

## ***Session 1 The Call to Prayer***

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. This course will cover many topics related to prayer: its biblical foundations, practical applications, historical expressions, and significance in the generation in which Jesus returns.
- B. My aim in this course is threefold:
  - 1. To give practical instruction on what to do to develop a life of prayer
  - 2. To give biblical insight to different types of prayer and the principles associated with them
  - 3. To give a big-picture perspective of what the Holy Spirit is doing in emphasizing prayer across the earth in this hour
- C. A simple definition of prayer: prayer is “*talking with God.*” It can take many forms, but all prayer is essentially a two-way conversation with the Lord that has life-changing results.
- D. We talk to the uncreated God of the universe; He listens attentively and with great affection. He responds by revealing His heart, giving us direction, blessing our circumstances, transforming our emotions, touching our loved ones, reviving the Church, saving the lost, releasing justice, impacting society, and so on. It is a great privilege and has many implications for our lives and the world. The results are worth whatever it takes to cultivate a strong prayer life.
- E. We must make every effort to establish our prayer life, because it will not develop on its own. The Holy Spirit will help all who desire to pray more effectively.
- F. Our prayer life can progress from *duty to discipline to delight* (Larry Lea).
- G. Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would make His servants joyful in prayer. He referred to a new paradigm for prayer—joyful prayer. I call this “*enjoyable prayer.*” Enjoyable prayer is prayer that refreshes our heart! If prayer is not enjoyable, then it will not be sustainable.  
  
<sup>7</sup>“*Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer.”*  
*(Isa. 56:7)*

### **II. ALL BELIEVERS ARE CALLED TO GROW IN PRAYER**

- A. The Lord calls every believer to a life of prayer, from new believers to seasoned saints. One of the best things any of us can do to improve our lives and our relationships is to grow in prayer.
- B. Being a person of prayer is the most important calling in one’s life; it is a higher calling than being a spouse, parent, pastor, preacher, or leader in the marketplace, and we will all become far better spouses, parents, and leaders as we take time to grow in prayer. While not every believer is called to preach, each is called to pray. Prayer is not an optional activity, as it is essential for our spiritual well-being. Are you ready to join the multitudes being sovereignly stirred by the Lord to grow in prayer and to begin a new chapter in your spiritual life? It is time to start.

- C. Prayer involves connecting with the Spirit. Jesus made an absolute statement about our inability to walk in the fullness of our destiny in God without growing in prayer or abiding in Christ (Jn. 15:5). He said that unless we abide in Him, we can do nothing in relation to bearing fruit or maturing spiritually.  
*<sup>5</sup>“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (Jn. 15:5)*
- D. We cannot generate spiritual life; as we abide in Christ we experience it more. Just as it is impossible for us to jump a hundred feet however much we practice, so it is impossible for us to generate spiritual life. It is not an issue of practice—we were simply not created to jump a hundred feet! Neither were we created to have spiritual life while living independently of the Spirit.
- E. The Spirit will move in a new and powerful way in your life as you take time to grow in prayer. The change may not happen overnight, but it will most certainly happen. The discipline of prayer will eventually become delight in prayer. Dryness in prayer will gradually be replaced by a vibrant dialogue with God that will change your life and result in many answered prayers.
- F. Do not wait for a special spiritual experience to begin to grow in prayer. We grow in prayer by actually praying. Beginners in prayer mature by praying more.

### **III. FROM DUTY TO DELIGHT**

- A. In my younger days I loved Jesus, but I dreaded spending time in prayer. I saw prayer as a necessary duty to be endured if I wanted to receive more blessing.
- B. My youth leaders told me that I had to develop a prayer life if I wanted to experience the deeper things of God and enter into the fullness of my calling. I read books on prayer; especially memorable are those by Leonard Ravenhill and E. M. Bounds, who wrote some of the classics on prayer and revival. After reading their books, I was even more convinced of my need to grow in prayer, but the thought was daunting. The books inspired me, but left me feeling guilty. I felt spiritually “stuck” and desperate for a breakthrough.
- C. I needed a new perspective on prayer—on what prayer is and why the Lord insists on it. I began to see prayer as much more than a religious duty to endure. I learned that it is a place of encounter, a way to receive blessing, an expression of partnership with God, and much more.

