

Lessons On Prayer From A Man Of God

Daniel 9:1-19

Introduction: 1) The wonderful 17th century Puritan, John Owen, well said, “What an individual is in secret, on his knees before God, that he is and no more” (quoted, in Ferguson, *Daniel*, 171). If Owen is right, and I believe he is, then Daniel was quite a man. This is certainly what God thought. In 9:23 the angel Gabriel says of the prophet, “you are treasured by God.” The *ESV* translates it, “you are greatly loved.” The *NIV*, “you are highly esteemed.”

2) Daniel 9:1-19 contains one of the most remarkable prayers in all the Bible. It runs on the dual tracks of 1) corporate confession of sin and 2) recognition of the greatness, awesomeness, righteousness and holiness of God as expressions of His character. It is a model prayer for how God’s people should pray for a nation to be sure. But even more, it is a model for how God’s people should pray for a desolate and rebellious community of faith. This is God’s man confessing and interceding for God’s sinful people!

3) The brokenness and humility of Daniel as he prays for “all Israel” (v.7) is amazing. And yet, we should not be surprised. As the faithful Baptist preacher of London, Charles Spurgeon, said, “A True-Hearted believer does not live for himself. Where there is abundance of grace, a great strength of mind in the service

of God, there is sure to be a spirit of unselfishness...Daniel's prayer should, by the blessing of God's Spirit, inspire us with the spirit of prayer; and that his example, in forgetting himself, and remembering his people, should help us to be unselfish, and lead us to care for our people—even God's people—to whom we have the honor and privilege to belong" (Spurgeon, *Sermons on the Book of Daniel*, 99-100).

4) We are going to look at this prayer in four movements: 1-2, 3, 9-14, and 15-19. And, we will bracket each movement with great statements on prayer from precious saints who delighted in talking to our heavenly Father in prayer. So, I want us to just immerse ourselves in the purifying waters of prayer asking God to make us men and women of prayer like we see exemplified in his prophet named Daniel.

I. Let your prayers flow from your study of the Scriptures 9:1-2

"Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it."

(Corrie Ten Boom)

- Daniel provides a historical marker for us in verse 1: it was the first year of Darius the Mede (another name or title for Cyrus; cf. 5:31; 6:1). The date is c. 538 B.C., approximately 12 years after the vision recorded in chapter 8 (Miller, *Daniel*, NAC, 240). Daniel is now more than 80 years old. He outlived the Babylonian empire and now serves under Medo-Persia.

- Daniel is reading the Bible, “the books according to the word of the Lord.” (v. 2). Specifically, he is reading the prophet Jeremiah “that the number of years for the desolation of Jerusalem would be 70.” This predictive promise is found in Jeremiah 25:1-14 and 29:1-11. Don’t miss the important point that Daniel considered Jeremiah to be Scripture in calling it “the books” or literally “the writings” (Heb. *separim*). The Hebrew canon was not complete, but Jeremiah was already a part of sacred Scripture.
- God judged Israel as He promised He would in Deuteronomy 28:15-68. Jeremiah reveals this exile would last 70 years. Daniel was exiled with others in 605 B.C. (cf. Dan. 1:1-4). It is now 538 B.C. Daniel, in reading Jeremiah, knows the end of God’s judgment of exile on His people is coming to an end. And, he knows that *Yahweh* (LORD, vs. 2, 4) is a covenant God who keeps his Word (cf. also Ezra 1:1). Further, as Bob Fyall succinctly says, “What Scripture says is what God says, and what God says happens” (*Daniel*, 132).
- When God makes a promise in his Word, it is not conditional or potential. It will come to pass just as He says it will. No other god can do that because all other gods are mere idols often empowered and energized by demons. Isaiah 44:6-20 contains a scathing denouncement on them and those who make and worship them.

- Daniel, as should we, believed in predictive prophecy. He saw it as he read and meditated on Scripture and trusted it as a reliable Word from God. Exiled, captive in a godless land, moving rapidly toward the end of his life, he still had great hope for his people in light of the sure and certain promises of the Word of God. Confidence in the promises of God did not move him to complacency. They drove him to action and to his knees. Immersion in Scripture will be an energizer to prayer!

So, reflecting on these two verses we would all do well to ask: do I struggle to pray as I ought because I do not know Scripture as I should? Do I fail to approach my God well because I do not soak in His Word well? God delights in the prayers of his children that emerge out of time in his Word. “Only as we deepen our understanding of God as revealed in the Bible will our praying become richer and more soundly based on who God is” (Bob Fyall, *Daniel*, 147).

