

Prayer: *Seeking God* – Part 1
Daniel 9:1-23

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer...

Introduction: We come back to the book of Daniel after a hiatus of a couple of weeks, and chapter 9 hits like a breath of fresh air. We have dug into the tunnels of prophecy and vivid pictures of the future, seeing strange animals, hard circumstances coming, and hopeful realities of the future in chapters 7 and 8. Often when we plumb the depth of Scripture we unearth the type of treasure that cannot be possessed by the casual observer. But the Spirit organized the book of Daniel in a way that gives us a reprieve, the ability to focus on one of the truly great prayers of the Bible. We have seen that Daniel was a man of prayer, which is consistent with the man we know him to be. He prayed **consistently**, even in the midst of scrutiny and persecution in Daniel 6, and this was a regular pattern of his life from his teenage years until the end of his life. Here we see how a **mature man in his 80's** approached life in the present when faced with the reality of the future. What we'll glean are a number of principles that govern all of our prayer in a timeless way.

Every believer and follower of Jesus Christ knows that prayer is important. But much like every person knows eating vegetables and healthy food is important, we can often neglect that which we know we need. Dr. Guthrie said "***The first sign of true spiritual life is prayer. And it is also the means of maintaining spiritual life. Man can as well live physically without breathing as spiritually without praying.***" **John Piper** said this about prayer:

Prayer as a relationship is probably your best indicator about the health of your love relationship with God. If your prayer life has been slack, your love relationship has grown cold.

E.M. bounds in his exemplary work on prayer said:

"The men who have done the most for God in this world have been early on their knees. He who fritters away the early morning, its opportunity and freshness, in other pursuits than seeking God will make poor headway seeking Him the rest of the day. If God is not first in our thoughts and efforts in the morning, He will be in the last place the remainder of the day."

While preaching giants like Spurgeon said, "*no man can progress in grace if he forsakes prayer*" and **D.L. Moody** said "*Those who have left the deepest impression on this sin cursed earth have been men and women of prayer.*" Prayer is not a secondary call or unimportant discipline, but a vital, energizing part of our life with God in Christ. The beautiful reality about prayer is that it does not take any amount of **talent, gifting, education, or even an excess of time** to be effective. It **DOES** take **desire, prioritization, and commitment**, as God gives it to us as a way of knowing Him.

I'm not sure anyone in here would disagree with anything that was just stated or quoted. In fact, you have most likely heard messages on prayer and engage at some level in personal prayer. However, I'd also venture an educated guess that you struggle with **two foundational issues with our prayer**: *It's lack of fervency and frequency, and it's lack of effectively praying for the right things.* The first comes out of the fact that we struggle with **self-sufficiency**. When prayer becomes the **last resort** rather than our regular, dependent crying out to the Lord, we know we are trusting ourselves too much. Everyone prays in the foxhole or when they are desperate. A mature believer prays because they **KNOW** they are in constant need for God in Christ. The second comes when we see lack of effectiveness in prayer because

we pray for the wrong things. **"You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on YOUR passions."** (James 4:3) Far too often, when we think about or engage in prayer, we do it to GET things from God, likening Him to the cosmic genie in a bottle or a quick download of what we want. When I hear people talk about their lives, trials, and stories, God is there to help them, an add-on of life that though important, is by definition secondary. Instead, we are to see it correctly, or oppositely, where we go to God and **seek Him, His will, His purpose, and His desire**, and ask how we can most glorify Him in the midst of circumstances, trial, etc. We often don't see answers to prayer because we are asking wrongly, viewing God wrongly, thus stripping prayer from power and effectiveness.

What we have in Daniel 9 is not a teaching **about prayer** but a model **of prayer**. We get a front row seat into the mind and prayer of a mature man who knew about fervent prayer, was committed to God and dependent on Him, and who saw much effectiveness in his prayer. What we'll see is that his **prayer was answered** in a most extraordinary way. He was not only given the knowledge of the restoration of Israel into the land after 70 years but was given access to information about 70 weeks of years regarding the coming of the prince and a week still to come. In other words, he longed to seek after God and intercede on behalf of His people, and God answered him not with **material gain, retribution against enemies, or success of the people**, but hope and restoration based on God's work and will. In all of this, we see **timeless principles of prayer**.

The Word of God Fuels Prayer (1:1-2)

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans—² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, **according to the word of the LORD** to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, **namely, seventy years**.

In the last 2 chapters we've looked at a vision and dream that Daniel had, that God had given him to reveal future events. At the end of chapter 9 he would again be given a vision, but this one was unique: *it came to him as a direct result of his prayer*. "In the first year of Darius" would put the date at **538 B.C.**, which means if Daniel was taken captive as a teenager in **605 B.C.**, he would have been over 80 at this point.

