

= Like a Prayer (song) =

" Like a Prayer " is a song by American singer Madonna , from her studio album of the same name . It was released by Sire Records as the lead single from the album on March 3 , 1989 . Written and produced by Madonna and Patrick Leonard , " Like a Prayer " denoted a more artistic and personal approach to songwriting for Madonna , who felt she needed to cater more to her adult audience .

" Like a Prayer " is a pop rock song with elements of gospel music . A choir provides background vocals that heighten the song 's spiritual nature , and a rock guitar keeps the music dark and mysterious . Madonna introduced liturgical words in the lyrics ? inspired by her Catholic upbringing ? but changed the context in which they were used . They have dual meanings of sexual innuendo and religion . " Like a Prayer " was acclaimed by critics , and was a commercial success . It was Madonna 's seventh number @-@ one single on the United States ' Billboard Hot 100 , and topped the singles charts in Australia , Canada , Denmark , Finland , Ireland , Italy , New Zealand , Norway , Sweden , the United Kingdom and other countries .

The music video , directed by Mary Lambert , portrays Madonna as a witness to a murder of a white girl by white supremacists . While a black man is arrested for the murder , Madonna hides in a church for safety seeking strength to go forth as a witness . The clip depicts Catholic symbols such as stigmata , Ku Klux Klan @-@ style cross burning , and a dream about kissing a black saint . After its release , the Vatican condemned the video , while family and religious groups protested its broadcast . They boycotted products by soft drink manufacturer Pepsi , which used the song for a commercial . Madonna 's contract with Pepsi was then canceled , although she was allowed to retain her initial fee .

The song has been featured on four of Madonna 's concert tours , most recently the Rebel Heart Tour in 2015 . " Like a Prayer " has been covered by many artists . The song is noted for the mayhem surrounding the music video , and the different interpretations of its content , leading to discussions among music and film scholars . Alongside its respective album , " Like a Prayer " has been considered a turning point in Madonna 's career , as she began to be viewed as an efficient businesswoman ? someone who knew how to sell a concept .

= = Background = =

1988 was a quiet year on the recording front for Madonna . Following the critical and commercial failure of her 1987 film Who 's That Girl , she acted in the Broadway production Speed @-@ the @-@ Plow . However , unfavorable reviews once again caused her discomfort . Her marriage to actor Sean Penn ended and the couple filed for divorce in January 1989 . Madonna turned 30 , the age at which her mother had died , and thus the singer experienced more emotional turmoil . She commented for the May 1989 issue of Interview that her Catholic upbringing struck a feeling of guilt in her all the time :

Because in Catholicism you are a born sinner and you 're a sinner all your life . No matter how you try to get away from it , the sin is within you all the time . It was this fear that haunted me ; it taunted and pained me every moment . My music was probably the only distraction I had .

But she understood that as she was growing up , so was her core audience . Feeling the need to attempt something different , Madonna wanted the sound of her new album to indicate what could be popular in the music world . She had certain personal matters on her mind that she thought could be the musical direction of the album . For lyrical ideas of the title track , she chose topics that until then had been personal meditations never to be shared with the general public . Thoughtfully , she sifted through her personal journals and diaries , and began considering her options . She recalled , " What was it I wanted to say ? I wanted the album and the song to speak to things on my mind . It was a complex time in my life . "

= = Development = =

As Madonna considered her alternatives , producers Patrick Leonard and Stephen Bray

experimented with instrumental tracks and musical ideas for her consideration . Both of them wanted to bring their unique style to the project , and they developed completely different music for the title track . Eventually , Madonna felt that the music presented to her by Leonard was more interesting , and she started to work with him . Together they wrote and produced the title track , naming it " Like a Prayer " ; it was the first song developed for the Like a Prayer album . Once Madonna had conceptualized the way she would interpose her ideas with the music , she wrote the song in about three hours . She described " Like a Prayer " as the song of a passionate young girl " so in love with God that it is almost as though He were the male figure in her life . "

Madonna 's further inspiration for writing the title song came from the Catholic belief of transubstantiation . She believed that the wine and wafer , which Catholics believe become the Body of Christ during Mass , have transformative power and every word in the prayer has its precise meaning . For Madonna , " Like a Prayer " similarly appeared to carry its own transformative power . While writing the lyrics , Madonna introduced liturgical words but changed the context in which they were added for a dual meaning . She wanted the song to have superficial pop lyrics about sexuality and religion , but a different meaning underneath which she believed could provoke a reaction from her listeners . In author J. Randy Taraborrelli 's book *Madonna : An Intimate Biography* , Leonard explained that he was not comfortable with the lyrics and the sexual innuendos present in it . He gave the example of the first verse for " Like a Prayer " which goes " When you call my name , It 's like a little prayer , I 'm down on my knees , I wanna take you there . " Leonard understood that the dual meaning of the lines referred to someone performing fellatio . He was aghast and requested that Madonna change the line , but she was adamant about keeping it .

