

HOW TO PRAY IN A CRISIS

Good morning! We are starting a new series called “Seeking God for a Breakthrough”. Just a few weeks back we did a series on prayer, too, called “Try Prayer”, if you remember. Why are we doing one again? Because I believe we just don’t need to try prayer and then forget it, we need to try prayer and make it a permanent part of our lives. You see, we live in a fast-paced and busy society that we bypass some of the most essential things in life, like prayer and Bible-reading.

What’s happening is that sometimes because of family and work and even ministry, we hurry up and say quick prayers, thinking that’s enough. But that’s not enough. Because God wants us to develop an intimate relationship with him more than anything else.

Let me ask you: How did you get intimate with your spouse? When you were still dating before you got married, did you spend just five minutes walking hand-in-hand in the park? Was five minutes enough? Did you eat for only ten minutes in the restaurant? Did you talk about sweet-nothings for only a minute? We all know that we burned up the phone lines for hours on end because we want to really become close to our dearest. That was before, right? How about now? Wives, you don’t have to answer. I’m going to deal with that in my Valentine’s Day message.

You get my point. If you want to get close to God, spend time with God. Jesus spent lots of times with his Father, alone, in a lonely place. **Luke 5:16 says, “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”** Jesus often prayed intensely and fervently because he wanted to be intimate with his Father. He sought the will of his Father through prayer. He desired to do only what pleases God through prayer. And that is why he experienced breakthroughs in his life.

What kind of breakthrough are you looking for and hoping for? As we enter the new year, are you longing for a breakthrough in a certain area in your life?

Maybe in your finances, in your health, in your relationships, in your career? Think about that for a moment. In fact, on your outline, complete the sentence where it says, “This year, I’m seeking God for a breakthrough in _____.” Maybe, in finances. And you can be specific like “being debt-free”. Or breakthrough in my health. Being physically fit at all times. In my marriage, career, or in my ministry, or what-have-you. And you can even aspire for one or more breakthroughs.

This series will help you discover the secret for a breakthrough. Because it is based on the Word of God. If you’re seeking God earnestly and honestly, you will find him, and he will reveal himself to you and help you to see his will clearly for you. **Jeremiah 29:12-13** says, *“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”* And in **Jer. 33:3**, *“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.”*

BTW, this series we’re going through, this is an adaptation from Saddleback. It has been used by other churches and the results were tremendous for them. I hope it’ll be the same way for us.

So, I’d like to start this series by sharing with you how to pray in a crisis.

All of us, at a certain point in our life, will experience a crisis in our life. That is, if we haven’t experienced it yet. What is a crisis?

The word crisis simply means you’ve come to a crossroads. It comes from the Latin word **“crisis”** which means **“critical stage”**. And the Latin word comes from the Greek **“krisis”** which means **“decision”**. Thus, a crisis or a crossroads is a place of decision. In a crisis, you must decide how you will respond. Not to decide is ultimately a decision in itself.

But how do you pray in such times? How do you form the words when the anxiety and sorrows of life's crises push in... and how do you pray through?

This morning we'll find the answers in the life of Daniel. Let me read from Daniel 2:14-23.

Now, as a background, the opening verses of this second chapter of Daniel tell us that Daniel was facing a great crisis at this time. King Nebuchadnezzar had a most amazing dream. So, he summoned his magicians, astrologers, sorcerers and other "wise" men (verses 2-4) and demanded that they reveal the dream and its interpretation to him (verses 5-9). The wise men of Babylon told the king that no one could do this, which made him so furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men, which included Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (verses 12-13). By the way, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah are the Hebrew names, the real names of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel then sought an interview with the king and promised he would reveal the dream and its interpretation (verses 14-16).

This crisis was one of many crises which Daniel experienced during his long and eventful ministry. But what did he do when he faced a crisis? Did he panic? No, he prayed as calmly as he could; and we, who live 2500 years later in the world's history, should likewise resort to the place of prayer in our times of crisis, which we all experience. We experience times of national crisis (2 Chronicles 14:11-12); religious crisis (Acts 4:23-31); domestic crisis (Acts 9:36-43); and personal crisis - ill-health (James 5:13-14), or in connection with our business or loved ones.

Are you facing a crisis now? Then do what Daniel did - pray! There are five steps we see modeled in Daniel's life in this chapter on how to pray a prayer that God answers. Let me share those with you.

Number one, here's the first step.