What prompted Daniel's prayer here? It was apparent that Daniel had given himself to the study of Scripture, those scrolls that had made it out of Jerusalem and into Babylon, as well as the writings of the prophet Jeremiah. As Daniel studied, the dots started to connect in terms of future events, and we even know *where in Jeremiah he read*:

*This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and **these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years**. 12 Then **after seventy years** are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste (Jeremiah 25:11-12)*

*For thus says the Lord: **When seventy years are completed for Babylon**, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.(Jeremiah 29:10-11)*

It didn't take an astute mathematician to figure out the dates here. Though we are not sure when the counting of the 70 years started (605, 597, 586?), he also knew that he had been in Babylon about 68 years already, and year 70 was rapidly approaching. This gives us some clues as to how Daniel viewed Scripture and the situation at hand:

Daniel knew that the **reason** for the captivity itself was the refusal for the people of Israel to obey (Jer. 29:17-19) and that since the people refused to give the land Sabbatical rests, God forced it on the land itself. This also means that he knew that going BACK into the land physically was only part of the issue. The people needed to undergo a spiritual revival of repentance of sin and turning back to God in order to experience all God had for them. This drove him to spend most of his time in prayer **in confession**, both personal and corporate (which we'll cover next week).

*"He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped the sword...to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, **until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.**"*

2 Chronicles 36:20-21

It is clear that Daniel had a high view of Scripture. He took the **70 years recorded by Jeremiah** literally, not seeing it as some allegory or figure of speech, and though he himself would not have travelled back, he responded in preparation because he took it **literally**. He also knew that even though the Word was clear, prayer was needed. God was going to accomplish His will and purpose, but prayer was a necessary component of human responsibility. *Is there mystery here?* Certainly. God is sovereign and does all that He pleases, and will always accomplish what He sets out to do. However He calls us to pray, to call out to Him, and He not only hears but will answer. It is a similar mystery in our salvation, as we are saved by God's divine love, call, and choice (Eph. 1:2-5), since **He had to make dead man live** and we COULD NOT CHOOSE, yet He does call us to believe, repent, and follow Him. His sovereign choice enlivens ours, and His sovereignty never negates our responsibility.

So how does the Word enliven our prayers? We are NOT trying to change God's mind in prayer, since His ways are higher than ours, but we are trying to align our desires and will with His! Prayer changes us. We are asking that God would accomplish His will and that we'd know, rest in, and be joyful in His will and purpose. And the reality is this: **God has revealed His will and purpose to us!** Do we always know what He is doing in the nitty gritty details? No, even Daniel was not given those, since we are still called to walk by faith. But what is clear, is that He is glorifying Himself, calling unbelievers to Himself, and preparing us, His bride, for eternity with Him. Scripture helps us pray **truthfully**, even when we struggle with present reality.

*"So we do not lose heart. Though the outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction **is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison**, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Cor. 4:16-18)*

Why are we going through pain, sorrow, uncertainty, etc? At one level, I don't know all that God is doing, but at another, we know **exactly what He's doing**. So we pray through Scripture that God will do what He says, fulfill what He promises, and accomplish all that He set out to do. At the end of Daniel's prayer in verse 19, that is what He requested: **do it...act as you said you would**. Praying through Scripture helps not only to **motivate us, but to inform us to pray for the things God wants for us**, rather than praying for things that never move beyond our own desires and passions.

"Without extended, concentrated prayer, the ministry of the Word withers. And when the ministry of the Word declines, faith (Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2, 5) and holiness (John 17:17) decline. Activity may continue, but life and power and fruitfulness fade away. Therefore, whatever opposes prayer opposes the whole work of ministry." John Piper

Seeking God Targets Prayer (1:3)

³Then I turned my face to the Lord God, **seeking him by prayer** and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

What is our first response when thinking about the future? Worry? Excitement? Uncertainty? What do we look forward to? Retirement? Kids grown up (and grandkids)? Rest? It's interesting that Daniel was faced with a certain future at the end of 70 years, and could have prayed for many things: *success for the people of Jerusalem, vengeance on his enemies, smooth transitions*. But what he did is informative. He **sought the Lord Himself**. This is truly the foundational reality of prayer. It is where seek the Lord and enter His presence, since in His presence is the fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). We spend time in **thanksgiving and praise**, and far too often we only spend time in **petition, asking Him for things**.

