

THE KIND OF PRAYER GOD ANSWERS DANIEL 9:1-23

Good morning! Hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner. Kind of different without your close friends and loved ones, right? We just have to grin and bear it. But we know that there are so many things to thank God for. Despite the political issues, the racial tension, the coronavirus crisis, and what have you. 2020 is shaping up or has shaped up to be one of the most challenging and difficult years in modern history. But with the help of God, we'll survive this. God is faithful, Amen?

We have reached the end of our series on **PUSH, Pray Until Something Happens**. Today, I'd like to talk about the **kind prayer that God answers**. I mean if you're going to pray you might as well say a prayer that God is going to answer. You've prayed a lot prayers that God did not answer. How do you pray the kind of prayer that God answers?

If you remember in the first message in this series, I talked about how to pray in a crisis. Today, I'd like to elaborate on that some more. This is like part 2 of How to Pray in a Crisis.

Today, I'd like to share with you the prayer life of Daniel. Daniel is one of those guys in the Old Testament who prayed a lot and received answers to his prayers. We can learn from him. We can learn a few principles that will enrich our own prayer life.

Let's get right into it. There are five steps we see modeled in Daniel's life and in the prayer in this chapter on how to pray a prayer that God answers. Please turn to Daniel 9 in your Bibles and I'm going to speak from verses 1-23.

There are five steps to follow in order to say a prayer that God answers. Number one, here's the first step.

1. Let God speak to me before I speak to him.

Let God speak to me before I speak to him. This is called the listening step. You listen to the voice of God. How do you do that? Well, I'm going to explain it. There is a principle you need to understand first and it's this. God always makes the first move in your life, you don't. God is always the initiator of everything in your life and you are the responder. God never expects you to make the first move. He always makes the first move.

The Bible says that we love him, we love God, because...he first loved us. The Bible says that we serve God because God first served us. He knew we had a problem and he sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross for us long before we even knew we had a problem. The Bible says we give to God because God first gave to us. Everything you have in your life is a gift of God. The air you breathe, your life, your mind, your spouse, your children, everything you've got is a gift from God. God will never ask you to do something he hasn't already done for you.

God always initiates; we always respond. And that's even true with prayer. The reason we pray, the reason we talk to God is because God has first talked to us in this book. In this book, the Bible, written over three thousand five hundred plus years, 40 different authors that God inspired to write these words down that he wanted written down, there are literally thousands and thousands of promises from God to you. What we do in prayer is we claim the promises that he has said to us.

The Bible says that prayer actually starts not with talking but with listening. You listen to God. Now, how do you listen to God? By reading this Book. Or if you don't like to read, listening to the Bible on your smartphone or whatever. Logically you need to let God talk to you then you're going to know how to pray, what to pray, where to pray, when to pray and all those things. Daniel did this.

Now as we start this chapter nine, Daniel is an old guy now. He's 85 years old. He's still in Babylon. He came to Babylon as a 15-year-old teenager together

with other Israelites who were captured by the Babylonians. He's now gone through multiple changes in his life. Test after test after test after test.

He keeps getting promoted higher in authority, higher in power. He's now served three different kings. We know that the Babylonians defeated the Assyrians and then the Persians defeated the Babylonians and so now he's got a new boss. He's survived every administration and no matter what the government has going on around him he keeps getting promoted. But he wants to go home before he dies. He's 85 years old and he knows that God had said in the book of Jeremiah that they'll be in Babylon for 70 years and then he's going to bring his people to Israel. He knows the time's up but he also knows that the people, the Israelites, have not turned back to God.

Seventy years later they're still as messed up as they were before and he goes, "We're not any closer to God than we were seventy years ago and I'm afraid God is just going to leave us here in Babylon and not bring us back to Israel." This is his crisis and here's how it starts. Daniel 9:1-2, *"In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom— [Darius was a Persian. The Persians conquered Babylon. Today, Persia is Iran and Babylon is Iraq. Now, if you're wondering what's the difference between Babylon and Babylonia, Babylonia is the empire and Babylon is the city, the capital of Babylonia] in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years."* So, Jerusalem was destroyed and God said it won't be rebuilt until after seventy years when Babylon itself is destroyed by the Persians.

