

Praying Your Way to the Heart of God

Daniel 6

Good morning! We are on the third part of our 5-part series I'm calling "Journey to the Center of God's Will". I mentioned that God's will is general and specific. His general will concerns all the things that applies to all mankind. His specific will is the thing that applies to only one person. Along that line, God has a specific will for each of us on this earth.

I remember Pastor Jerry of Bible Church International in New Jersey. He is my mentor. He told me years ago when he was still in the Philippines that he believed it was God's will to marry a woman who became his wife later on. But he had a hard time at first. The woman's parents did not really like him because he was a pastor. And you know, some pastors in the Philippines are really just dependent on God's provision. They don't have a steady income. So, the parents were against him marrying their daughter. Well, they got married anyway. Begrudgingly, they accepted him as their son-in-law. Some years went by, then Pastor Jerry was offered by a church here in the US to come and pastor that church. Sensing it was God's will, he accepted. In short, he and his wife came. Afterwards, his wife was able to sponsor her parents and they came as well. And he became their most favorite son-in-law. My point is, God moves in our lives and he makes known to us what his will is for us. It is up to us, to know his will and pursue it. And there are rewards that await us as we fulfill his will in our lives, either here on earth or in heaven.

Now, I understand that pursuing God's will can be perilous at times. It can discourage you. There will be obstacles. But getting there is worth it. It's worth all the trouble and pain. Getting into the center of God's will is a reward in itself.

I read the story of this Christian mother whose daughter wanted to go as a missionary to a remote tribe in Africa. Upon hearing this, a friend of the mother said to her, “Are you letting her go to Africa? Aren’t you afraid that she might get a disease or suffer hardship or worse get killed in that miserable tribe? Aren’t you concerned about her safety?” The mother’s reply was, “The safest place to be is in the center of God’s will.” Let me repeat that, “The safest place to be is in the center of God’s will.”

So, in this series, we’re looking at how we can journey to the center of God’s will by studying the lives of people in the Bible so that we’ll learn from their example. Two weeks ago, we looked at Moses. We saw that God’s specific will for his life was to lead the Israelites out of slavery from Egypt. And he exhibited great faith in doing so. Then, last week, we looked at the life of Ruth. We saw that God’s specific will for her life was to become the gentile ancestor of King David and eventually the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. She exhibited utter obedience in the process. Today, we’re going to look at the life of Daniel. Daniel is known as a prophet. God gave him a vision regarding the future, about the end times, and he also foretold the coming of the Messiah. Thus, God’s will for Daniel was to foretell future events in order to give hope to the exiled Jews in Babylon.

Why did God choose Daniel? How was Daniel able to fulfill God’s will for his life? How can you remain close to God? These are questions I’m going to answer in today’s message.

Today, I’d like to focus on prayer. I believe that without prayer, we can never be close to God and we wouldn’t know what God’s will is for our lives and we wouldn’t be able to accomplish the journey toward the center of God’s will.

Please open your Bibles to Daniel 6. The Book of Daniel is sandwiched between Ezekiel and Hosea. I hope that helps. It's in the Old Testament. When you're in Daniel, please turn to chapter 6, that's the basis of my message today. We don't have time so we're not going to read it but you can scan through it.

This chapter is entitled "Daniel in the Den of Lions". Chuck Swindoll calls it "The Lions in Daniel's Den." Anyway, this is the famous story of Daniel being thrown into the lions' den by King Darius upon the instigation of Daniel's enemies. This familiar story has all the elements of a popular movie: colorful characters, suspense, drama, tension, twist, a surprise ending. It's got everything but sex.

Daniel is about eighty-five years-old in this 6th chapter and you of course remember when he was very young, about 15 or 16, he was taken from Jerusalem to live in Babylon in service to the king. Daniel and some other college-age buddies were dragged off to a foreign land whose culture and customs were VERY different from those of his homeland. But Daniel refused to complain. He didn't play the role of the victim. Instead he decided to lean deeply into his relationship with God.

How did he develop a deep relationship with God? It was because of a deep prayer life. Daniel was a man of prayer. He was such a great man of prayer that he was arrested for praying. Chapter 6 gives an account of his prayer life. The key verse is v. 10. Please take a look. *"Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before."*

Question – If you were arrested for being a person of prayer, would there be enough evidence to convict? Daniel prayed when it was against the law to pray. Why do you think he continued his daily prayer regimen even when he knew it could be dangerous? Do you have a daily prayer regimen?

What were some characteristics of Daniel’s prayer life? All the basics of prayer are right here in this one verse that describes Daniel’s prayer life.

So, let me share with you a few principles that would help you deepen your prayer life.