= = Recording = =

Once Madonna and Leonard finished writing the lyrics of " Like a Prayer " , they decided to record it alongside a choir at the end of 1988 . He wanted to have a quick recording session for the song , as he believed that not much work would be needed for it . Madonna and Leonard met with musician Andraé Crouch and a member of his management team / vocalist Roberto Noriega and signed his choir as one of the background vocalists . Since Crouch was the leader of the Los Angeles Church of God choir , he researched the lyrics of the song , as he wanted to " find out what the intention of the song might be . We 're very particular in choosing what we work with , and we liked what we heard . " At Jonny Yuma recording studio , Crouch got his choir together and explained to them what they needed to do during the recording session . He had listened to the demo of " Like a Prayer " in his car , and directed his choir according to his own interpretations of the music . The choir was recorded separately , and Leonard wanted it to be added during post @-@ production of the song .

Recording took more time than usual since Madonna and Leonard fought " tooth and nail " according to O 'Brien , the reason being Madonna wanting to prove everybody that her second time as a record producer was not a fluke . Leonard worked on the chord changes for the verses and the chorus . He hired guitarist Bruce Gaitsch and bass guitar player Guy Pratt as musicians for " Like a Prayer " . Pratt had in turn hired some additional drummers who were supposed to reach Jonny Yuma in the morning . However , the person cancelled at the last minute , which irritated Madonna greatly , and she started shouting and swearing profusely at Leonard . Pratt did not end up being fired , but as recording started for " Like a Prayer " , he realized that Madonna would not forgive him easily ; she called him at late nights for his opinion , and urgently asking him to come to the recording studio , only to dismiss him . In the meantime , Leonard hired British drum and guitar players such as Chester Kamens , David Williams and Dann Huff . He commented that the choice was deliberate since he was a fan of British rock , and wanted that kind of attitude and quirkiness of the musicians in " Like a Prayer " , as well as the other songs of the album . Madonna had her own opinion of how the different musical instruments should be played to achieve the sound that she envisioned .

Pratt recalled that after the middle chorus of the song was recorded , Madonna notified the musicians of some changes in the production . She wanted drummer Jonathan Moffet to " do less of the high @-@ hat in the middle eight , and more of a fill towards the end . Guy , I want duck eggs [

semibreves] on the end , and Chester , bring in your guitar on the second verse . " The team ran through her instructions once more , and did a final take with vocals and one with the string arrangements . Gaitsch heard Madonna telling Leonard that " Like a Prayer " could not be improved further , and that the recording was finished . Leonard then gave the song to Bill Bottrell for the mixing process . As the mixing was nearing completion , Leonard felt that the bongos and the Latin Percussion would sound really mismatched , if Crouch 's choir was to be added afterwards ; hence , he removed them . Junior Vasquez remixed the 12 " version of the track , turning the church capella inside out and overlaying it with Fast Eddie 's single " Let 's Go " .

= = Composition = =

" Like a Prayer " is a pop rock song that incorporates elements of gospel and funk music . According to the sheet music from Alfred Publishing , it was composed using common time in the key of D minor , with a moderate tempo of 120 beats per minute . Madonna 's vocals range from the lower octave of A3 to the two @-@ lined higher note of F5 . " Like a Prayer " starts with a Dm ? C / D ? Gm / D ? Dm chord progression in the opening chorus , and a Dm ? C / E ? C7 ? B ? ? F / A sequence in the verses . The song begins with the sound of heavy rock guitar that is suddenly cut off after a few seconds , and replaced with the choir and the sound of an organ . Madonna sings the opening lines alongside the light sound of percussion , as drums start during the first verse . The percussion and the choir sound are added interchangeably between the verses and the bridges , until the second chorus . At this point the guitars start flickering from left to right , accompanied by a bubbling sequenced bassline .

Rikky Rooksby , author of The Complete Guide to the Music of Madonna , commented that " Like a Prayer " was the most complex track that Madonna had ever attempted . According to him , the complexity builds up more after the second chorus , in which the choir fully supports Madonna 's vocals and she re @-@ utters the opening lines , but this time accompanied by a synthesizer and drum beats . As Madonna sings the lines " Just like a prayer , your voice can take me there , Just like , a muse to me , You 're a mystery " , an R & B @-@ influenced voice backs her up along with the choir . The song ends with a final repetition of the chorus and the singing of the choir gradually fading out .

Taraborrelli noted in Madonna : An Intimate Biography that the lyrics of the song consist of " a series of button @-@ pushing anomalies " . With Madonna 's inclusion of double entendres in the lyrics , " Like a Prayer " refers to both the spiritual and the carnal . Taraborrelli felt that the song sounds religious , but with an undertone of sexual tension . This was achieved by the gospel choir , whose voice heightens the song 's spiritual nature , while the rock guitar sounds keep it dark and mysterious . Author Lucy O 'Brien explained how the song 's lyrics describe Madonna receiving a vocation from God : " Madonna is unashamedly her mother 's daughter ? kneeling alone in private devotion , contemplating God 's mystery . She sings of being chosen , of having a calling . " The album version features bass guitar played by Guy Pratt doubled by an analogue Minimoog bass synthesizer , while the 7 " version has a different bass part played by Randy Jackson . " Like a Prayer " was also remixed by Shep Pettibone for the 12 " single of the song ; a re @-@ edited version of Pettibone 's mix is featured on Madonna 's 1990 compilation album The Immaculate Collection .