But think back to the time when you were a kid (when you still wanted to be with mom and dad). Sure you wanted things from them ("dad, can you make us pancakes?" "Can you get me water?" Typically this happens right as I sit down), but mostly you wanted to be with them. I loved watching my girls do cooking/baking next to my wife just so they could do what she does. I love watching little boys "help" their dads work on the car, or work in the garage with their fake tool belt. Why? They want to be close to us. I know that's how I was with my dad. We'd mow lawns every Saturday, and though I didn't always like the work or the pay (seriously, not even minimum wage!), I wanted to simply BE with him. Isn't that the **joy of every parents heart**, not only that your kids walk in the truth (3 John 4), but that they want to be with you! That is exactly what Daniel demonstrated. This was not a **utilitarian relationship**, but an intimate, joyful one in His presence, where we take refuge in the shadow of His wings, feast on the abundance of His house, drink from the water of His delights, and see light in His light (Psa. 36:7-8) One of the key Psalms to understand this is **Psalm 37:1-7**, where we often take verse 4 out of context:

*Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. **Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.** Commit your way to the Lord; **trust in him, and he will act.** He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. **Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!" Psalm 37:1-7***

What is the counter to worry/fretting? Trust in the Lord. What is the action step to take in trusting? **Delight in Him**. What is the result? He will give us Himself, since He is our greatest desire! How do we cultivate this? **Bes still, linger long, and wait for Him**. Jesus Himself demonstrated this in His earthly ministry as He would take time out of a busy public ministry schedule to commune with the Father. Prayer is the means of communing with God, seeking Him NOT for what He can give us, but giving of Himself in Christ.

Fervency Focuses Prayer (1:3)

"Then I turned my face to God..."

"Spiritual work is taxing work, and men are loath to do it. Praying, true praying, costs an outlay of serious attention and of time, which flesh and blood do not relish."

— E.M. Bounds, **Power Through Prayer**

Often we are caught up in the tyranny of the urgent. We expect things in the immediate, and we are willing to move forward quickly when something does not come into fruition. But Daniel was different. Daniel prayed for the restoration of his people to Jerusalem his whole life, diligently, daily. Sometimes we'll commit to praying for something or someone, do it for a bit of time, see no results, and wane in our diligence. When we have done significant things as a church, it has always come from a concerted time of fervent prayer, which is exactly what we are committing to with **New England** and our church planting team. We know that God has called us to make disciples, to do this with all nations, to send out workers for the harvest, and to see His name go out to the ends of the earth. So we pray fervently that He will do it. I'm reminded of the parable of the **persistent widow**:

And he told them a parable to the **effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart**. 2 He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. 3 And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' 4 For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, 5 yet **because this widow keeps bothering me**, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" 6 And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. 7 **And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night?** Will he delay long over them? 8 I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, **when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"**

Luke 18:1-8

Fervency is motivated by truthful realities of God's Word and the excellencies of knowing God in Christ. Are we faithful to plan and prioritize this way? Are we too busy to pray, or should we rather see that we are too busy NOT to pray? God answers the prayer of His fervent servants, since they are the ones praying according to His will in the manner by which He calls them to do so.

Humility Drives Prayer (1:3)

and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes."

Daniel knew that Israel deserved what she was getting. If you read Jeremiah 42-44 it is a vivid story of the hard hearted, rebellious disobedience of Judah against the clear commands of God. God can sometimes seem vindictive and mean, but when we understand His holiness and glory, we are amazed that any of us make it without being stamped out immediately. When we **know what we deserve**, we can pray and cry out for **mercy**. Mercy is God's grace toward us by withholding what we deserve in judgment. Daniel was a righteous man, maybe one of the most who has ever lived. In fact, there is nothing negative written about him in Scripture. But he knew his sin, as all godly people do. In fact, the mark of spiritual maturity is an understanding of the depth of our sin, even as our external expressions of sin lessen. Daniel cried out for mercy, and sat in a **sign of humility**, in sackcloth and ashes while self-depriving from food.

We started by saying that **self-reliance, self-righteousness, and selfishness** keep us from praying. True humility drives us to our knees. In fact, one could chart their growth in humility by their fervency in praying for mercy. Seeking God in prayer requires us to humble ourselves, and when we are in the presence of God, we have no other response but to stay humbled.

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10 "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 **The Pharisee**, standing by himself, prayed thus: '**God, I thank you that I am not like other men**, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' 13 **But the tax collector**, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but

beat his breast, saying, '**God, be merciful to me, a sinner!**' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. **For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."**

Luke 18:9-14

Humility drives us to pray because humility drives us to our knees at the foot of the cross. We are sinful, "the" sinner. We get so absorbed with sin "out there", the downgrade of our culture, the terrible decisions of leaders around us, and the overt sinfulness that has become commonplace. We may pray God would change all of that, make it right, or get it back to what it used to be. BUT, the most effective prayer we can pray is "Be merciful to **me, the sinner.**" He will answer that prayer. What He does with everything else is up to Him, but we cannot enter into true intercessory prayer unless we have first humbled ourselves and recognized the fact that WE have offended a holy God, WE are deserving of judgment, WE are under God's wrath, and that WE need mercy. This is the foundation for all prayer, preparing us to be used as God's instruments.

So we pray, fueled by the Word of God, targeting the Person of God, Focused in fervency, and Humbly driven in prayer. Next week we'll look at how we intercede on behalf of others in prayers of **confession**. **May we be a church marked by prayer, because we love our God and are loved by Him.**