1. Live a righteous life

There are many verses in the Bible that tell us that we can’t come to God unless we repent of our sins. Our sins act as barriers between us and God. We need to confess them and decide to sin no more. The Psalmist says, *“Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.”* (Psalm 24:3-4) He is saying we cannot come to the presence of God unless we are living lives that are pure and godly.

For sure, Daniel during his exile in Babylon, never got indoctrinated by the Babylonians even though the king changed his name to “Belteshazzar” which means “Bel protects his life”. Bel or Baal was the god of the Babylonians. Together with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he remained pure both in body and spirit. In chapter 1, he and his companions asked to be fed vegetables rather than the king’s unlawful food. In chapter 3, they would not bow down to the golden statue that the king erected. But wait a minute, you may say, how come Daniel is not mentioned in that chapter, only his three friends? According to some scholars, Daniel may have been on a diplomatic trip during that dark period.

This event occurred maybe 20 years after Daniel was promoted by the king as one of his most influential advisors in chapter 2. Granted that Daniel was in Babylon during that time, the king would have consulted Daniel about this decree and we know what Daniel would advise him. And if the king did not follow his advise or did not consult him, there is no reason to believe that Daniel would have bowed before the image.

In any case, my point here is that Daniel was wise, godly, and loyal to his God. God was so pleased with him that he promoted him in the sight of everyone through the king of Babylon. The king acknowledged the wisdom and godliness of Daniel that he promoted him as one of his most influential advisors.

Now, of course, we're not perfect just like Daniel was. God loves us despite our sins and he always wants us to come to him. The apostle James says, "Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded." (James 4:8) The problem is, we don't admit to our sins. Today we use other words. We say, "I goofed" or "I blew it" or we talk about "mistakes" and "weaknesses" and we say "I made a boo-boo" or "My bad." But those terms tend to water down sin. It has been said that the three hardest words to say in the English language are: "I was wrong." Every husband soon learns how hard it is to say those words. But when all is said and done, no wife likes to say them either. Most of us would rather do anything than to admit we were wrong. Do you remember how much trouble Fonzie had with this issue on the TV series Happy Days? Fonzie was too cool to ever admit he was wrong. Richie Cunningham would say to him, "Go ahead, admit it, you were wrong." So Fonzie would go, "I was wr-r-r-r-r-r-r-." And he couldn't get the word out. So he would end up saying, "I was wr-r-r-r-r-Not right!" But "not right" is not the same thing as "wrong." If you're wrong, you're wrong. But if you are "not right," nobody really knows what you are.

To get our prayers answered, live a blameless life. To deepen your relationship with God, it would be good to start living a righteous life. Then, God would be pleased and he would promote you.

2. Be committed to prayer.

The first principle could be a bit hard. But the second principle is really hard. Because it demands something from us. It requires us to do something every day and every moment of our lives.

In chapter 6, we see Daniel facing the most trying circumstance in his life. King Darius, the Persian king and the new ruler of Babylon had issued a decree upon the instigation of Daniel's enemies. His decree stipulates that no one can pray to any god, except to the king, for thirty days. What was Daniel's reaction? Look again in verse 10. It says, "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before."

Rather than stage a protest, he prayed. That's how committed he was to prayer. He brought this situation to God instead of fuming or ranting or worrying. Notice it says that during that period of prohibition of prayer, he never altered his practice of praying. He prayed three times a day just as he had done before. In full view of everyone including his enemies. He could have prayed alone in his room without opening the windows. But he was so committed to prayer and to his God that he was ready to face the consequences.

Steve Brown, the author of *Approaching God* says, "...before you begin the hard work of prayer, you must make a commitment to prayer, no matter what, so that it becomes an essential part of your life...Prayer, if one is going to be successful at it, must constitute a major commitment."

Are you committed to prayer? How often do you pray? Nothing wrong with saying a few words of prayer like “Lord, please protect me as I drive.” “Lord, help me pass my exam.” “Lord, make my husband more loving.” Nothing wrong with those. But God expects us to pray more often and pray longer. As D. L. Moody once said, “A man who prays much in private will make short prayers in public.” So, if our prayer in public is long, maybe we don’t pray much in private, just to compensate? Now, I’m not judging because sometimes I pray long in public, too. The point is, our prayers must be like a real conversation. You know, like talking to someone who you really love.

Remember when you were still in the courting stage with your wife? You and your sweetheart talked a lot. You burned up the phone lines. You just wanted to talk and talk and talk. Because you just wanted to be with each other. Now you’re married, what happened? Yes, you talk but no more of that sweet stuff and doesn’t last as long as before. It became occasional. Some don’t talk at all. You take each other for granted.

Sadly, many of us are in that kind of relationship with God. We’ve been Christians for so long that we’ve taken him for granted. Jesus never took God for granted. While on earth, the Bible tells us he often prayed by himself and into the wee hours of the morning. And certainly Daniel likewise.

