

TO SEEK BY PRAYER

DANIEL 9:1-19

Text: Daniel 9:3

Daniel 9:3

³ *And I set my face unto the Lord God, **to seek by prayer** and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:*

Introduction:

Today many struggle praying with humility. Most of us are much better at excusing our sins and failures than we are at confessing them.

We are quick to point out other people's mistakes, but we have a hard time admitting when we've blown it.

I was reading not long ago some actual from insurance companies where individuals who had accidents explained what went wrong.

- The other guy was all over the road and I had to swerve a number of times before I hit him.
- The telephone pole approached my car at a rapid speed, as I swerved to get out of its way, it hit me.

- I pulled away from the side of the road, glanced at my mother-in-law, and drove over the embankment.

As we begin this message let me ask a very personal question.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your prayer life?

John Owen, a Puritan writer, has said: “What an individual is in secret on his knees before God, that’s who he really is, and no more.”

Tonight we’ll consider some significant truths about effective praying from the Old Testament prophet Daniel.

Note we must:

1. PRAY BIBLICALLY (VS. 1-2)

Daniel 9:1-2

*¹ In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, which was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; ² In the first year of his reign I Daniel **understood by books the number of the years,** whereof **the word of the LORD** came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.*

No doubt Daniel read and studied the scriptures.

At this time he is an older man, approaching 90 years of age. He had been sent to Babylon almost 70 years earlier and had proven himself as the prime minister under 3 successive kings. Here's what he was reading from Jeremiah 29:10-12:

Jeremiah 29:10-12

¹⁰ For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place. ¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. ¹² Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you.

We know that Daniel and others had been taken captive around 605 B.C. and that it was now 538 B.C. and so Daniel has been in captivity for 67 years. He recognizes that his people are only about 3 years away from returning to Jerusalem. He also realizes that they are not spiritually prepared, so he is driven to his knees in prayer, simply from reading and understanding the Word of God.

Although things looked humanly hopeless and it appeared impossible that the exile would end soon, Jeremiah now had a firm word from the Lord.

We too need to stand on the promises of the Word of God and pray like Daniel did.

I picture Daniel reading the Scriptures and then spending some time meditating upon what he had just read. He rolled these truths over in his mind. Then he prayed. Meditation is often the missing link between Bible intake and prayer.

There's good application for us here. We should start by reading a passage of Scripture and then meditate on it, allowing time to take what God has said to us by thinking about it and digesting it. It may even be helpful to write it down. Then, after we've read and meditated, we can move into prayer. The focus of our prayer should be what we've encountered in the Bible, now personalized through meditation.

Someone has said: "The great reason why our prayers are ineffectual is because we do not meditate before them."

Prayer is not a way to get God to work for us it's His way of involving us in what He intends to do.

Not only must we pray "Biblically" but also we must:

2. PRAY WITH HUMILITY (VS. 3)

Daniel 9:3

³ And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes:

Daniel takes off his beautiful robe and jewelry and dresses himself in a simple gown of rough burlap or sackcloth. The term “sackcloth” is used 46 times in the Bible and was a symbol of deep grief and mourning.

Spreading ashes on the head was more of a statement of guilt and symbolized deep repentance. When you’re covered with ashes, you don’t feel clean because they represent something that is burned or lost. In the Bible, the penitent person often covered their entire body with filthy ashes. Basically, when you put on sackcloth and ashes, you aren’t comfortable, and you don’t feel clean. It was an outward sign of inner pain and agony.

Fasting is another act of humility.

You fast because you are so serious about prayer that you don’t have time to eat. Fasting also teaches you to say “No” to your bodily appetites so that you can focus on prayer.

Daniel did not do any of this as a public display of spirituality but as a private expression of his sincerity.

Illustration:

The story is told of two ducks and a frog who lived happily together in a farm pond. They were great friends and enjoyed playing together. When the hot days of summer came, however, the pond began to dry up. They soon realized that they had to move. This was no problem for the ducks because they could just fly to another pond. But the frog was stuck. So they decided to put a stick in the bill of each duck that the frog could hang onto with his mouth as they flew to another pond. The plan worked well so well, in fact, that as they were flying along a farmer looked up in admiration and said, "Well, isn't that a clever idea! I wonder who thought of that?"

To which the frog said, "I did..." Be careful of pride it can cause you to fall!

Not only must we pray "Biblically" and with "Humility" but also we must:

3. CONFESS SINS SPECIFICALLY (VS. 4-14)

Daniel 9:4-14

⁴ And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; ⁵ We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: ⁶ Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. ⁷ O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, that are near, and that are far off, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. ⁸ O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him; ¹⁰ Neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. ¹¹ Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned

against him. ¹² And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil: for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem. ¹³ As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth. ¹⁴ Therefore hath the LORD watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us: for the LORD our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth: for we obeyed not his voice.

Daniel pours out his heart to God in verses 4-5.

Daniel 9:4-5

⁴ And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; ⁵ We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments:

He doesn't make excuses; instead he admits that the nation of Israel has gotten exactly what it deserved. He does not blame anyone else for their misery. Drop down to verse 13:

Daniel 9:13

¹³ As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us: yet made we not our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities, and understand thy truth.

This is a prayer that needs to be prayed in our church and throughout America today!

When you read Daniel's prayer you notice that his confession is both personal and collective. He speaks about his sin even though Scripture does not record Daniel doing anything wrong. He recognizes that he is part of a community of sinners when he says, "us" and "we".

He didn't say "they" have sinned but rather "we" have sinned.

While Daniel may not have been personally liable for the sins that caused his people to be sent to Babylon for 70 years, he took responsibility.

Have we prayed with that same type of responsibility?

We are much better at making excuses than confessing sin. We live in a "no-fault" culture where you can get "no-fault" insurance, and a "no-fault" divorce. The mantra of our modern culture is, "Hey, it's not my fault." And we've come up with some pretty names to

excuse our sin. We say, “I goofed” or “I blew it” or we talk about “mistakes” or “weaknesses.” What we call an “affair,” God calls “adultery.” What we call “a little weakness,” God calls “wickedness.” What we call “a mistake,” God calls “madness.”

Note:

Proverbs 28:13

¹³ He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Illustration:

A Sunday School teacher once asked a class what was meant by the word “repentance.” A little boy put up his hand and said, “It’s being sorry for your sins.” A little girl also raised her hand and said, “That’s true, but it’s being sorry enough to quit.”

It’s important to get detailed with God, because in confession you aren’t informing God of your specific sins, you are agreeing with God about those things you have thought, done and said.

Not only must we pray “Biblically” with “Humility” and “Confess Sin specifically” but also we must:

4. ASK FOR GOD'S GLORY (VS. 15-19)

Daniel 9:15-19

¹⁵ *And now, O Lord our God, that hast brought thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten thee renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. ¹⁶ O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city Jerusalem, thy holy mountain: because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us.*

¹⁷ *Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, **for the Lord's sake.** ¹⁸ O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. ¹⁹ O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for thine own sake, O my God: for thy city and thy people are called by thy name.*

Note verse 17

So many of our prayers are focused on our needs and concerns but Daniel wasn't praying for himself because He was praying for God's glory.

To summarize:

This this prayer begins with praise for who God is and for what He does. It then moves into confession, which leads to petition.

Close:

Tonight we have much that we should be praying for and about.

May we pray in such a way as did Daniel.