *Breakthrough Prayer* does more than present important biblical principles for seeking God's assistance. In an easy-to-read style it attempts to "draw the heart toward the throne of grace" (8).

Cymbala maintains that God desires to bless His people abundantly because of His great love for them. Churches need God's blessing more than they require human talent, cleverness, or church growth models. We obtain God's blessing by crying out in passionate prayer, implanting biblical truth in our hearts, faithfully obeying God's commands, and giving joyfully to others. Cooperation with God is indispensable to breakthrough prayer. Although God has promised to do much for His people, He wants us to pray to Him concerning these promises. Power in prayer comes from our living in God's Word that produces the faith that enables us to obtain answers to our prayers. Scripture refines Christians, purging of self-dependence so that we may rely more fully on God.

The Holy Spirit's role in breakthrough prayer is to reveal both the individual's need and God's promised provision. Although focusing on "praying through" targets us for

spiritual opposition, we should direct our attention not toward ourselves, but toward the glory of God. We then experience God's peace as we prevail in prayer.

Breakthrough Prayer does more than offer instruction on appropriating God's promises through prayer; it grapples with the difficulties Christians encounter when, after praying about a difficult situation, the obstacle remains. We must engage in two activities at this point—believe that no problem is too big for God and wait for his answer. Scripture encourages us to trust God, expecting him to respond in due time. God's promises to Abraham to multiply his offspring remind us of God's faithfulness toward all of his people (Genesis 13:16; 15:5).

The primary reason for Jesus' mission on earth was to establish a church to bear fruit for God's kingdom. The church must live fruitfully, converting and discipling the world instead of allowing the world unduly to influence the church. Bearing fruit matters more than counting attendance and implementing the latest church growth techniques. The Lord's kingdom holds no place for bigotry and racial discrimination, attitudes which characterize far too many churches. God's love must replace these hindrances to bearing fruit.

In addition to Scripture, the author alludes to current events to illustrate his points. The gripping story of the miraculous rescue of an individual trapped in the rubble

of the collapsing World Trade Center during the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, aptly describes God's mercy and deliverance when those in trouble break through in prayer. Cymbala views the contemporary issues of sex abuse, divorce and remarriage, homosexuality, and sensuality in the church as tares growing among the wheat of those who are seeking the Lord with a listening ear and a sensitive heart. God requires holiness of his people, and he will "clean house" if necessary to find those who will follow him with a pure heart.

Timing is another important element of breakthrough prayer. Events in the exodus from Egypt demonstrate that God's timing generally occurs in one of four ways—never, always, at certain times, or, not now. Christians should have no trouble discerning the first two; they are easily determined from God's Word. The timing of the latter two often presents problems, though. We must be in tune with the Holy Spirit to know both the "certain times" and the "not now's" of God.

Finally, Cymbala reminds us that joy is a key to both spiritual and physical health. We cannot afford to allow cares and anxiety to rob us of joy. The Holy Spirit produces new streams of joy, sustaining us in troubling times.

Breakthrough Prayer confronts real issues faced by real people. Jim Cymbala offers no frills, fluff, or quick fixes to life's troubling situations. Instead, he brings the reader back to the Bible to demonstrate the magnitude of God's love for His people and His desire to answer our prayers when we call to Him out of genuine obedience to His Word. *Breakthrough Prayer* is a valuable resource for any Christian—pastor or parishioner—who desires to understand God's purposes better and appropriate God's promises through prevailing prayer.