

Discipleship Groups — Level II

WEEK 2

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: PRAYER

Welcome to week two of the discipleship groups. We are focusing on the Spiritual disciplines, and this week, we are focusing on prayer.

Of all the spiritual disciplines, there are probably none as powerful as prayer. Prayer is certainly *not* talking **at** God, as if we were giving Him His marching orders. Prayer includes the basics of talking **to** God about things in your life, and it requires **listening** to God as we grow in conversation and relationship with Him. But that doesn't fully cover what prayer is. Even the principle of **asking** God for the various needs in our lives does not take in the full scope of prayer. **Intercession** and **spiritual warfare** are also necessary aspects of what it means to pray.

All these things are part of what prayer means, but at its most essential core, **prayer is learning to be with God**. When we learn to be with God, we learn to become like Him. As we become like Him, we begin to desire the things He desires. When this happens, our conversations with Him in prayer—even our asking for things in our lives—begin to align themselves with God's Word and God's will to fulfill Heaven's plans for our lives and for this planet. When God changes our heart to be like His, then our time spent in His presence and in conversation with Him is where powerful, world-changing prayer happens—and those prayers will also change our own lives!

Over the next few minutes, I want to go a little deeper into the discipline of prayer and give some biblical insights into what makes for effective prayer.

Philippians 3:14 gives us an amazing perspective on our spiritual lives—and that certainly includes our understanding of prayer. It says, *"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the **upward call** of God in Christ Jesus."* Our call to God's presence is ever upward. When prayer is focused not on our own needs, but on just being in God's presence and loving Him and knowing Him, it causes us to rise to where God is, to meet Him, speak with Him, and do His work with Him.

Isaiah 40:31 says, *"...those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will **soar high on wings like eagles**."* This is a further indication of an "upward call." Eagles ascend and rise to the highest of heights. As we wait on God in prayer, we are told that we, too, may rise up to another spiritual level through prayer, worship, waiting on God, and meditation on His Word.

In the same theme, King David writes in Psalm 24:3-4 of those people whom God allows to "ascend" up to His holy place *"Who shall **ascend** into the hill of the Lord? And who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart..."* God

affording certain people this honor is not favoritism, rather it is those who are willing to pay the price to meet God on His terms. Now, God is always kind to meet us where we are in the weaknesses of our own lives, but there is a difference between God meeting us in our weakness and Him meeting us on our terms. As we grow, it is in prayer that we learn to rise and meet God where He is and on His terms.

King David continues in the description of those who continue to ascend to where God is: Those *“who have clean hands and a pure heart, who do not lift their soul to what is false and do not swear deceitfully.”* These people will “ascend the hill of the Lord,” and it is an “upward call.” The closer we get, the higher we go into God’s Presence, the cleaner our hands and hearts must be. The heights and the depths of knowing God in prayer have to do with the state of our hearts.

God is pure and holy in all He is and does. We are made clean by the blood of Jesus, and not by our own works. However, we need to live in such a way that we remain clean, keeping ourselves away from sin—this is learning to live in God’s holiness. The closer we get to God, the more He requires of us. It is like Moses climbing **UP the mountain** to the Burning Bush. He was instructed by God to remove the sandals from his feet, because God said that this was “holy ground.” Shoes are what desensitize us to the world around us. They allow us to walk through all sorts of filth without being affected. Yet when Moses approached the “holy ground,” he had to remove the insensitivity and the grime from him. We cannot willingly walk through the garbage of this world and then run into God’s holiness with the same crud clinging to us. It would be the same as walking through a nasty public bathroom and running through a yard filled with dog poop, then walking into your wedding. The closer we get, the cleaner we must be. The cleaner we are, the more profound and effective our prayers become.

As we draw closer and closer to the Lord, Hebrews 4:16 gives us even more insight. It says that we can, *“...approach [God’s] throne of grace with confidence.”* Our Heavenly Father has given us, His children, this unparalleled freedom to come near to Him and ask for anything we need. We can approach His throne not because we are good in and of ourselves, but because of who Jesus Christ is and how He has made us holy and acceptable before God. Hebrews 12:14 further says that, *“without holiness, no one can see the Lord.”* In God’s Temple in the Old Testament, there was a curtain that separated the main part of the Temple from the “Most Holy Place,” signifying the separation of people from God’s Presence. Before Jesus, no one was holy enough to approach God. But when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain in the Temple was torn in two, signaling that Jesus had opened the way to God, and through His blood, He has forgiven our sins, washed us clean, and made us perfectly holy and able to draw near to His Presence. When we pray, we come to God with freedom and confidence, the way is open, and we will find all the grace we need! Jesus Christ has given us access to God, we are not just approaching God’s presence, but His throne. And what is a throne? It is the seat of power and authority from which the ruler governs and passes edicts and laws. When we approach God in prayer, it is not merely to the nice “Man Upstairs.” **We are coming to the throne, the seat of God’s authority; the central focal point of the entire universe’s governance—both seen and unseen.** Our prayers touch God’s

heart, enact His will, and stir His power into action on our behalf. When we pray, know that we are bringing Heaven to Earth; making way for God's perfect will to override what the devil has meant to destroy. There is nothing higher or more powerful than the Throne of God.

In the book of Revelation, we get even more insight into God's throne and the role our prayers have in Heaven. We read in Revelation 8:5 that there is an incense altar before God's Throne. Throughout the Bible, incense is correlated with prayers, and these prayers are rising before the Throne of God—the very same Throne, which is the seat of His authority, His power, and His governance. Listen! This is so awesome! Our prayers are not being stuffed into an obscure room somewhere to be dealt with later. Our prayers rise to the throne where God not only hears but decrees answers for us from the seat of His authority. This means God's power is actively working on our behalf when we pray! In Revelation, it says that God put fire in the incense bowl and threw it to the Earth, and then there were earthquakes, lightning, and peals of thunder. I find it very interesting that our prayers before God's throne are what was cast on to the world causing it to shake. Our prayers are more powerful than we know—they have Earthshaking power! When we pray, pray for the things going on in the world, our families, our friends, and God's power will be unleashed into those situations and shake them with His incredible power!

Out of everything we have talked about over the last few minutes, remember the essential core of prayer is **learning to be with God**. It is from our heart that becomes like His heart, and the two hearts are intertwined to become one, then we get all the results of effective prayer. This prayer accomplishes what Jesus said prayer should accomplish. He said to pray this way, "Our Father who is in Heaven, holy is Your name. Let Your Kingdom come, and let Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven." That happens when His heart in Heaven beats in our chest here on earth. **You and your prayers are the point where God's rulership intersects the Earth and changes things for God's purposes!**