= = Critical reception = =

Following the release of " Like a Prayer " on March 3 , 1989 , it received widespread acclaim from critics and biographers . Taraborrelli commented that the track " deserved every bit of the curiosity it generated . While being devilishly danceable , the song also shows Madonna 's uncanny ability to inspire strong , conflicting emotions during the course of a single song , leaving the listener scratching his head for answers ? and craving for more . " Stephen Holden from The New York Times , while writing about Madonna 's re @-@ invention of her image , observed how Madonna 's sound had changed from the " simple blaring dance @-@ pop to the rich , fully rounded pop of ' Like

a Prayer ' " . O 'Brien felt that the most remarkable aspect of " Like a Prayer " was Madonna 's usage of liturgical words . " There is the surface meaning , forging sexuality with pop lyrics that sound so sweet . But underlying that is a rigorous meditation on prayer . In shorter words , ' Like a Prayer really takes you there , " she concluded . This view was shared by biographer Mary Cross , who wrote in her biography of Madonna that " the song is a mix of the sacred and the profane . There @-@ in lies Madonna 's triumph with ' Like a Prayer ' . It still sounds catchy and danceable . "

Michael Campbell , author of *Popular Music in America : And the Beat Goes On* , felt that the soothing melody , which " flows in gently undulating phases " , resembles English singer Steve Winwood 's 1986 single " Higher Love " . Australian rock music journalist Toby Creswell wrote in his book *1001 Songs : The Great Songs of All Time and the Artists , Stories and Secrets Behind Them* that " ' Like a Prayer ' is a beautifully crafted devotional song in the guise of perfect pop . God is the drum machine here . " Scholar Georges Claude Guilbert , author of *Madonna as Postmodern Myth : How One Star 's Self @-@ Construction Rewrites Sex , Gender , Hollywood and the American Dream* , noted that there was a polysemy in " Like a Prayer " as it was clear that the woman who sings is addressing either God , or her lover , and in doing so ? Madonna achieves the gold @-@ card of attaining her own divinity . Whenever someone calls her name , it alludes to the song . " Theologian Andrew Greeley compared " Like a Prayer " with the music and the hymns present in the Hebrew religious textbook *Song of Songs* . Greeley , although focusing more on the video , acknowledged the fact that sexual passion may be revelatory , and complimented Madonna for glorifying ideologies of female subjectivity and womanhood in the song .

Stephen Thomas Erlewine from Allmusic called the song haunting and felt that it displayed a commanding sense of Madonna 's songcraft . According to Rolling Stone 's Gavin Edwards , it sounded glorious and " is the most transgressive ? and the most irresistible " song of Madonna 's career . Jim Farber from Entertainment Weekly commented that the " gospel @-@ infused title track demonstrates that her writing and performing had been raised to heavenly new heights . " In a review for The Immaculate Collection compilation album , David Browne of Entertainment Weekly wrote that the " frothier " texture of the song added poignancy to its spiritual lyrics . Sal Cinquemani from Slant Magazine was impressed with the track , saying " ' Like a Prayer ' climbs to heights like no other pop song before it ? or after . Like most of the songs on the album , the track 's glossy production gives way to a power beyond studio sonics , and if [its] ' church @-@ like ' reverence feels like a religious experience , it 's no mere coincidence . " Writing for the Official UK Charts Company , Justin Myers called " Like a Prayer " a simple love song and complemented the numerous hooks and the lyrics . He believed that the song had the potential to be successful even without its controversial music video .

= = Chart performance = =

In the United States , " Like a Prayer " debuted at number 38 on the Billboard Hot 100 , and reached the top of the chart on the issue dated April 22 , 1989 . It was number one for three weeks , before being replaced by the Bon Jovi song " I 'll Be There for You " . " Like a Prayer " also topped the Dance Club Songs chart , while reaching number three on the Adult Contemporary chart and number 20 on the Hot R & B / Hip @-@ Hop songs chart . " Like a Prayer " was ranked at number 25 on the Hot 100 year @-@ end chart of 1989 , and was certified platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) in May 1989 , for shipment of a million copies of the single . According to Nielsen SoundScan , it has also sold 443 @,@ 000 digital downloads as of April 2010 , becoming Madonna 's best @-@ selling digital track since SoundScan started calculating downloads in 2005 . In Canada , the song reached the top of the RPM Singles Chart in its ninth week . It was present on the chart for 16 weeks and was the top @-@ selling Canadian single for 1989 .