### **IV. PRAYER IS A PLACE OF ENCOUNTER**

- A. At first I thought of prayer as being mostly results-oriented. I imagined that the Lord wanted me to “endure” talking to Him to prove my dedication. I saw it as paying the price, and if I endured it long enough, He would give me the blessing I asked for.
- B. First of all, prayer is about encountering God and growing in relationship with Him. It is the means by which we most feel His presence and receive love from Him as we gain understanding of what He is like. In prayer we position ourselves to receive fresh insight into His heart as new desires are formed in our hearts. Prayer positions us to be energized to love—to love God and people.

- C. The call to prayer is a call to participate in the love that has forever burned in God’s heart. From eternity past the Father has loved the Son with all His heart, and the Son has loved the Father with the same intensity. The primary factor in the Father’s relationships, both within the Godhead and with His people, is *wholehearted love*. The family dynamics among the Father, Son, and Spirit are based on and flow in this wholehearted love.
- D. God’s love is the bedrock of His kingdom, and we participate in the intensity of this love as we grow in prayer—we actually participate in the family dynamics of the Godhead. How do we do this? By receiving God’s love and responding in His love to the Lord and to people.
- E. God’s heart burns with love. He calls us to experience it—to enter into what I refer to as “*the fellowship of the burning heart*.” Salvation is an invitation to this fellowship.

**V. PRAYER IS A WAY TO RECEIVE BLESSING FOR OURSELVES AND FOR OTHERS**

- A. We do not pray “just to pray.” Yes, we pray to commune with God, but we also pray so that things will change and God’s blessings will be released in us and through us. Effective prayer accomplishes much and leads to real results that release blessing.

*<sup>16</sup>The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. (Jas. 5:16, NAS)*

- B. Prayer is a God-ordained way of receiving His blessing in both our inner lives and our external circumstances and to release God’s justice and revival.
- C. Some think of prayer solely as communion with God, while others think of it *only* as the way to obtain more blessing in their circumstances. We do not need to choose one over the other; we can expect results from our prayers *as* we grow in communion with God.
- D. Some believers have a passive attitude toward receiving God’s blessings in their circumstances. They see this as humility, since they consider it selfish to want to receive temporal blessings in “things.” It is false humility to disregard the blessings Jesus has ordained for His people.

**VI. THE LORD WAITS TO HEAR THE PRAYERS OF HIS PEOPLE (ISA. 30:18-19)**

- A. The Lord longs to be gracious—He desires to release a greater measure of blessing to His people. Receiving more from God is not about convincing Him to be willing to give us more; rather, it is about God convincing His people to pray for more with confidence.

*<sup>18</sup>The Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits...to have compassion on you...*

*<sup>19</sup>He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. (Isa. 30:18-19, NASB)*

- B. Some of God’s promises for increased blessing are not guarantees, but are invitations to partner with Him in prayer. If we fulfill the conditions—and prayer is one of the conditions—then the promises are guaranteed. Many of the promises in the Word include the conditional word “*if*”—if we call out to Him, then God promises to answer in specific ways.

*<sup>14</sup>If My people... will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chr. 7:14)*

## VII. PRAYER IS PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD

- A. The Lord wants much more from His people than for them to be His workforce. He longs to have relationship with those who love Him, and to partner with them in accomplishing His purposes.
- B. The Lord's leadership of His kingdom involves giving more blessing in response to the prayers of His people.... In prayer we position ourselves to receive abundant grace and blessing. We must never imagine that we earn or deserve God's blessing because of our prayers. Rather, prayer is the place of receiving blessing in response to interacting with Him.
- C. God governs the earth in prayerful partnership with His people who reign with Him.  
<sup>10</sup>*“And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:10)*
- D. Jesus is not just our King with power; He is also our Bridegroom, with a desire for relationship. He finds great joy in our friendship and in our partnering with Him in the work of His kingdom.
- E. The essence of prayer is that we speak in agreement with God's heart. Thus, one important aspect of prayer is telling God what He tells us to tell Him. The Word shows us what He promises or desires to release to His people, and we simply pray these things back to Him. This agreement causes us to grow in our partnership and relationship with Jesus.