Now, if you back up to chapter one of Daniel, Daniel is worried about the crisis in his life and so he starts studying God's word through Jeremiah. Now, here's the thing. Daniel and Jeremiah are contemporaries. They lived at the same

time. When Babylon crushed Israel, Daniel is taken captive as a prisoner of war to Babylon; Jeremiah is left behind in a defeated broken city called Jerusalem. Daniel knows God said through the prophet Jeremiah, "My people are going to be in exile for seventy years." Daniel reads this and he starts getting hope.

Here's my point. Before you even come to God in prayer, listen to him first by reading his Word, studying his word. What I mean is that make his word primary in your life. Be grounded in his word. Then, you might just get his answer already by reading his word. Many of our questions have their answer already in God's word. For example, some singles ask, "Lord, should I date this guy? He's not a Christian but he's a good person." First of all, you should be careful because he's not of the same household and you should keep your distance. Second of all, God is not pleased when you get close to someone who you don't have anything in common with when it comes to faith. 2 Cor. 6:14 says, *"Do not be yoked together with those who do not believe. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship does light have with darkness?"* This verse is not specifically talking about dating but it is a principle that you can apply to dating. Because if you ignore this principle, then you'll have an excuse to date an unbeliever. Basically, dating an unbeliever is not good for your health, physically and spiritually speaking. Or, you can listen to this rhetorical question by God in Amos 3:3, and he is speaking figuratively, *"Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?"* Obviously, when you are not agreed on matters of faith, then it will be hard for both of you down the road to make the same spiritual decisions.

Reading God's word is a daily exercise. God speaks to you through his word and he wants you to know him more and more through his word. And reading his word first prepares your mind and your heart before you come to him to talk to him. That's why devotionals are written with a verse or a passage from God's word

first, then after the devotions, you are encouraged to pray. You see, everybody prays. Even pagans pray. But God's word is available to every Christian who wants to align their will with God's will. God lets his will known through his word.

Let God speak to me before I speak to him. Then

2. Focus my attention on God.

This is the second step in the kind of prayer that God answers. Focus my attention on God. In Daniel 9:3 it says this, *"So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition..."* When you turn to someone, you look at them in the face, right? And when you look at their face, it means you're focusing your attention on that person.

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 Bel talks to me I turn my face toward her physically. Whenever she starts talking I literally turn my face toward her. 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. Well, it wasn't like that in the beginning. She had to say, "Rolly, look at me". If I didn't, then I'd be in bigger trouble. So, I learned. Happy wife, happy life. Everybody likes this. 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. 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 remember when I was new here in the US in New Jersey and my driving instructor took me to a DMV office to take the driving exam. All the guys in the office rejected my application because of this and that, and I was frustrated, and my instructor was frustrated, too. In the end he asked to see the manager which they granted. I stepped outside and I was really down because that was the second DMV office I went to. I was already rejected at the first one days before because of immigration issues they said, although I had the proper documents. I didn't expect this second office to be different from the first one. I was helpless because if I couldn't drive, I wouldn't be able to go to work. At that point, I looked up at the sky, at the clouds, and kind of just was wondering where God was and whether he was actually concerned about my situation. And I said these words to God loudly while looking at the heavens, "God, I don't know what's going on. But if I didn't get their approval, I would pack my bags and go back home to the Philippines. Please let the manager approve my application and let me take the driving exam." I was almost in tears. I went back in and a few minutes later, my instructor came out of the manager's office and happily said, "You're approved."

Now, I want you to notice the second part of this verse. It says, "pleaded with him". The idea here in the original Hebrew is "to seek to find" that's why some versions of the Bible say, "to seek him" or "seeking him".