II. Let your prayers humbly take you into the presence of God 9:3

“Where the mind isn’t brimming with the Bible,
the heart is not generally brimming with prayer” (John Piper)

1) Verse 3 describes the humble and contrite attitude which Daniel approached “the Lord God” in prayer. He began by turning from his reading of the

Scriptures to the face of “the Lord my God” (vs. 4). René Péter-Contesse and John Ellington note that in the context of Bible translation, “a literal rendering of the verb phrase **turned my face** will probably sound strange in many languages. It simply focuses on the beginning of the action of earnestly praying to God” (*A Handbook on the Book of Daniel*, UBS Handbooks Series, 231). There is a deep earnestness in Daniel’s heart that moves him to look to his Lord. Seeking the Lord “by prayers and pleas for mercy” (*ESV*), he approaches Him in the 3-fold posture of “fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.” David Helm provides a nice summary when he writes, “Fasting is the withholding of food from the body for the sake of prioritizing something else, such as prayer. Sackcloth was a rough material, most likely made from animal skins, that would have been an irritant to the skin, and was a mark of repentance, Ashes symbolized complete ruin. In other words, the posture of Daniel took was of visible lament” (*Daniel for You*, 159).

Daniel turned to the Lord with a heavy heart, a burden he could hardly bear. Indeed he could not bear it without God’s help and strength. Daniel’s prayer should remind us of a prayer offered in a garden called Gethsemane some 600 years later. In Gethsemane, in prayers and petitions, our Lord Jesus turned His face to his Father in humble pleas for mercy (Luke 22). The burden of bearing the sins of the world (John 1:29) caused “His sweat [to become] like drops of

blood failing to the ground” (24:44). Coming humbly, dependently, into the presence of His Father, His prayer was heard (“not My will, but yours be done”) and strength was provided for enduring the cross that lay ahead.

Daniel humbled himself to pray. Jesus humbled Himself to both pray and to prepare for His passion. It is truly unconscionable that we would ever think to burst into God’s presence in arrogance or pride, in hubris or vain glory. When we know our sin and the sins of our people, we will approach our God on our knees and with our face to the ground. Only then can we turn our face to the Lord with our prayers and pleas. Only then can we rightly pour out our heart and soul to “the Lord my God.”

“All vital prayer makes a drain on a man’s vitality. True intercession is a sacrifice, a bleeding sacrifice.” (J. H. Jowett).

III. Let your prayers be characterized by honest and full confession of sin

9:4-14

“The great people of the earth today are people who pray,
(not) those who talk about prayer.” (S. D. Gordon)

- The prayer of Daniel is recorded in verses 4-19. It is characterized by 2 major themes: 1) cooperate confession of sin and 2) acknowledgement of God’s character and mighty acts of salvation. John Piper notes, “Daniel’s

prayer begins with the Bible and it is saturated with the Bible. Phrase after phrase comes right out of Scripture. There are allusions to Leviticus (26:40) and Deuteronomy (28:64) and Exodus (34:6) and Psalms (44:14) and Jeremiah (25:11). The prayer brims with a biblical view of reality, because it brims with the Bible” (“How to Pray for a Desolate Church,” 1-5-92).

- The prayer itself can be analyzed in a number of ways including its structure and its content. Structurally there are three movements:

- 1) Adoration (v.4)

- 2) Confession (vs. 5-14)

- 3) Petition (vs. 15-19) (Miller, *Daniel*, 243-249).”

In terms of content one is overwhelmed by the use of the word “we” and the piling up of terms used to describe Israel and Judah’s sin. Concerning the use of “we” and Daniel’s solidarity with the Hebrews in their sin, Bryan Chapell well says, “Daniel confesses the reality of his sin and the people’s sin because he has been called to carry their burden as his own even though he did not cause the burden. He feels responsible for the people under his care” (*The Gospel According to Daniel*, 158). As to the terms used to describe Israel and Judah’s sin note the following: sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, turned away (v.5), not listened, (v.6), disloyalty (v.7), public shame, sinned (v.8), rebelled (v.9), not obeyed (v.10), broken

your law, turned away, refused to obey, sinned (v.11), iniquities (v.13), not obeyed (v.14), sinned, acted wickedly (v.15). Daniel has taken the role of prosecuting attorney and has built an irrefutable case against those “called by your name” (v. 18-19). And amazingly, Daniel puts himself on the side of God’s rebellious people using the personal pronouns “we” or “us” or “our” more than 20 times! In a confession of sin that echoes Isaiah 6, in a confession of sin that acknowledges that they have broken their marriage covenant to Yahweh (Ezk. 16:8), in a confession of sin that admits to not keeping the Lord’s commands and ordinances (v.5), in a confession of sin that acknowledges they have not listened to God’s prophet, both leaders and common people (v.6), Daniel acknowledges that their exile is just and right. Why? Because “the Lord our God is righteous in all He has done” (v. 14, also, v. 7). Israel’s public shame (vs. 7, 8) is deserved. They dissed and disrespected “the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant” (v.4). Therefore, the promised curses written in the Law of Moses [Levt. 26; Deuteronomy 28] “have been poured out upon us” (vs. 11). Shame on God’s people and shame on God’s city (v. 12) is the righteous reward they have invited on themselves.