## VIII. THE IMPORTANCE OF ASKING

- A. One foundational principle of the kingdom is that God releases more blessing if we ask for it. He could release more to us without our asking, but He wants us to be involved in the process.  
<sup>2</sup>*Yet you do not have because you do not ask. (Jas. 4:2)*
- B. The Lord knows our needs without our asking, yet He waits to give us many things until we ask Him for them. Many think about their circumstances or problems, or talk to others about them, without actually talking to God about them. It is easy to think about our needs without verbalizing them. God insists on us asking, because the “asking” leads to a greater heart-connect with Him.  
<sup>6</sup>*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. (Phil. 4:6)*
- C. Jesus called us to pray with perseverance for God's help and blessing. He taught us to *ask* and keep on asking, to *seek* and keep on seeking, to *knock* and keep on knocking. The verbs in the Greek are in the continuous present tense, indicating that we are to do these things consistently.  
<sup>7</sup>*“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.  
<sup>8</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” (Mt. 7:7-8)*

## IX. A FEW PRINCIPLES TO REMEMBER

- A. Our prayers are effective even when they are short, weak, and poorly worded. They are effective because of the authority we have in Jesus, which is based on His finished work on the cross.

- B. Short prayers—ninety-second prayers are valuable and effective. They matter and can connect our hearts to God while releasing His blessing to us. Do not put off praying until you have a full hour to pray. While you are rushing to an appointment, waiting at a stoplight, or standing in line at a store, you can offer ninety-second prayers that will make a difference in your life and the lives of others.
- C. Weak prayers—we must see the value of “weak” prayers. Some assume that because they do not feel anything when they pray, God must not feel anything either. The truth is that we offer our prayers in human weakness, but *they ascend to God in power because of the sufficiency of Jesus’ blood, and because they are in agreement with God’s heart*. Others believe that they are growing in prayer only if they *feel* good during their prayer times. They wrongly conclude that their prayers are meaningless when they feel spiritually dry or distracted.
- D. Our prayers—all of them—are heard, even if we do not feel anything when we offer them. Do not *measure your prayers* by how you feel when you pray them, but *by the extent to which they are in agreement with God’s will and Word*. Our weak prayer times may not move us, but they move the heart of God. We can have confidence that our prayers are heard regardless of how we feel while we are praying.

***<sup>14</sup>Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. (1 Jn. 5:14)***

- E. Poorly worded prayers—the Lord values our prayers, even if we think we do not say them in the “right” way. We come to the “throne of grace” (Heb. 4:16), not the “throne of literary accuracy.”...
- F. Our private times of prayer and public prayer meetings may not move us, but they move the angels, and, more importantly, they move the heart of God. Never measure your prayers by what you feel. When we pray in agreement with God’s will, our “weak” prayers move God’s heart.
- G. While Cornelius was praying, an angel appeared to him with a message from God, telling him his prayers would be remembered forever (Acts 10:3-4).

***<sup>3</sup>...he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming in and saying to him, “Cornelius!” <sup>4</sup>And when he observed him, he was afraid, and said, “What is it, lord?” So he said to him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.” (Acts 10:3-4)***

- H. Prayer is a brilliant way to rule the universe. Why? Because when we speak God’s Word back to Him, it draws us into intimacy with His heart and unifies us with others who pray the same things. It humbles us and transforms us at the same time.
- I. In other words, the result of the Father’s ruling the universe through prayer is that His people are established in intimacy, community, and humility, while engaging in partnership with Jesus to change the earth.