This is the second step of prayer. The first is listening, the second step of prayer is seeking. In Proverbs 8:17, God says this, "*I love those who love me, and those who seek me will [what?] find me!*" Find me. You say I can't find God. You're not seeking him. You got to seek him the right way. Those who seek me will find me. Let me show you another one. Jeremiah 29:13 says this. God says, "*You will seek me and find me when you seek me [what?] with all your heart.*" That's serious. That's emotional seeking. You're going to find me when you really want to know me. Not like, "Oh yeah I kind of like to know God, in my spare time,

between the football game and work, maybe." No, when you seek me with all your heart then you're going to know me.

Now, Hebrews 11:6 says this, "*God rewards those who earnestly seek him.*" Would you like God to reward your business? Seek him. Would you like God to reward your finances? Seek him. Would you like God to reward your marriage? Seek him. Would you like God to reward your children? Your future? Wherever you seek God, God is going to reward. Wherever you don't seek God, God says, "You're on your own."

Let me show you another verse. This is a very familiar one, Luke 12:31, Jesus says this, "*Seek, [there's that word again, seek] first God's Kingdom, before everything else, [God's kingdom is his priority, not your priorities, his priorities. Before everything else] and all the other things you need will be given to you.*" Another one of those blanket promises. He says, "Don't seek wealth, seek God." He'll take care of what you need. Don't seek fame, seek God. He'll take care of what you need. Don't seek pleasure. Don't seek a husband. Don't seek all these other things you're seeking he says, "Seek me first and I'm going to take care of everything else. You put me first. I bless the people who put me first. "

You have probably never realized this but a lot of the pain you're in right now, the difficulties, the stress, the pressure you feel, the troubles you're facing, the mess that's all tangled up in relationships, almost all of that stuff that you're facing right now is the result of you not seeking God because you didn't ask God first. You didn't seek his guidance, his wisdom, his help, you didn't seek his permission. You just made a decision and so you went out and you bought something without even asking God, God, should I buy this house? Should I do this job? Should I get this car? Should I get in this relationship? You didn't even ask God. You didn't seek God. You just did it and now you're reaping the consequences of it.

That causes so much of the problem in your life because you made a decision without talking to God first. You weren't having that daily conversation with God. God I'm getting ready to go to Costco, help. Because I don't want to come home with four giant jars of pickles that I really don't need. In every area you ask God, you seek God he'll help. He'll bless even your shopping.

Now, here's a very important point. Any time we ignore God or we don't ask for his help, you know what God does when we don't ask for those things, don't ask for his direction, God just backs off and let you do what you want to do until you come to your senses.

Let me show you this on the screen. Hosea 5:15-6:1. God is speaking to Israel but he might as well be speaking to you, ““Then I will return to my lair until they have borne their guilt and seek my face—in their misery they will earnestly seek me.’ ‘Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.’” Friends, that’s the good news, though you may have departed from God’s ways and his will, you can seek him and find him anytime and he will willingly and readily receive you back.

Here's the third step. The third step in prayers that get answered is

3. Demonstrate my seriousness.

When you're praying about something, you need to signal to God that you mean business about this. That it's not just a little whim, it's not just a casual thought, but you're really serious about this. You want to let God see how important, whatever you're praying about, it is to you.

Now, Daniel, in the next part of verse 3 mentions three ways he shows his seriousness to God. Two of them were cultural customs, which we don't do in America or anywhere I think today, but one of them is a spiritual discipline that had been going on for thousands of years and people still do it today. Here's what he says in the third part of verse 3. He says, *"in fasting, and in sackcloth and*

ashes". Now we're familiar with fasting. But fasting in sackcloth and ashes? Nobody does this today.

Jesus said there are some miracles that happen only by prayer and fasting, not by prayer alone. Now, I don't have time to go into this, but all through Scripture we see examples. Moses fasted before he received the Ten Commandments. The Israelites fasted before they went into many, many major battles. Daniel fasted in order to receive guidance from God. Nehemiah fasted before he began a major building project. Jesus fasted before he started his ministry. The very first Christians fasted during decision-making times in their life.

We should too. In fact, we used to. Remember? And I think we need to fast again especially during this time of turmoil. On the second Saturday of next month, let us fast, ok? As we did in the past, we're going to fast by skipping lunch. We'll meet by Zoom and do our prayers and then fast. I'll tell you more about it next week. For now, please make plans to join our prayer and fasting on Dec. 12th.

