

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Characteristics of a Fervent Prayer Life, Part 2

Scripture: Daniel 9:1-19

Code: 80-231

As you know, a few weeks ago I was talking to you about the condition of our nation. Some of you were somewhat discouraged by what I said related to the Word of God and where this country is and how, evidently, we are experiencing the judgment of God in a severe moral decline. And I was asked the question, what is to be our response to that...if God sovereignly determines history, if God sovereignly determines the rise and fall of nations...what do we do? Do we just accept that? Do we just passively resign ourselves to that? Or do we pray intently that God may do a work of grace in our nation?

And then we were also talking about the healing ministry of Jesus, and I showed you how rare that healing ministry was in redemptive history. You remember that I pointed out to you that between the creation of the world and time of Abraham, a period of 2200 years, the Bible records no healings from the time of Abraham, 2200, to the time of Isaiah in 750, about 1500 years, there are about 20 miracles that relate to the body. Some of them would even be God allowing an infertile person to become fertile, in the case of Hannah, the case of Sarah. But only about 20 miracles during that 1500 years. And from the time of Isaiah to the time of the New Testament, there are no healing miracles recorded, and we talked a little bit about the fact that the healing explosion during the ministry of Jesus Christ was unique to that ministry so that as that ministry came to an end, and as the Apostolic Era came to an end, even the Apostle Paul was sick, and Timothy was sick, and Epaphroditus was sick, and Trofimus was sick, and you see the diminishing of healings.

And we talked about the fact that we are not living in an age of miracles. We're not living in a time when the gift of healing is operative, and the question also came up, well, what role does prayer play in this, and how are we to pray?

So as we look at our world and we realize it's not a time of miracles and, as we realize that the...the history of the world is the history of the judgment of God. That nations rise and fall, and that, when they turn their back on God, and when they who...knew God, reject Him as God, God turns them over to sexual sin, turns them over to homosexuality, turns 'em over to a reprobate mind, turns them over to the judgment that is, in a sense, the consequence of their own sinful choices. How are we to respond to all of this, and what role does prayer play? Do we resign ourselves to all of these things confident in the sovereignty of God, that He's gonna do what He's gonna do, and there's no point in praying? Or...or do we go to battle in the matter of prayer to beseech God to be...to be gracious and to do other than appears to be apparent at any given time.

And, of course, in answering that, I've tried to address the issue of prayer and have chosen a text, Daniel 9. I want you to go back to Daniel 9, because I think this is a, there are many prayers in the Bible. My own personal favorite in the Old Testament is this one, and the reason that it is a favorite is because it is so instructive. It is a rather lengthy prayer, and it is a prayer that embodies all of the necessary elements that grant to us a full understanding of prayer. It's one of the greatest chapters in the Bible on prayer, and it may well be the greatest example of prayer in the Old Testament. Doesn't teach us about prayer by precept. It teaches us about prayer by pattern or by example. We literally are eavesdropping on the prayer life of Daniel, who was no smalltime man of prayer. He was a significant example of prayer, maybe the greatest Old Testament example of prayer, who...who prayed against the will of the king, who prayed himself into a lion's den, because he wouldn't alter his prayer life. He was a man of great integrity, as we learn in the early chapters. He wouldn't compromise on any front, and that included his prayer life.

Uncompromisingly bold, full of faith, unselfish, humble, resistant to the world, persistent, holy, incorruptible, consistent, trustworthy, virtuous, obedient, worshipful, God-honoring, all of those things describe Daniel. And we could add to that prayerful. An amazing, amazing man who would rather face lions than alter his pattern of prayer. And he is a...a good man to teach us what prayer is all about.

As we come to chapter 9, just a very brief review...review, remember, now, Daniel is in captivity with the children of Israel. He was taken captive in the first deportation around the year 603, 604 B.C. He was one of those young Jewish nobles that the...the Babylonians took captive in the first of three deportations. The second, 597, the third in 586, when they destroyed Jerusalem and really ended Judah's national identity in the Holy Land.

He went in the first deportation. They, in the first deportation, the Babylonians, took the brightest young Jews they could find...they...in order that they could train them so that when they brought the rest of the Jews into captivity, they would have Jewish-trained leaders who the people would accept, the Jewish people would accept in exile, but who had been sufficiently brainwashed to disseminate Chaldean culture. And Daniel was one of those young men. As it turned out, he eventually rose to become prime minister in that first empire of Babylon. And when the Medo-Persian Empire came in, he remained in a very high position. So he literally was such a man of integrity, such a gifted leader, such a great man, even from a...from the standpoint of the human evaluation, that he really bridged two opposing empires. And here we find him in chapter 9 in the first year of Darius, who was the king in the Medo-Persian Empire, and he is in a very, very important position.