In Australia , " Like a Prayer " debuted on the ARIA Singles Chart at number three on March 19 , 1989 . The next week it reached the top of the chart , and stayed there for another four weeks . It was present for a total of 22 weeks on the chart , and was certified platinum by the Australian Recording Industry Association (ARIA) for shipment of 70 @,@ 000 copies of the single . " Like a

"Prayer" was also the top-selling Australian single of 1989. In New Zealand, the song had a similar run as in Australia, by debuting at number three on the RIANZ Singles Chart, and reaching number one the next week. It was present for a total of 13 weeks on the chart. "Like a Prayer" became Madonna's seventh number one single in Japan, and occupied the top position of the Oricon Singles chart for three weeks.

In the United Kingdom, "Like a Prayer" entered the UK Singles Chart at number two, before moving to the top the next week, remaining there for three weeks. Madonna became the artist with the most number-one singles of the 1980s in the UK, with a total of six chart-toppers. "Like a Prayer" became the tenth best-selling song of 1989 in the UK, with the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) certifying it gold, for shipment of 400,000 copies of the single. According to the Official Charts Company, the song has sold 580,000 copies there. "Like a Prayer" also reached number one in Belgium, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. It was Madonna's fifth number one song on the Eurochart Hot 100 Singles chart, reaching the top on March 25, 1989, and staying at number one for 12 weeks. After the Glee episode "The Power of Madonna" was broadcast, "Like a Prayer" again entered the chart at position 47, on May 15, 2010. The song went on to sell over five million copies worldwide.

= = Music video = =

= = = Development = = =

The music video for "Like a Prayer" was directed by American film director Mary Lambert and was shot at Raleigh Studios in Hollywood, California and at San Pedro Hills in San Pedro, California. Madonna wanted the video to be more provocative than anything she had done before. She wanted to address racism by having the video depict a mixed-race couple being shot by the Ku Klux Klan. However, upon further thought, she decided on another provocative theme to keep with the song's religious connotations. When Madonna had recorded the song, she would play it over and over again; she interpreted the visual as:

[T] his story of a girl who was madly in love with a black man, set in South, with this forbidden interracial love affair. And the guy she's in love with sings in a choir. So she's obsessed with him and goes to the church all the time. And then it turned into a bigger story, which was about racism and bigotry.

Lambert had a different visual aspect of the song on her mind. She felt that it was more about ecstasy, especially a sexual one, and how it related to religious ecstasy. She listened to the song with Madonna a number of times and came to the conclusion that the religious ecstasy part should be included. A sub-plot about Madonna as a homicide witness was included and became the trigger factor in the ecstasy part of the plot. Actor Leon Robinson was hired to play the role of a saint, which was inspired by Martin de Porres, the patron saint of mixed-race people and all those seeking interracial harmony.

The video was shot over four days, with an extra day allotted for re-shooting some of the scenes. Originally Lambert had casts taken of Leon's face, hand and feet to create the statue of the saint which would be used as a decoration. The actor only enacted the live scenes. However, after post-production started, Lambert found that the statue did not look like Leon, who was asked to re-shoot the respective scenes. Leon had to act as the statue and required special make-up; he had to stand motionless during extended periods of shooting and retakes. The actor recalled that standing like a statue was difficult since "first of all, I didn't realize how hard it is on the back to stand absolutely tall and straight and not move. Secondly, as a performer you have this nervous energy? and my requirements here were total antithesis of that."

= = = Synopsis = = =

The viewers first see Madonna who runs on the street. She witnesses the murder of a young

woman , but is too frozen in fear to protest . A black man walking down the alley notices the incident and decides to help the woman , but the police arrive and arrest him , mistakenly suspecting him to be the killer . The murderers give a threatening look towards Madonna and leave . She escapes to a church and sees a caged saint who resembles the black man on the street . As the song starts , Madonna utters a prayer in front of the saint , who appears to be crying .

Madonna lies down on a pew and has a dream in which she is falling through space . Suddenly , a woman , representing power and strength , catches her . She advises Madonna to do what is right and tosses her back up . Still dreaming , Madonna returns to the saint , who becomes the black man she had seen earlier . He kisses her forehead and leaves the church as she picks up a knife and cuts her hands , bleeding . As the chorus starts , the scene shifts to Madonna as she sings and dances wildly in front of burning crosses . In the meantime a church choir sings around Madonna , who continues to dance with them . Madonna wakes up , goes to the jail and tells the police that the black man is innocent ; the police release him . The video ends as Madonna dances in front of the burning crosses , and then everybody involved in the storyline takes a bow as curtains come down on the set .

