

# BLESSED

NINETY DAYS TO CHANGE YOUR WORLD

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## SECTION I

### NEGLECTED ALTARS

#### The Call to Prayer

The baritone and almost human sounds of the shofar pierce the hustle and bustle of busy Jewish life as darkness comes on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, “the day of the shofar blast” (Number 29:1). Its intonations seem erratic to the uninformed. The protracted bellow from the ram’s horn signifies our halting and humbling approach to God. The broken and quavering notes that follow remind the observant Jew that all come before God as broken and shattered creatures in need of His mercy and provision. Its sound is a call back to an ancient time when Israel escaped Egypt’s cruel bondage by God’s wondrous might. The notes invite a time of consecration. It echoes man’s deep and personal need to connect with His Creator. It is an awakening sound. It is a summons to pray.<sup>1</sup>

This book is my shofar.

The times and the season bear witness that our altars have grown silent. Our voices that once filled God’s throne room have become muzzled by the cares of life and the pursuit of personal ambitions.

A new day has come, but it is already evening. It is sunrise at sundown. As the days of creation began in the evening, so too does this pivotal day. The shadows lengthen, the darkness gathers.

As most fowl roost when the sun sets, believers have likewise folded their wings of faith and prayer. We tend to grow quiet and still. We do not stretch our wings and soar into the heavens. Our wings of prayer grow dusty and atrophied. Our voices grow ever more silent like muted horns than a blaring shofar.

We sense increasing chaos around the corner. Mayhem creeps like a toxic fog over the hearts of men. Anxiety has come and just will not leave. Other uninvited guests with names like violence, hatred, prejudice, and strife have seized our national attention and collective angst.

Believers struggle to come to grips with these rapid changes. Churches struggle to survive in this “cancel culture” that means to silence convictions

and muzzle morality. Marriages and families are on the brink. Frequent sightings of the “ness” monsters—hopelessness, worldliness, and selfishness—lend support to the realization something primitive and wicked has been loosed on this modern world. Today’s believers, divorced from timeless and holy habits, are no match for this old, evil beast.

In one generation, we have seen the most significant moral collapse witnessed in the history of the United States. The loosening of sexual mores in the sixties was profound. We observed a 300 percent rise in illegitimate births; fifty million abortions in one generation; one in two marriages ending in divorce; the collapsing of morals in music, media, and popular entertainment; and a rise in any number of social ills.<sup>2</sup>

You would normally think churches are doing better than the nation. If they are, it is not across the board and probably not as much as you think. Morality, or the lack thereof, among most church attendees mirrors society. And “church-going” plummets.

The United States follows the path of Europe. Only 20 percent of American adults regularly attend church. Some 94 percent of churches have either plateaued or are declining. Only 6 percent of churches are growing. Fewer still are growing when you factor in the community’s population growth. Thousands of churches are up for sale at any given moment in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

We may take some degree of comfort that this could be different in the realm of Spirit-filled, truth-loving churches. Yet, before we get too complacent, we need to take a long look at ourselves. Are we reaching, teaching, and discipling the lost? Are we having parking, seating, and space problems where we congregate for worship? Or has it been a long time since we have seen the church consistently filled with hungry, thirsty souls?

What about our own lives? Are we more satisfied with our walk with God today than we were yesterday? Or have we grown discouraged and set aside our diligence and discipline in pursuing His face?

Bleak? Yes. Hopeless? No. What gives me this confidence? We stand upon a single, unshakable promise of God:

*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*  
(II Chronicles 7:14, KJV)

So, pray we shall. We will seek His face with all humility and urgency.

God, heal our land!

God, forgive our sins!

God, help us rebuild neglected altars!

Before we launch into the aspects of prayer that will help us construct a more effective prayer life (which is likely what drew you to this book in the first place), will you permit me to first share my heart? I must warn you; I have hard things to say. Nonetheless, before I plant the seed, I feel I must dig deep with my trowel to till the fallow ground of your impressionable hearts and minds. Know this—I speak the truth in love.