Now, as he comes into chapter 9, he is reading, in verse 2 it tells us, he's reading the Old Testament. In fact, he was reading Jeremiah the prophet. And as he was reading the Scripture, which, undoubtedly, he did regularly, he came across passages in Jeremiah chapter 25 verses 11 and 12, and chapter 29 verse 10, to be specific. And in those two chapters in Jeremiah and those verses,

Jeremiah records the Word of God that Israel is to be in captivity for a period of 70 years. Daniel knows that that 70 years is nearly finished. He knows that the 70 years is nearly complete. He becomes, then, alerted to that reality that the time is nearly over for Jeremiah's prediction of a 70-year captivity to end. This, then, prompts his prayer. This is the reason for his prayer.

And...and what I told you last time, as we begin to think about these things, is that understanding the plan of God does not spell the death of prayer. It incites it. When you know that God has a purpose, when you know that God's purpose, let's say, is to judge, that doesn't cause us to passively resign ourselves to judgment and shut down our prayer life. When you know that God is going to deliver Israel in a 70-year period, and you're near that 70 years, you don't say, "Well, what's to pray about? It's all gonna come to pass anyway." Rather, that incites your prayer. And like John the Apostle, you remember, at the end of the book of Revelation, who has just received the visions of revelation and...and written them down, 22 lengthy chapters about the return of Christ. And at the very end of all of that, he prays a prayer. And what is his prayer? "Even so come Lord Jesus"...and you might say to yourself, "That was an unnecessary prayer. He just had 22 chapters of Revelation saying Jesus was coming, why pray that?"

But that's just the point. When you begin to get a grip on the purposes of God, you begin to pray for them to be fulfilled. You see the saints in the 6th chapter of Revelation under the altar, and they're praying, "How long, O Lord, how long, O Lord, are You going to endure this terrible dishonoring of Your name," and "How long are Your children gonna be martyred?" Well, they knew how long. It was prophesied that it would be a seven-year period, and that the great tribulation would last for three-and-half years. And, yet, there is that cry, "Lord, Lord, end it and bring to pass Your own glory."

And so that's what we learn first of all. True prayer is in response to the Word. It was when Daniel was reading the Word and coming to grips with the Lord's program that he began to pray in response to that. I...I mention the illustration to you that Matthew records for us that...that Jesus said, "I will build My church...Matthew 16...and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." In other words, there's an invincibility about the church. There's an indominatability about the church. The Lord will build His church. All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and I will receive them. And he says, "I will lose none of them, but raise them at the last day." So Romans 8 says, "Whomever He predestined, He called. And whoever He called, He justified. And whoever He justified, He glorified." And so if...if it's all in the determinate council of God, and if you go from predestination to calling justification to glorification, what's to pray about?

But that's not how it works. When we understand the saving purpose of God, we join our prayers and, listen to this, "Our prayers become instrumental in God fulfilling His plan." When we hear the Lord is gonna build the church, that doesn't, it doesn't make us indifferent toward the church. I don't know about you, but I know the apostles in Acts 6:4 were giving themselves to prayer and the ministry

of the word. What do you think they were praying for? They were praying for the blessing of God and the church and the building of the church, even though they knew that Jesus said He would build His church. They joined their prayers in the divine enterprise, so that their prayers, as well as their evangelism became to the meanings by which God fulfills His sovereign ends. And his soven..., sovereign purpose. So Daniel, because he knows that the 70 years is nearly up, in response to that, according to verse 3, "Gives his attention to the Lord God, to seek Him by prayer and supplication. With fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

True prayer then is in response to the Word, and we went into detail on that that I'll not rehearse. Secondly, it is...it is grounded in God's will. You read the Word, and it excites your prayer life. And, for me, it...it...it does that a number of ways. Not just with regard to God's plan. For example, if you're reading the Scripture, and it speaks of God, then you long to commune with Him. You're reading Scripture, and it speaks of His Blessing, then your...your prayer turns to praise. And when it speaks of glory, we long to give Him that glory. And someday to share that glory. When it speaks of promise, we long to see that promise fulfilled. When it speaks of judgment, we long to see sinners delivered from that judgment.