= = = Pepsi commercial = = =

In January 1989 , while the music video was still being filmed , Pepsi @-@ Cola announced that they had signed Madonna to a US \$ 5 million deal to use her and " Like a Prayer " in a television commercial for them . The agreement also called for Pepsi to financially sponsor Madonna 's next world tour . Madonna would use the commercial to launch the " Like a Prayer " single globally before its actual release ? the first time something like this was being done in the music industry ? thereby creating promotion for the single and the album to come . Pepsi , on the other hand , would have their product associated with Madonna , thereby creating promotion for the soft drink . According to the company 's advertising head , Alan Pottasch , " the global media buy and unprecedented debut of this long awaited single will put Pepsi first and foremost in consumer 's minds " . Problems started when Madonna refused to dance , " I ain 't dancing and I ain 't singing . " Joe Pytko introduced her to choreographer Vince Paterson (from Michael Jackson days) and she agreed to dance . She and Paterson continued their professional relationship for a number of years . Pepsi ran the expensive television commercial during the global telecast of the 31st Grammy Awards in February 1989 . A week later , the ad was premiered during NBC 's sitcom , The Cosby Show .

Titled " Make a Wish " , the two @-@ minute commercial portrayed Madonna back in time to revisit her childhood memories . It starts as Madonna watches a video of her childhood birthday party . As she reminisces , she interchanges places with her childhood self . The young Madonna roams aimlessly around the grown @-@ up Madonna 's room , while the latter dances with her childhood friends on the street and inside a bar . The commercial continues as Madonna dances inside a church , surrounded by a choir and her child self discovering her old play doll . As both of their lives are interchanged again , the grown @-@ up Madonna looks towards the TV and says , " Go ahead , make a wish " . Both depictions of Madonna raise their cans of Pepsi towards each other , and the young Madonna blows out the candles on her birthday cake . An estimated 250 million people around the world saw the commercial , which was directed by Joe Pytko . Pepsi @-@ Cola Company spokesman Todd MacKenzie said that the ad was planned to be aired simultaneously in Europe , Asia , Australia and North America . Bob Garfield from the Advertising Age observed that from " Turkey to El Salvador to anytown USA , around 500 million eyes [were] glued to the screen . Leslie Savan from The Village Voice noted that the ad qualified as a " hymn to the global capabilities of the age of electronic reproductions ; it celebrates the pan @-@ cultural ambitions of both soda pop and pop star . "

= = = Reception and protests = = =

Taraborrelli pointed out about the actual music video that " Madonna danced with such abundance in [it] , as if she knew that she was about to cause a commotion , and couldn 't wait to see how it

would unfold . " The day after the Pepsi commercial was premiered , Madonna released the actual music video for " Like a Prayer " on MTV , who deemed it controversial . Among music critics , Phil Kloer from Record @-@ Journal felt that whether one condemns the video as racist or not , " It 's condemnable on the face of it because it exploits a symbol of evil [the burning crosses of the Ku Klux Klan] in order to sell records . " Jamie Portman from The Daily Schenectady Gazette noted that " the video is vulnerable to charges of being blatantly provocative in its calculated blending of sex and religion . " David Rosenthal from The Spokesman @-@ Review found the video " visually stunning " ; however , Edna Gundersen from USA Today did not understand the media mayhem behind the video . She pointed out that " Madonna is a good girl in the video . She saves someone . What is the big deal behind it ? " Writing for the Los Angeles Times , Chris Willman complimented the video for its portrayal of a love song , rather than blasphemy . He was more interested in the stigmata presented in the video .

Religious groups worldwide protested against the video , which they deemed contained blasphemous use of Christian imagery . They called for the national boycott of Pepsi and PepsiCo 's subsidiaries , including their fast food chains Kentucky Fried Chicken , Taco Bell and Pizza Hut . Pepsi had decided initially to continue airing their commercial ; however , they were taken aback by the protests . They explained the differences between their advertising methods and Madonna 's artistic opinions in the video . Ultimately , Pepsi caved in to the protests , and cancelled the advertising campaign . According to Taraborrelli , Pepsi was so eager to extricate themselves from the venture that they even allowed Madonna to keep the five million dollars she had been advanced . In the meantime , Pope John Paul II involved himself in the matter and encouraged fans to boycott her Italian performances . Protests from a small Catholic organization in the country prompted Italian state television network RAI and Madonna 's Italian record company WEA to not air the video there .

At the 1989 MTV Video Music Awards , " Like a Prayer " was nominated in the Viewer 's Choice and Video of the Year categories , winning the former . Ironically the award show was sponsored by Pepsi in 1989 , and when Madonna came onstage to receive the award she added , " I would really like to thank Pepsi for causing so much controversy . " " Like a Prayer " also topped video countdowns and critic lists . It was number one on MTV 's countdown of " 100 Videos That Broke The Rules " in 2005 , and for the 25th anniversary of MTV , viewers voted it as the " Most Groundbreaking Music Video of All Time " . In addition , the video was ranked at number 20 on Rolling Stone 's " The 100 Top Music Videos " and at number two on VH1 's 100 Greatest Videos . Fuse TV also named " Like a Prayer " one of its 10 " Videos That Rocked The World " . In a 2011 poll by Billboard , " Like a Prayer " was voted the second best music video of the 1980s , behind only Michael Jackson 's " Thriller " .