1. Set Aside a Time for Prayer

In verse 16, we read that “Daniel went in to the king and asked for time”. Why did Daniel ask the king for time? Because he wanted to pray. Mind you, he had already a regular time for prayer which you see in Daniel 6:10, but the need now was for a special, extra time of prayer. He did not call a public meeting, organize a petition, started a march, or something to that effect. He faced a problem, he went to prayer. If you are facing a crisis now, set aside a definite time to seek God’s face and put the perplexing matter into His hands for a solution.

You see, sometimes when we are overwhelmed by a crisis, we lose our perspective. We even question God and ask why things are happening to the point of blaming him. That’s understandable and God understands that. We are emotional beings and we cannot control our emotions. Even the psalmist wondered whether God had forsaken him in Psalm 10. He says, “*Why, Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?*” Can you feel the emotions of a person in distress in that plaintive cry? Then, after verses after verses of complaints, he settled down toward the end of the psalm and gave his praises to God.

What I’m saying is that you may raise your fist against heaven but you have to bring it back down and acknowledge that God is still God. You can be distracted by the crisis, but you have to put your focus back on God. Even if it hurts, you have to trust the wisdom of God. Like Daniel, set aside a time for prayer to focus your attention on God. In fact, God wants your attention. He is always longing and waiting for your attention.

Husbands, let me talk to you for just a minute. I'm going to give you a marriage tip that will pay great dividends in your life for the rest of your life. Here's a big tip for every husband. I have noticed and I've developed this habit, that whenever Anabel talks to me I turn my face toward her physically. Whenever she starts talking I literally turn my face toward her.

When I forget, she reminds me. “Rolly, look at me.” And you know what I've learned? She likes it. In fact, she loves it, because when you turn your face to somebody it says “You have my undivided attention. I'm totally focused on you.”

Everybody likes that. When you talk you want people to turn their focus to you. Now, did you know that you can actually do this with God? You can turn your face to God in prayer. How? Physically. Just look up. God I'm here. I'm ready to talk. You can go outside and look up at the heavens and stare up there. You just look up. There's nothing in the Bible that says you have to close your eyes to pray. Nothing in the Bible that says you have to bow your head to pray. That's one of the ways to pray, it's a good way but many times in the Bible people didn't close their eyes. They actually looked up and they talked aloud.

I was with a missions team in Russia years ago. One thing we noticed is that Russian Christians stood when they prayed. One time we were at this church and while waiting for the service to start, my missions team decided to pray. We sat down on the grass and bowed our heads, closed our eyes and mumbled our prayers. When we finished and opened our eyes, there were these Russian Christians looking at us wide-eyed. What they witnessed us doing was something totally alien to them.

Anyway, in a crisis, start by setting aside a time to pray. Even when it hurts, even when you don't feel like it. God is pleased when he has your undivided attention. When you're focused on him.

2. Seek Fellowship in Prayer

In verse 17, it says, *“Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.”*

Apparently, his friends were already waiting for him at his home or he summoned them to his home. Why do you think he conferred with his friends? So that they can have a pity party knowing that their lives are in danger?

So that they can have a brainstorming session to know how to deal with the situation? Of course not, they were there and meeting together for a what? A prayer meeting. I imagine Daniel telling his friends, “Friends, here’s my prayer request. Can you please pray with me?”

Now, Daniel could have prayed on his own. In fact, that was his practice since coming to Babylon. In **Daniel 6:10**, 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.”* It’s obvious that we can pray alone and God is able to listen to each of our individual prayers. Jesus himself encouraged us to pray alone with God. *“But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”* (Matt. 6:6)

I just want you to notice something here about the practice of prayer by Daniel. In Daniel 6:10 it says that *“Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed”*. I think that’s a good practice. Something we can do ourselves, individually. And so, during the next four weeks of this series, I want to encourage you to pray 3 times a day especially if you’re seeking God for a breakthrough. This is one way of telling God that you’re serious about seeking him and letting him speak to you and allowing him to work on your situation. Pray for just five minutes each time. One in the morning, another at lunchtime, and just before you go to bed. Whether you want to face Jerusalem or not, that’s up to you. If you’re in a family, you can keep each other accountable.

So, beginning tomorrow, can you commit to praying three times a day? That’ll be 27 days of non-stop praying until Feb. 11. If you’re going to do that, say to your neighbor, “I commit to praying three times a day. How about you?”