In all of these matters that we read about in the Scripture, there is an inciting, to the sensitive heart, to pray. So we could say, essentially, the Word teaches us how to pray. As we line up our prayers with the purposes of God. And so the Bible then generates prayer. Prayer is generated by the Word. Secondly, it's grounded in God's will. The more specific the Will of God is revealed in Scripture, the more specific our prayers become. We are not fatalists. We do not listen to the Word of God and then some level of bitter resentment or passive resona...resignation or theological reservation, just say, "Well, God's gonna do what He's gonna do and let Him do it." Not at all.

You remember that in Luke 18:1, Jesus said, "At all times pray and do not lose heart." We don't acquiesce to some gray acceptance of everything the way it is. And I told you last time, prayer, in God's will, is a form of rebellion against Satan and against sin and against the flesh and against the world in its fallenness. We rebel against the things that dishonor God. We rebel against the things that steal His Glory, that mock Jesus Christ. We...we never come to terms with that. We are never content to just accept that. We pray, like David did, the imprecatory Psalms, down on the heads of the enemies of God. We...we understand Jesus making a whip and cleaning out the temple that was dishonoring His Father. And our prayers fit in, because James 5:16 says, "The effectual fervent prayer of a...of a righteous man avails much."

So they then become the means by which God accomplishes His purpose. Prayer, then, is generated by God's will...or generated by God's work grounded in His Will. And thirdly, last time, characterized by fervency. The kind of passionate prayer that lines up with God's will and is stimulated by God's word is fervent. And in verse 3, we see how fervent it was, as Daniel engages himself in prayer and supplication, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. The intensity here...the

persistence here is immediately clear. There is a certain relentlessness, a fervency that characterizes his prayer life. We would call it today importunity, as illustrated in Luke's 11 and Luke 18.

Now let's come to the rest of the chapter for tonight. True intercession is generated by the Word of God. That is the Word stimulates it. It is grounded in the Will of God. The more we know about the purposes of God, the more we line up our prayers with those purposes. And, thirdly, characterized by fervency.

Number four, true intercession is realized in self-denial. True intercession is realized in self-denial. Folks, I want you to understand that the truest and purest kind of prayer has very little to do with me. Very little to do with I, ego. You find, in the beginning here, in verse 4, "I prayed to the Lord my God, and confessed." The only...the only personal references in this prayer by Daniel have to do with the confession of his sinfulness. Real prayer is basically stimulated by one's own sense of sinfulness. There is an overwhelming self-denial in prayer, because the purest and truest kind of prayer has recognition of its own utter unworthiness.

There is no self-confidence in Daniel. There is no self-seeking here. There is no self-righteousness here. There is no, "This is what I think I deserve, because I'm Your child, and I've served You," etc. There's none of that attitude. All of that self-confidence, all that self-seeking, all of that self-righteousness is completely lost in the true intercession.

And when Daniel began to pray, the first thing out of his mouth, "I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed." That's the start of it...This is how David prayed, and you can find other illustrations of it. David, of course, is a classic illustration. David prays...that...that the same way, as he pours out his heart to God. Psalm 32, Psalm 51. In 1 Chronicles 21, an illustration starting in verse 8, "Go and speak to David saying, 'Thus,' says the Lord, 'I offer you three things. Choose for yourself one of them that I may do it to you.'" God says, "I'm gonna have to punish you, David." Why? Because back in verse 8, David said to God, "I have sinned greatly in that I've done this thing. Please take away the iniquity of Thy servant, for I have done very foolishly." And David starts his prayer with a confession, and God says, "Well, I'll give ya choice of your judgment."

And in all honesty, that's the way all of our prayers have to begin, and it is...it is not that we have all done what David did, whether it's sinning with Bathsheba, killing Uriah, or numbering the people of Israel as in 1 Chronicles 21. And, certainly, there is no indication that Daniel was a man of wicked conduct. Just the opposite is true. He was a man with immense personal integrity, a godly man in every sense. And, yet, it is true that the more godly you are, the more of your sin you see.

I've said this to the students at the college. Young people always ask me the question, "Will I ever get victory over sin?" and I tell them, "Of course you will. As you mature in Christ, there'll be a

decreasing frequency of sin. The more mature you become, the more you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. The more devoted to Christ you become, the less frequently you sin. However, as you grow in maturity, you will sin less but feel worse about it." And this is what we see with Daniel.