Notice, too, that he prayed on his knees. Why would you pray on your knees? I think there’s a spiritual meaning. It signifies you’re humbling yourself before God. It’s an act of honor and respect like what you would do before a king. And God is the king of our lives, of course. But there’s a practical meaning, too. When you kneel, it signifies a commitment to praying for quite a while. You can stay longer in prayer when you kneel rather than when you stand.

Now, of course, you don’t have to kneel to pray. Any position will do just fine. God knows the position of your heart.

What we're talking about here is if we want answers to prayer, we need to pray and pray more often. Prayer is not a one-shot deal. It requires patience and persistence.

3. Know that the power of prayer comes from a powerful God.

Now, if the first two principles were hard, this third principle is the hardest. This is where the rubber meets the road. This where most of us trip up. Because this principle demands that we suspend our disbelief. It demands us to believe the impossible.

You see, the power of prayer is not the result of the person praying. Rather, the power resides in the God who is being prayed to. 1 John 5:14-15 (NASB) tells us, *"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him."*

No matter the person praying, the passion behind the prayer, or the purpose of the prayer - God answers prayers that are in agreement with His will. His answers are not always yes, but are always in our best interest. When our desires line up with His will, we will come to understand that in time. When we pray passionately and purposefully, according to God's will, God responds powerfully.

Daniel certainly knew this. He had spent almost his entire life in Babylon. Through those years, he had seen God answer his prayers in miraculous ways. Like when the king asked for him to interpret a dream he had and not only that. The king asked him to tell him what his dream was! But God revealed everything to Daniel.

And now, he faced the prospect of being thrown into the lions' den because he disobeyed the king's decree. He was arrested and brought before King Darius. The king was greatly distressed as verse 14 says. "When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort

until sundown to save him.” He wasn’t able to save Daniel. Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den.

Was Daniel ever distressed? I don’t think so. Why not? Because he prayed and he knew that the power of prayer comes from a powerful God.

Like his three friends many many years ago, he knew that God could save him and if he didn’t, he would accept that fate rather than stop worshipping God.

God answered Daniel’s prayer. The lions didn’t touch him. These lions were ferocious. They were not fed for days so that they would really be hungry. But God controlled these animals by sending an angel to close their mouths. God’s might and power was clearly displayed at that incredible episode in Daniel’s life.

In verses 23-24, we read, “The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions’ den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.”

As a result of all this, the king gave his praises to the God of Daniel. He acknowledged the power and dominion of God. That’s what happens when we remain true to God. When we stand in the midst of trials and persecutions and pray, people take notice. And they begin to acknowledge that our God is real.

Let me share a true story of how being prayerful unleashes the power of God. I’ve shared this a number of years ago but I thought it’s worth retelling because of its impact. This was told by **Dr. Helen Roseveare**, a missionary to Africa, in her testimony at Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg.

She begins, “One night, in Central Africa, I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all that we could do, she died leaving us with a tiny, premature baby and a crying, two-year-old daughter.

We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive. We had no incubator. We had no electricity to run an incubator, and no special feeding facilities. Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts.

A student-midwife went for the box we had for such babies and for the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a **hot water bottle**. She came back shortly, in distress, to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst. Rubber perishes easily in tropical climates. "...and it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed. As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk; so, in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over a burst water bottle. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways. All right," I said, "Put the baby as near the fire as you safely can; sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm." The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with many of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle. The baby could so easily die if it got chilled. I also told them about the twoyear-old sister, crying because her mother had died. During the prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt consciousness of our African children. "Please, God," she prayed, "send us a water bottle. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, the baby'll be dead; so, please send it this afternoon." While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added by way of corollary, " ...And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?" As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say, "Amen?" I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything: The Bible says so, but there are limits, aren't there?

The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever received a parcel from home.

Anyway, if anyone did send a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator! Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time that I reached home, the car had gone, but there, on the veranda, was a large twenty-two pound parcel! I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone; so, I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then, there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children began to look a little bored. Next, came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas - - that would make a nice batch of buns for the weekend. As I put my hand in again, I felt the...could it really be? I grasped it, and pulled it out. Yes, "A brand-new rubber, hot water bottle!" I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could. Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, "If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!" Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone: She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked, "Can I go over with you, Mummy, and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?" That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday School class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator.

One of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child -- five months earlier in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it "That afternoon!" "

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." Isaiah 65:24

Folks, that's an incredible answer to prayer. God worked because of prayerful people.

Daniel is a man of prayer. God's will for his life was fulfilled because he remained faithful to God through prayer. I hope we would be like him, being prayerful, so that we, too, can experience the fulfillment of God's will in our lives.