# 1

## My New Name: Chalah Speaks

**SCRIPTURE:** *Anyone with ears to hear must listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying to the churches. To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it (Revelation 2:17, NLT).*

*Chalah.* Such a strange word. An even stranger name.

Many years ago, I attended a training conference for Sunday school teachers at a small church in Houston, Texas. I did not want to go. My schedule was pressed. I was newly married, newly degreed, and freshly certified in accounting. My life was in front of me. My eyes saw only unlimited possibilities. How could I possibly make time for this conference? Nevertheless, I went anyway.

That night, the late J. T. Pugh spoke of Bible characters who encountered God, and their identities were altered: Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel, Solomon to Jedediah, and so forth. A curious sense of discontentment rose within my heart as I listened to him teach. Until that moment, I had charted a course for a successful life mainly focused on achievement, material goals, and the like. I thought God was in there somewhere, but He certainly was not the focal point. That night, I grew miserable. I sensed something was missing.

When the session ended, I knelt between the pews and tried to pray. I could not grasp the depth of what I felt that night. Why was I suddenly so miserable? Everything I had sacrificed for was within my grasp, and I felt such a sudden sense of meaninglessness.

I asked God that night, "If You were to change my name, what would it be?" I really did not expect an answer. To my surprise, He did answer. I reached for a pen and piece of paper and wrote a series of incoherent letters that came to my mind: "C-H-A-L-A-H."

I stared at it. Tried to pronounce it. I had attempted a course in Hebrew. It appeared to be a transliteration of a Hebrew word. Yet, as the cliché goes, it was Greek to me.

I tucked the note in the back of my *Scofield Reference Bible* and forgot about it. In the next couple of years, I got lost in my career. One promotion after another, and soon I found myself at the threshold of the jobs I had coveted. Yet, I felt empty, unfulfilled, miserable.

One early Sunday morning, while preparing my Bible lesson for the adult class I was to teach that day, I opened my *Strong's Concordance* to study a word. As I thumbed through the Hebrew section of the concordance, my eyes fell on a word that looked familiar to me: *chalah* (*Strong's* #2470). This was the same word I had written years before on the scrap of paper. My name!

Expecting the meaning to be something remarkable such as *valiant* or *great-hearted*, to my disappointment, it meant *to grow weak, to become sick, to be wounded, to beseech, to make prayer, to travail*.

Used seventy-five times in twenty books of the Old Testament, *chalah* describes people enduring stressful times and situations.

What? This is my new name?

I denied my new name. I spent years running from it. I grew angry about. I tried bargaining with God for a better name. I felt forsaken by God over my new name. Finally, I came to accept my name—even to embrace my new name.

In the process of dying to my God-given name, I have made some discoveries of my own about prayer. I no longer view prayer as second fiddle to what God is doing in our lives, our churches, and our nations. Rather, I view prayer as primary to all He has done and will do.

Your life will not be measured by balance sheets, degrees, books written, accomplishments, or by friends and followers; you will be measured by your heart for God revealed in your prayers.

God does not seek bigger altars. God seeks you. Isaac once asked, “Where is the sacrifice?” You and I are the answer to that question. We are the living sacrifices devoted to God.

So, greetings! My name is *Chalah*. This is my message.

**PRAYER FOCUS:** We know that our identity is wrapped up in Jesus Christ. We are purchased by His blood. We seek to be more like Jesus every day. In becoming more like Jesus, however, the more we share in His suffering. He condescended, so we humble ourselves before our Creator. He was acquainted with grief. In turn, our hearts should break within us over the ever-widening chasm between God and man. Will you take my name today? Will you grow weak, and wounded, and sick with grief as you offer yourself a living sacrifice to God in prayer?

### **REFLECTIONS**

1. Jesus experienced suffering. According to I Peter 4:16, we should not be ashamed if we experience suffering for Christ's sake. Why is suffering an integral part of a consecrated life?
2. How is prayer a sign of humility?
3. How can earthly pursuits become distractions to living for God? How can they not?