I suppose somebody could argue, like they did with Isaiah, when Isaiah said, "Damn me, curse me, woe is me, because I'm disintegrating." Isaiah could see nothing but his sin. We saw that with Peter in Luke 5:8 this morning. "Depart from me, O Lord, I'm a sinful man." Now this is not to say there is some great scandal in the life. There is just this overwhelming sense of sinfulness, and that is how a true intercessor begins his prayer. You come with a...with an overwhelming sense of unworthiness. You don't go rushing into God's presence and say, "Hey, I gotta remind You, this is what I deserve, or this is what You owe me. I'm...I'm cashing in my spiritual chips here."

Daniel comes with a sense of his own wickedness, a sense of his own failure, and he understands that he needs to be humiliated in the presence of God. When Abraham went before the Lord, to tarry before the Lord according to Genesis 18, "Behold now...he says...I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." Abraham is saying, "I'm gonna talk You, Lord, but I really shouldn't be opening my mouth. I am dust and ashes." And that is the right attitude. The true intercessor is clothed in self-denial.

Now, let me tell you, folks, this goes a long way in ordering the nature of your prayer life. Because if the first thing that happens when you arrive in the presence of God is you lay out before God your utter unworthiness, that has a direct impact on what you're about to ask for. On the other hand, Luke 18, he prayed like this, "I thank You that I am not as other men, but I tithe, and I fast, and I do this, and I do that." He laid out all his credentials before God, while the publican beat on his breast and had his head down and his face down, and said, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." He wouldn't even so much as lift up his face. Jesus said, "That's the man that went home justified." So any kind of prayer, any kind of intercession starts with the recognition that you don't deserve anything from God, that you are merely the subject of His Mercy, the subject of His Grace, and though you are forgiven, you are not worthy. You understand that? Forgiven, but not worthy.

You know, we can really play games with 'em...with ourselves and convince ourselves that because there isn't some big scandal in our life, because there isn't some big...notable sin or pattern of sin in our lives, that we are somehow worthy. There's a prayer prayed long ago that I often read. It goes like this, and it's the prayer of a minister. "Oh, God, I know that I often do Your Work without Your Power and sin by my dead, heartless, blind service, my lack of inward light, love, and delight, my mind, heart, tongue moving without Your Help. I see sin in my heart, and seeking the approval of others, this is my vileness, to make men's opinion my rule, whereas, I should see what good I have done and give You all the glory...It is my deceit...he said...to preach and pray and stir up other spiritual affections in order to begat commendations for myself. Whereas, my practice should be daily

to consider myself more vile than any man in my congregation...Help me to rejoice...he said...in my infirmities and give You praise to acknowledge my deficiencies before others and not be discouraged by them, that they may see Your Glory more clearly...Let me learn of Paul...he said...whose presence was common, whose weakness great, whose speech contemptible." This is the spirit of prayer.

Another minister put it this way. Give me a deeper repentance, a horror of sin, a dread of its approach...Give me a deeper holiness in speech, thought, action...Plow deep in me, great Lord, heavenly farmer, that my being may be a tilled field, the roots of grace spreading far and wide."

Now, these people understood what it meant to really intercede. You...you got to the Lord, literally compelled by your own unworthiness. And that's precisely the way Daniel prayed. Here was the best of men, the noblest of men, the godliest of men. He ranks probably in the triumvirate of Old Testament godly heroes. And, yet, all he can see about himself when he comes into the Presence of God is his sinfulness, and he arrives initially to confess his sin. Again, I say, true intercession is realized in the context of personal self-denial. That's very important, lest we load all of our prayers with the long list of things that we want, and some illusion about the fact that we may actually deserve them.

There is a great amount of self-denial in the way the Lord taught the disciples to pray. He said, "When you pray, pray like this. Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed by Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come...and what's the next line?...Thy Will be done, in earth as it is in Heaven." That is the...that is the same realization of self-denial. Your Name be hallowed. Your Kingdom come. Your Will be done. And when it comes to us, just "give us our daily bread, and lead us not into...what?...temptation." There is the recognition of our vulnerability and our sinfulness. That's an essential component in true intercession, so that I'm not bringing my personal agenda to God.

Number five in this list, true intercession is generated by God's word. It's grounded in God's will. It's characterized by fervency. There's a passion in praying. It's realized in an...in a context of self-denial. Number five, it is identified with God's people. This is a very important issue here. It's identified with God's people. I want you to look at verse 4. Daniel says, "I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed and said...and after what he says in verse 4, go down to verse 5...we have sinned, committed iniquity...etc., verse 6...we, our kings, our princes, our fathers, all the people of the land...verse 7...to us...verse 8...to us, O Lord, our princes, our fathers, we have sinned...verse 9...we have rebelled...verse 10...we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God."