= = = Themes and analysis = = =

Scholars and academics have offered different interpretations of the music video . Allen Metz , one of the authors of The Madonna Companion : Two Decades of Commentary , noted that when Madonna enters the church at the beginning of the video , the line " I hear you call my name , And it feels like Home " is played . He explained that the scene highlighted Madonna 's continued fascination with Spanish culture right from her early videos . The women of Italian East Harlem in New York call their Church as la casa di momma (Momma 's House) . In that respect , Madonna alluded herself to be one from Harlem , but also refers to her own name as the divine returning to the Church . Nicholas B. Dirks , author of Culture / power / history , argued that Madonna falling into a dream is the most important point of the narrative as it signified that " Madonna is really not putting herself in place of the redeemer , but imagining herself as one . "

Santiago Fouz @-@ Hernández wrote in his book Madonna 's Drowned Worlds that the Black woman who catches Madonna when she is falling through heaven in her dream , is a symbol for the divinity , as she helps Madonna throughout the video to come to the correct decision . Fouz @-@ Hernández also noted how the physical similarity between Madonna and woman indicated that it was actually Madonna 's inner divinity which was rescuing her . After the Black saint comes to life

and departs from the church , Madonna picks up his dropped dagger and accidentally cut her hands . Scholar Robert McQueen Grant explained the action as a stigmata , that marked Madonna as having an important role to play in the narrative . During the second chorus , as the crime scene is shown in detail , an identification is established between Madonna and the victim . Freya Jarman @-@ Ivens , coauthor with Fouz @-@ Hernández , noted that the woman cries out for help when Madonna sings the line " When you call my name , It 's like a little prayer " . However , Madonna does nothing about it , thus portraying failure of divinity to save . According to Jarman @-@ Ivens , the look between the gang member and Madonna also sets up a complicity of " White men rape / kill women , white men blame it on Black men ; Women are raped / killed for being on the streets at night , Black men are nevertheless thrown in jail . "

As Madonna sings the intermediate verse amidst a field of burning crosses , she evokes the murder scene of three civil workers , portrayed in the 1988 American crime drama film Mississippi Burning . Metz noted that when Madonna dances with the choir in the altar of the church , a young Black boy joins her . This referred to the only person who had protested against the Ku Klux Klan murders in Mississippi Burning , a Black man . Metz believed it was symbolic of how his protest was now transferred in Madonna . Benson described the erotic scene between the saint and Madonna as " leading the viewer to a single conclusion through its numerous cut @-@ scenes of burning crosses , shocked face of Madonna , bleeding eye of the icon etc that Black men have been martyred for kissing white women or even wanting them . " Grant believed this was where the racial equality message of the video came across as most poignant . On the contrary , when the curtain falls and the scene shifts to a smiling Madonna among the burning crosses , professor Maury Dean felt that another explanation was inevitable . Madonna portrays a successful heroine and thus the whole video becomes about female empowerment .

= = Live performances = =

The first live performance of " Like a Prayer " was on the 1990 Blond Ambition World Tour . Madonna started the performance by uttering the word " God ? " suddenly , as everything became silent . Then she started singing " Like a Prayer " , donning a dress that looked like a cross between a Mediterranean widow 's attire and evocative clergyman 's robes . A red velvet bed , which was present during the previous performance , was replaced by hundreds of burning candles . At the beginning of the song , Madonna knelt down in front of the stage , as the backup singers cried the words " Oh my God " several times . Madonna eventually removed a scarf from her head to display a huge crucifix hanging from her neck , and then rose and sang the full song , while her dancers gyrated around her . Two different performances were taped and released on video : the Blond Ambition : Japan Tour 90 , taped in Yokohama , Japan , on April 27 , 1990 , and Blond Ambition World Tour Live , taped in Nice , France , on August 5 , 1990 . On his review of Blond Ambition World Tour Live , Entertainment Weekly 's Ty Burr praised the " gymnastic dance productions in songs such as ' Where 's the Party ' and ' Like a Prayer ' " , calling them " astonishing " .

In 2003 , Madonna released her ninth studio album , American Life . While doing a set of short promotional performances for the album , Madonna sang " Like a Prayer " , with the choir portion of the song being replaced by guitar sounds . The song was also included in the set list of the Re @-@ Invention World Tour of 2004 . Members of the audience asked to sing along with her , filling in the part of the choir . Backup vocalist Siedah Garrett sang the vocals during the intermediate verses , while the backdrops displayed a series of Hebrew letters , indicating the 72 names of God . Jim Farber from New York magazine complimented Madonna 's vocals during the song . The performance was included on the 2006 live album of the tour , titled I 'm Going to Tell You a Secret . Madonna sang a similar version of the song during the Live 8 benefit concert at Hyde Park , London in July 2005 . She performed it alongside Birhan Woldu , an Ethiopian woman who , as a malnourished toddler , had appeared in some of the footage of the 1984 ? 85 famine in Ethiopia . Roger Friedman from Fox News Channel praised her performance , describing her voice as " rich , supple and perfect " . Conversely , Chicago Tribune 's Jill Lawless found Madonna 's delivery to be uninspiring and " cathartic " .