Amazingly, this portion of the prayer (vs. 4-14) ends with the indictment, “But we have not obeyed Him” [the Lord]. Dale Davis provides words of

wisdom when he writes, “Daniel seems to be saying that though Israel had gone through the ravages of God’s curse, the people remained unchanged, unbroken, unrepentant....Israel has a history of rebellion and idolatry and has suffered God’s judgment for it but it has not driven them to godly grief and genuine repentance....What good will it do to have a people back in the land with still no sense of their sin and no exercise in repentance? Who have never been crushed in spirit over their idolatry? It’s not Israel alone—humanity in general is averse to admitting sin and guilt” (*Daniel*, BST, 118). To such an accusation, I, you, we all must confess: guilty as charged.

“To get nations back on their feet, we must first get down on our knees”
(Billy Graham)

IV. Let your prayers move to petition and pleas grounded in God’s character

9:15-19

“Prayer is not so much an act as it is an attitude—an attitude of dependency, dependency upon God” (Arthur Pink)

Before the righteous Judge (God) and the prosecuting attorney (Daniel) God’s people have been tried and found guilty. There will be no appeal. No retrial. The evidence is too great. Actually, it is irrefutable. Is there than any hope? Is there no court or avenue of grace and forgiveness? Mercifully the answer is yes there is!

Sinclair Ferguson is so helpful here when he says, “Daniel sees the righteousness of God both as the basis for God’s judgment of the people (v. 7) and also the basis for his own prayer for forgiveness (v. 16). How can this be? In Scripture, “righteousness” basically means “integrity.” Sometimes it is defined as “conformity to a norm.” In the case of God the norm to which He conforms is His own being and character. He is true to Himself; He always acts in character” (*Daniel*, 178). So, in a prayer that is clearly God-centered but people oriented (*Ibid*, 179), Daniel appeals to “the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps His gracious covenant” (v. 4) to act for the sake of Your own name, to move according to Your character, righteousness, and “abundant compassion” (v. 18). In verse 15 Daniel appeals to the Exodus and God’s gracious deliverance of a sinful and undeserving people (then and now!). In verse 16 he appeals to God’s righteous acts and pleads that the Lord would turn away His “anger and wrath” from “Your city Jerusalem” (emp. mine). Why? Because “Jerusalem and your people have become an object of ridicule (ESV, “byword”) to all those around us” (see Hezekiah’s prayer in 2 Kings 19:14-19). Dale Davis again is right, “Daniel batters heaven with appeals to God’s honor” (*Daniel*, 120). It is Your city, Your holy hill, Your people (v.16), Your servant, Your desolate sanctuary (v. 17), Your name (v.18), Your own sake, Your city, Your people, Your name” (v. 19).

Daniel's plea begins to build as he asks God to "hear the prayers and petitions of Your servant. Show Your favor" (v.17). "Listen, my God, and hear. Open your eyes and see" our devastation, those "called by your name." Lord, we appeal to "Your abundant compassions" (v.18). Then reaching a crescendo he cries out in verse 19, O Lord, hear! Forgive! Listen and act. Do not delay. Do it not for our sake for we are undeserving. Lord, do it for Your own sake! Do it because it will bring glory to Your name and show the nations just who you are and what you are like. You ruined your own reputation to drive us to repentance. Restore your name and reputation for Your sake. We are not worthy. But, O Lord, you are!

"God shapes the world by prayer. The more praying there is in the world the better the world will be, the mightier the forces against evil" (E. M. Bounds).

Conclusion: How does this text point to Christ?

Tennyson says, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of" (quoted in Fyall, *Daniel*, 131). The Bible teaches us how true that is, especially when a man of God intercedes for the people of God. Moses, in Exodus 32 (cf. Deut. 9:13-14), pleads with God not to destroy the people for their idolatry.

Instead, he asked God to take his life in their place. God did not wipe them out.

Here, Daniel identifies himself with his people in their sin, making their sin his sin.

Both anticipate the greater Moses (Deut. 18:15-20) and the greater Daniel who will both identify Himself with those He will save and substitute Himself in death, taking their place and bearing the punishment of their sin. And, we should note, the important role prayer played in the past but also in the present. In the past, in the Garden of Gethsemane, our Lord was troubled and wept in prayer as He prepared to take on the sins of the world and bear in His own body the judgment and wrath of God. But now, as Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25 tell us, we have an intercessor in heaven, a Great High Priest, who pleads our cause before “the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments” (Dan. 9:4, *ESV*). The prayer of Moses draws my admiration. The prayer of Daniel inspired my emulation. The prayers of Jesus moves me to adoration. His prayers led Him to experience “open shame” (9:7) in my place. His prayers, my God heard. His prayers led my God to forgive. Hearing the prayers of His own dear Son, my God paid attention and He acted raising Jesus from the dead where He then ascended on high and is “always able to save those who came to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede for them” I love praying men. I worship my praying God!