That is the tone of this prayer. There is just we and us and we and us. Were all these sins...characteristic of Daniel? No. No. That Daniel had obeyed the Lord. Daniel had followed by walking in the teaching of God's word. Daniel had not transgressed God's law. But here, he identifies himself with his people. This is like Ephesians 6:18, where Paul says, "Praying always for all saints." The focus of our prayers goes like this. First we face our own failure. We face our own

unworthiness. And then we embrace all the needs, the spiritual needs of others. This is...this is essential in real intercession. You cannot go to God as if you existed on an island. You cannot go to God with your list of petitions, which only satisfy your own desires. There...there needs to be the sense in which you are part of the body of Christ. There is a...I guess the word in our culture today is there's a solidarity here. And the Jews understood this. This is part of Galatians 6:2, "Bearing one another's burdens and so fulfilling the law of Christ."

Daniel hasn't elevated himself above his people and sitting there like a critic and saying, "Well, this person is doing that wrong, and they did this, and they did that," and all of that. He literally is engulfed in the solidarity of people and the failures of Israel to become his...The identification is so complete that he feels the guilt. He feels the pain. He feels the sorrow. He regards the sins of his people as his own. He regards the sins of the priests as his own. The sins of the rulers and the judges and the kings as if they were his own. He cannot disconnect himself from his people...

I understand that if you...by reading the 2 Corinthian letter of Paul. Paul is literally under tremendous, overwhelming burden that has, really, nothing to do with what's going on in his life, and everything to do with what's going on in the Corinthian church. He calls it a thorn in the flesh. He...he says that it is so overpowering to him, that he is depressed in chapter 7. He says it is so severe that he literally has affliction. He is burdened excessively beyond his own strength, chapter 1. And...it didn't have so much to do with his own life as it did with what was happening among the people that he loved.

I guess what I'm trying to say is you have a classic illustration here that the first point of your prayers is to recognize your unworthiness. The second point is to recognize the need of the body of Christ. Is to embrace the people of God. Now that's very important that you defuse your own request into the great good for the group. It's as if you would say, "Lord, I, You know my needs. You know my life. But whatever You do, may it benefit the church. May it be for the good of the body. May it embrace the needs on a wider level. I'm not asking for anything that would diminish the rest of the fellowship. I don't want you to do anything in my life that would somehow be negative in the lives of others. The focus of my prayers in the case of Daniel, the focus of Daniel's prayers is the whole of the people who named the name of God, because he can't divorce himself from that. And that...that makes him...that makes him a co-intercessor. That...that keeps him from being a critic. That keeps him from sitting outside and damning them all, and sitting in judgment on them all. He...he feels the pain. It's the empathy, the sympathy, something like even Jesus felt when He wept at the tomb of Lazarus, because He could see the sorry that death caused and would cause, when he wept over the city of Jerusalem, whom he so wanted to gather to himself. And this is the kind of praying that Paul does at the beginning of Philippians, at the beginning of Colossians in the 4th and 5th verse of...of Philemon's letter, we...we...we find the same thing. We find the same kind of praying in Ephesians 1. We find it in the 15th chapter of Romans, as Paul wraps his arms around the church, and he will never be content, and he will never be happy. He will never be satisfied until the work has extended to the church.

So, you know, if you're praying...the simplest way might be, Lord, I...I have some things to bring before You, but I only want You to do what is good for my family, what is good for the people around me, what is good for my fellowship that I enjoy, people that I serve with, minister with. I only want You to do what benefits my church. I don't want You to isolate me."

This was Daniel. This was Daniel lost in the plural pronouns here. I mean a really self...self-righteous man would repudiate such a...an identification. But Daniel saw the people the way of the Jews always did, solidarity. They all suffered together. They all were blessed together. And this identification with God's wayward people leads him to be an intercessor, rather than a critic. You have to criticize when the truth is not obeyed. You have to preach against error and against apostasy. But when it comes to the point of intercession, you have to embrace the people of God. It's easy to sit and criticize somebody else as a sinner. But when you do that, you are definitely blind to your own sins. Maybe we could say it this way. The secret of real intercession is we not I. Prayer is identified with God's people. And your own personal requests and your own personal needs get defused into what is good for the Kingdom. Lord, do in my life what benefits Your church. Do in my life what builds Your Kingdom. Do in my life what blesses my family and my spiritual sphere of influence.