A dance version of the song , mixed with fragments of the dance track " Feels Like Home " by Meck , was performed in the 2008 ? 09 Sticky & Sweet Tour as part of the rave segment . Madonna 's line " feels like home " was replaced by the same line from Meck 's song . In the rave segment , Madonna appeared wearing a breastplate and a short wig . She danced energetically around the whole stage as backup singer Nicki Richards provided vocals during the intermediate solo . Screens displayed a message of equality of religions , as symbols and texts from different scriptures flashed by , including messages from the Bible , Qur 'an , Torah and Talmud . The performance ended with the line " We all come from the Light and to it shall we return " , as a circular screen covered Madonna to give way to the next song , " Ray of Light " . Helen Brown from The Daily Telegraph declared the performance as one of the highlights of the tour , while Joey Guerra from Houston Chronicle compared the sequences of Madonna rising on a platform with that of a superhero . The performance was included both in the CD and DVD of the live release of the tour , titled Sticky & Sweet Tour , filmed in Buenos Aires , Argentina from December 4 ? 7 , 2008 . In January 2010 , Madonna performed an acoustic version of the song live during the Hope For Haiti telethon . Jon Caramanica of The New York Times commented : " For 20 years , that song has been the symbol of one of the most tumultuous and controversial periods in Madonna 's life . But for five minutes tonight , it was pure , put in service of something bigger than the singer . "

For The MDNA Tour in 2012 , a modernized gospel version of " Like a Prayer " was performed as the second @-@ to @-@ last song of the show . This version featured Madonna and 36 of her back @-@ up singers , who played the role of a choir and wore church robes , energetically performing the song as images of a gothic church and Hebrew letters appeared on the backdrops . Critical response towards the performance was generally positive , with many reviewers deeming it a highlight of the show . Jim Harrington from The Oakland Tribune gave the overall concert a negative review but stated that " It wasn 't until the last two songs ? " Like a Prayer " and " Celebration " ? that the whole deal finally clicked " . Timothy Finn from The Kansas City Star was particularly impressed with the backing choir , calling it " the best use of one since Foreigner 's " I Want to Know What Love Is " . The performance of the song at the November 19 ? 20 , 2012 shows in Miami , at the American Airlines Arena , were recorded and released in Madonna 's fourth live album , MDNA World Tour .

On October 27 , 2015 , during the Inglewood stop of her Rebel Heart Tour , Madonna performed " Like a Prayer " . The performance began with the singer playing the acoustic guitar before asking the crowd to sing along with her . She also performed the song during her concert in Stockholm , Sweden , on November 14 , 2015 , dedicating it to the victims of the terrorist attacks that took place in Paris , France , two days before .

= = Cover versions = =

One of the first cover versions of the song was done by folk singer @-@ songwriter John Wesley Harding , for his 1989 extended play , God Made Me Do It : The Christmas EP . The 1999 and 2000 compilation albums , Virgin Voices : A Tribute To Madonna , Vol . 1 and Vol . 2 , included a cover of " Like a Prayer " by singers Loleatta Holloway and electro @-@ industrial band Bigod 20 . An uptempo eurodance remix was made by DJ group Sound Assassins for the remix album Dancemania Speed 2 , released in Japan in March 1999 . The song was redone as a hi @-@ NRG / eurodance song in 2002 by a group called Mad 'House , and was included in their album , Absolutely Mad . It was released as a single and was a commercial success , reaching the top of the charts in Austria , Germany , Ireland and the Netherlands , the top ten in Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia regions) , France , Switzerland and the United Kingdom , and the top twenty in Denmark and Sweden . On the European Hot 100 Singles chart of Billboard , it reached a peak of two . A folk music cover of the song by Lavender Diamond was included on the 2007 Madonna tribute compilation Through the Wilderness , with an accompanying music video made by Peter Glantz .

" Like a Prayer " was featured in an episode of American television series , Glee , called " The Power of Madonna " . It was sung at the end of the episode by the fictional show choir New Directions , performed by the Glee cast members . The song was released as a digital

downloadable single to the iTunes Store , and was also included on the soundtrack EP , Glee : The Music , The Power of Madonna . The cover version reached number 28 in Australia , number 27 in Canada , number two in Ireland , and number 16 in the United Kingdom . In the United States , the song debuted at number 27 on the Billboard Hot 100 , while entering the Hot Digital Songs chart at number ten , with sales of 87 @, @ 000 copies .