OK. Going back to Daniel and his friends. So, they met and prayed together. This is what we call corporate prayer. Praying together as one. Praying alone is Scriptural and praying with others is Scriptural, too. Is one better than the other? No, there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that corporate prayers are “more powerful” than individual prayers in the sense of moving the hand of God. But, one thing is sure. When we pray together with other believers, the effects can be very positive. In fact, when you’re in a crisis, the one thing you need is encouragement and you get that when you share your burden with others and ask them to pray for you.

For sure, that’s what Daniel was looking for. He was facing a very, very pressure-laden situation. His and his friends’ lives were in danger. So, he came to them and verse 18 says, *“He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven...”*.

If you’re in deep trouble, I encourage you to share it with your Christian friends. With those in your home group. Let God minister to your heart through your friends.

So, when in crisis, set aside a time for prayer; seek fellowship in prayer. And thirdly,

3. Be definite in prayer.

Verse 18 says that Daniel and his friends prayed to God *“concerning this mystery”*. This mystery was the dream that the Babylonian King had. He was so bothered that he wanted someone to interpret it for him. The thing is, the interpreter must know first what the dream was without the King telling him. That’s what we call an impossible dream. It was just impossible to interpret a dream that you don’t have an idea of. But the King was wary about his astrologers and magicians. He knew they could just pull his leg. That may be an impossible situation, but nothing is impossible with God, Amen?

Daniel's faith in God never wavered. He knew God can do the impossible. So, he and his friends went right ahead to ask God for a specific answer to their specific request.

When we pray, it needs to be specific and definite. For certain, God knows our every need but God also wants us to name exactly what we need. When Jesus taught his followers to pray, he could have said, when you pray, say "bless us" or "help us." But he didn't. He said, "Give us this day our daily bread." He urged his followers to be specific in prayer.

I read the story of this elderly man named Jon Walker who has bipolar II disorder and also lived alone. His doctor encouraged him to get a dog. Feeding and walking a dog would help build structure and routine into his day. But he was at a place in his life where he wasn't sure he could afford a dog, especially the shots and veterinarian visits that would be required.

But he went ahead and asked God to provide him with a dog. He loved dogs and have had several, so he was specific in his prayer. "Father, I am grateful for what you can provide but this is what I'd like:

One that is hypoallergenic, because I am allergic to dogs that shed. I'd really like a cockapoo — a cross between a cocker spaniel and poodle.

One that is older and already trained.

One that is female, because my last dog was a very territorial male.

One that is around 30 pounds.

One that I can afford to keep."

Afterwards, he found a rescue dog that seemed to fit his criteria at a place just around the corner from his house. But, when he walked the dog around for a while, there just didn't seem to be a connection. When he brought the dog back in to the rescue center, the woman at the front desk asked, "What are you looking for?"

He said, "I really was hoping to find a cockapoo."

The front desk clerk said there was someone who had recently called about a cockapoo. She gave him a card and said, “Give this woman a call and see if she has the right dog for you.”

He called the woman named Laura West, who owned Pumpkin, a 4-year-old female cockapoo who weighed around 30 pounds and was current on all her shots. When he asked her how much she wanted for Pumpkin, she said, “I just want her to have a good home!”

He told Laura how he’d prayed specifically for this dog. He believed that God heard his prayer and engineered circumstances so that as he happened to walk into the rescue looking for a dog, at the same time Laura, who is also a believer, had called the rescue about Pumpkin.

You know, I think that’s one reason God wants us to pray specifically. So that we’ll know that God cares for us and is concerned about our every specific need.

Let me tell you another story. One that is closer to home. This one I heard from Rosemarie Gil in one of Eddie Mesa’s concerts. Eddie Mesa, as you know, is dubbed as the Elvis Presley of the Philippines. Before he became a Christian, he was a womanizer, a drunkard, in short, a man of the world. So, Rosemarie Gil, already a Christian, left him and took their children along with her. Years later, Eddie Mesa came to know the Lord and started to mend his ways and he started to sing for the Lord.

Rosemarie Gil said that one day she received a call from her estranged husband. She wasn’t sure of her feelings and wasn’t sure that he really had changed. But in the end she agreed that he could come and visit her and their children. So, Eddie Mesa got into his car but before proceeding to the house where his family was, he decided to pass by a flower shop. In the flower shop, he instructed the sales lady to arrange the flowers in a certain way.