Now, let's go to the fourth step.

4. Praise God for his love and promises.

Praise God for his love and promises. Praise him because he is great and powerful and awesome. Remember just how loving he is always and that he keeps his promises. In fact, you thank him for all this. As I said last week, our prayers to God must be laced with thanksgiving. You thank God not only during Thanksgiving Day but every waking moment of your life. **1 Thess. 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances"**. So, when we look now at verse 4, Daniel prays **"Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments."** Down in verse 9 he also says, **"The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him;"** Daniel has seen how God has been good to him and his people during their

70 years in Babylon. He praised God for that. Let us praise God, too, every time we pray. Whatever your situation is. However you may be feeling inside.

Finally, the last step.

5. I humbly confess my sin.

God doesn't listen to prideful complaining, but he does listen to humble confessing. God responds to humility. The Bible says, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." (James 4:6) Now, some of you think, you know if I admit my sins to God I'm going to get punished. Hang on a minute. In the first place, God already knows them all. You're not going to say, "God I did this" he goes, "Oh really. How did I miss that one? I didn't see that one coming." God already knows every bad thing you've done in your entire life. He just wants you to admit it. It's for your own humility.

How does God respond when I humbly admit I blew it? With punishment? Never. When God hears you being humble he responds not with punishment but with blessing, with forgiving, with mercy, with grace. It's not like I come and I admit it then God's going to take me down. No, no. You're going to get taken down by your own pride. God says, "You come to me humbly and you just admit, I blew it." This is the fifth thing you do. I humbly confess.

Now the word confess in the Bible, the Greek word is the word *homologeō*. *Homo* means same. Homosexual, *homo sapiens*, homogenized milk means it's all the same. *Homo*, same. *Logeo* means to speak. To confess simply means to speak the same thing about God. I don't say, "God that was a little faux pas. It was a little weakness." But I say, "God, it was wrong. It was sin. It was rebellion against you. I did it. You told me not to do it but I did it anyway."

That kind of thing God responds to with grace. Now, in Daniel 9:5 he says this, "*We have sinned and done wrong.*" He didn't just stop there. He gets very, very specific and you need be, too.

You don't need to go, "Oh God forgive all the sins I did yesterday but I'm too busy to name them." God wants you to be specific because then he wants you to be able to know what not to do again. I'm just going to read these verses real quick. I'm not even going to comment on them. He says *"We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land."* He was very specific. He's saying, "We're all at fault here. Every generation."

You see, he admits it's not just one generation. In America every generation has got part of the blame. Then in Daniel 9:7-8 he says this, *"but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you."*

He said, next verse, Daniel 9:10. *"..we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us."* Now verse 13, but *"Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth."* Then he sums it all up in verse sixteen and he says, *"Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us."*

Does any of this sound vaguely familiar to you? I just read you a laundry list of America. I just read you the last fifty years of America right there.

John MacArthur just said recently that America is in a moral free-fall. I agree. He's right. I didn't have to hear his entire interview with Laura Ingraham of Fox News. The title says it all.

Now, Daniel knows we don't deserve God's blessing, but he casts himself on the grace of God. In verse 18 he says this, *“Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.”*

Now, how does God respond to this kind of prayer? Well, in Daniel 9:20-23, here's how God responds. Daniel says, *“While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill— while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, ‘Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed’”*.

What do we see here? We see God responding immediately to Daniel's prayer. God sent his angel, Gabriel, to deliver a message for Daniel. And the message was about God giving him insight and understanding about what's going to happen in the future, what is going to happen to the nation of Israel. The next few verses talks about a prophecy which I don't have time to talk about. The important thing to note here is that God responds to prayers that are said with the 5 principles I shared with you. Listening to God, seeking God, demonstrating my seriousness, praising God, confessing my sins. There are other principles. But you can begin with these. Those are the basics. Those are what we learn from Daniel's life.

Folks, if you're in a crisis, pray a prayer that Daniel modeled for us and expect God's answer.