DJs Meck and Dino did a mash up of his 2007 single " Feels Like Home " with " Like a Prayer " , and released it as " Feels Like a Prayer " . The song reached the top ten in Belgium (Flanders region) and the Netherlands , while peaking at number 15 in Belgium (Walloon region) . In the United States , " Feels Like a Prayer " debuted at number 36 on the Hot Dance Club Songs chart , and reached a peak of number six , after seven weeks . We Are the Fallen , an American gothic metal band , covered " Like a Prayer " live in 2008 . Nick Duerden from Spin felt the song was " so successfully pulverized that one wondered whether it wasn 't written specifically to become the world 's greatest heavy rock anthem . " Canadian singer @-@ songwriter Nelly Furtado included " Like a Prayer " in the set list of her The Spirit Indestructible Tour .

= = Legacy = =

" Like a Prayer " is considered to be one of the best songs of Madonna 's career . It was ranked sixth on Blender magazine 's list of " The 500 Greatest Songs Since You Were Born " , while Rolling Stone included it in their list of " The 500 Greatest Songs of All Time " , at number 300 . In 2003 , Madonna fans were asked to vote for their " Top 20 Madonna singles of all @-@ time " , by Q magazine . " Like a Prayer " was allocated the number one spot on the list . Another similar poll conducted by MSN Entertainment in 2008 had the same result . In 2014 , LA Weekly placed the song at rank two on their list of " The 20 Best Pop Songs in History By Female Artists " . Art Tavana from the publication opined that " ' Like a Prayer ' was the moment when Madonna went from being the voice of America 's teenagers to the worldwide high priestess of pop . " At their ranking of the best songs from the 1980s , Pitchfork Media listed " Like a Prayer " at number 50 .

Campbell noted that the popularity and the media mayhem surrounding the song and the music video helped introduce a very important factor in the celebrity world : the reception of free publicity . " Like a Prayer " ' s impact was more evident on its parent studio album , which shot to the top of the charts once it was released in April 1989 . The music video also served as evidence of the emergence of the video commodity as a different entity from the song that spawned it . As author Judith Marcus argued in her book Surviving the Twentieth Century , Madonna used the church to make her point on victimization . For Marcus , the main impact of the video lies in the fact that Madonna emerged from the role of a victim by " empowering " herself . The author asserted that the video metaphorically " attacked " the Church 's demand for female compliance , indicted the Church 's precept of a dichotomy between body and spirit , and at the same time assailed the Church 's denial of female spirituality . Campbell noted that the video does not follow any definite narrative , although there is a plethora of images in it . He found sequences where Madonna does not sing the song , but her voice is heard , as most interesting since it pointed out the rapid evolution of the music video medium and Madonna 's own work , which had moved beyond a simple capture of a live performance , as was the case for the music video of her first single , " Everybody " (1982) ; by 1989 , such videos were already a distant memory .

Like the video , Campbell noted the song for merging disparate and contradictory musical features in it . He found that the simple melody of " Like a Prayer " offered an easy listen , as the contrasts in sound , rhythm and texture appealed to different target audiences . He also believed that the usage of choir and organ paved the way for gospel music to be more mainstream than before . In 1999 , the University of Michigan School of Music , Theatre & Dance held a seminar on the different implications and metaphors present in the song ; it was headed by professors Martin Katz , George Shirley and Michael Daugherty . The main topic discussed was the fact that there can be different metaphorical meanings of the song , as the word " like " can be taken in separate contexts . Shirley explained that although when one thinks of " Like a Prayer " , they would first think of its visual aspects , but for him the lyrics are far more important as they reinforce the postmodern nature of the

video . The ambiguity of the word " like " blurs distinctions between a human lover and God , evident strongly in the line " Like a child , you whisper softly to me " . This was further explained by Katz , who added : " The music of ' Like a Prayer ' is probably a mitigating one , blunting and softening the harder edges , the more challenging content of the lyrics and the video . "

Taraborrelli commented that " in the end , the events surrounding ' Like a Prayer ' only served to enhance Madonna 's reputation as a shrewd businesswoman , someone who knows how to sell a concept . " Before Madonna 's deal with Pepsi , pop stars in general were not given much artistic freedom by sponsors . However , Madonna had said from the very first day that she would be doing the commercial in her very own way , which Pepsi had to accept . While she said that it was never her intention that Pepsi be the fall guy in the fiasco surrounding the video , Taraborrelli argues that Madonna stayed true to herself . Although the commercial intended to promote Pepsi the soft drink , she did not bother to hold even a can of the product , leading Taraborrelli to comment that " Madonna the pop star was going to do it her way , no matter what Madonna the businesswoman had agreed to do . " She maintained all along that the Pepsi ad and the music video were two different commodities and she was right to stand her ground . Taraborrelli noted that after " Like a Prayer " , the recruitment of pop stars and athletes to sell soft drinks became commonplace . However , none of them generated the level of excitement on par with Pepsi 's failed deal with Madonna .

= = Track listings and formats = =

= = Credits and personnel = =

Credits adapted from Like a Prayer album liner notes .

= = Charts = =

= = Certifications = =