I don't remember the details of the arrangement but it was something that Eddie Mesa thought would be quite unique and make her wife really happy.

So, he arrived at the house. Rosemarie's face was stoic. She tried not to show her emotions. But when Eddie Mesa slowly handed her the flowers in the box, her facial expression changed. She burst in tears when she looked inside the box. The reason is that after she talked with her husband on the phone that morning, she prayed to God to give her a sign that her husband is truly repentant and that they could reconcile. She told God that if he brought flowers and those flowers are arranged in a certain way, then there's no doubt God wanted her to take her husband back.

Folks, was that coincidence or God-incidence? You see, God responds to requests that are specific and made to obey the will of God. It may be hard for Rosemarie but she said, in effect, "Not my will, Lord, but yours." There are moments in our lives when we have to go through something like that because the situation may be hard emotionally and mentally. Jesus himself prayed that he would be spared of the suffering on the cross but he said to his Father, "Not my will but yours be done". In Rosemarie's situation, God had to speak also to Eddie Mesa's heart. It takes two to tango, as they say. He wouldn't force Eddie Mesa's heart. If his heart is right, then he would be sensitive to the Lord's leading and would be a willing participant in what God is doing in their lives. If his heart wasn't right, he would be tone-deaf and push his own agenda. It's good he listened. It's good he humbled himself and allowed God to do a work in his heart.

So, I'd like to emphasize the importance of walking closely with God. Get into his Word, spend quality time with him. It is only then that you would truly know God and know his ways. One Bible personality who had such close relationship with God is Moses. The Bible says that, in fact, "[God] made known his ways to Moses." (Psalm 103:7)

When you pray specifically, not only it shows that you have faith that God can do the impossible for you. It also strengthens your faith when the answer comes.

4. Watch your motive in prayer.

The last part of verse 18 says, *“so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”* At first glance, it seems their focus was on themselves. But, the following verse actually tells us the real motive of their hearts, and that is, to praise and glorify God when the answer came. In verses 20-23, Daniel extols the name of God and pointed all the glory to God. In fact, in verses 27 to 28, when the King asked him whether he could interpret his dream, he admitted that he didn’t know anything about it but it was his God who revealed the mystery of the dream. It says, *“Daniel replied, ‘No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.’”* He gave all the credit to God.

You see, our hearts are tested not only during times of tribulation. But they are also tested in times of triumph. Are we able to look beyond ourselves after a victory? Can we humbly recognize that it is God who has given us the victory and the results were not because of our own abilities? That’s why when we pray, we ought to have the objective in mind that when the answer comes, ultimately, it is not to make us feel happy or feel good about ourselves, but to magnify the name of Jesus.

So, I believe that Daniel and his friends prayed not just to save their skins but that God would be glorified and his kingdom extended through the answering of their prayers. You see, prayer with the wrong motive cannot prevail. **James 4:3** says, *“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”*

The motive of prayer should be to glorify and honor God in the end. **Psalm 50:15** says, *“...call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will*

honor me.” And in John 14:13, it says, *“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”*

5. Thank God for answered prayer.

In verse 19, we see that God answered Daniel and his friends’ prayer in a vision during the night after they prayed during the day. It was quick, right? Sometimes, God answers quickly, sometimes it takes time. In either case, there’s a reason why. There’s a purpose why he answers quickly or why there seems to be a delay. But as Romans 8:28 says, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”*

When God does answer our prayer in a time of crisis, it is only proper that we thank him for his love and promises. In verse 23, Daniel says, *“I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king.”*

Being grateful is an important characteristic of a child of God. By giving thanks, we acknowledge God’s power and might and his control over our lives. We are saying he is Lord of all and the only person who is worthy of our praise and adoration.

But what if he doesn’t answer? Then, we respond in the same way that Daniel’s friends responded in the next chapter. In chapter 3, we read that the King built a statue and ordered everyone to bow down before it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not bow before it and were ordered thrown into the blazing furnace. When the king asked them, “Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?” (Daniel 3:15c). They replied, *“King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from*

Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

These brave young men declared their allegiance to God even if God didn't deliver them. They had faith in him not only in good times but in bad times as well. I hope we'll have the same kind of faith as well. Not the fair-weather kind of faith but the all-weather kind of faith. A faith that will not wilt down under pressure. A faith that will remain strong in times of crisis.

Folks, you may be in a crisis, you may be in deep trouble. You don't know what to do. Just keep looking to Jesus who gave up everything for you.