And then that leads us to number six, and this is really so much the body of this. And we've already touched on it in the matter of self-denial. Real intercession is strengthened in confession. Real intercession is strengthened in confession. We've already seen the self-denial aspect in...in the fact that he confessed in verse 4. We find down in verse 20, at the end of his prayer, "While I was speaking and praying and confessing my sins." So at the beginning, he starts confessing. At the end, he's still confessing. This is the tone...and, as one continues to pray, it's as if there is an escalating awareness of one's sin...so the true intercessor never comes to term with his own sinfulness. Confession becomes a way of life. The more devout the soul, the deeper the love of God, the higher the standard of holiness, the truer the commitment to God, the greater will be the sense of sinfulness. And the...the process of intercession, in a sense, goes to a greater understanding of one's unworthiness.

Prayers, as I mentioned, that David illustrate...this Psalm 32, Psalm 51, wonderful intercession on the part of Ezra in chapter 9 of the book of Ezra, and chapter 10. Chapter 9 verse 2 of Nehemiah shows the same thing. Paul had this. I...I think the most profound agony of the heart of Paul, if you really want to see him confessing sin, is Romans 7. While it's not a formal prayer, it certainly is an indication of the character of his heart. "The things I wanna do, I don't do. The things I don't wanna do, I do." That's the purist confession. What he was saying was he's a wretched man. He confesses a principle in him that keeps him from doing what honors God, what he knows is right. He acknowledges that it's there.

You look at Paul, and you could...you couldn't imagine a stronger Christian. You couldn't imagine a greater servant of the Lord. And, yet, how amazing to say, "O, wretched man that I am." How amazing that he says at the end of his life not I was, but I am the chief of what? Sinners. Confession is a daily part of Daniel's life. And as he embraces the sins of his people, he engulfs his own sins, as well, because just the recitation of all their failures is a reminder of his own. You know, their...their whole...their whole life, the Jewish people, was all around the issue of sin. The whole sacrificial system was a constant, relentless reminder. The Day of Atonement each year, a reminder of their sins. When John the Baptist came, he started immediately by preaching repentance for sin. The last of the Old Testament prophets. I mean from the...from the very beginning in Exodus to the very end of that economy with the...the...the coming of John the Baptist, confession of sin, repentance was at the heart of all of it. Hezekiah, 2 Chronicles 29, calls his people to confess. Ezra did the same. Nehemiah did the same. Jeremiah cries out for his people to confess their sin, as do the other prophets.

Let's look how this intercession flows. Just starting in verse 5, I'll...I'll pick out the...some as we go. "We have sinned...we, again...committed iniquity, acted wickedly, rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances." And when you do this, when you continue to recite this, you continue to reinforce the fact that you don't deserve anything, and it takes all of that self-confidence and sense of deserving out of your prayers. In verse 6, "Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants, the prophets who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, all the people of the land." Verse 8, "Open shame belongs to us, O Lord, to our kings, our princes, our fathers, because we have sinned against You." Verse...10, "Nor have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. Indeed, all Israel has transgressed Thy law, turned aside, not obeying Thy voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath, which is written in the law of Moses, servant of God, for we have sinned against Him. Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us, against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole Heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem."

He's talking about the terrible Babylonian judgment. "As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Thy truth. Therefore, the Lord has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us; for the Lord our God is righteous with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we haven't obeyed His voice."

Lemme tell you how you pray. You go to the Lord, and you say, "Lord, I just want you to know I'm a sinner, and here's the pattern of my sin, and here's the pattern of my sin, and here's the pattern of my sin." And, like Daniel, as you begin to recite before God the pattern of your sin, you begin to suck right out of your prayers those things that request God to give you this or give you that or do this or do

that before you...for you, and you're content to say, "Lord, thank You for not judging me." And your prayer becomes content with what you haven't received from God, rather than preoccupied with what you think you should get...you have sinned. You have committed iniquity. You have done wickedly. That carries the idea of knowing to do something wicked and doing it anyway. You have rebelled, defying divine authority. You've turned aside from God's laws. You haven't listened to His prophets, to the Word. And this is true of all of us. This is true of Paul.

There is terrible confusion and shame in your life because of this. You have even sinned against God's mercy. That's what verses 9 and 10 say. You rebelled, and then in verse 11, you transgressed the law. Even when God was patient, you just kept doing it. Curses were given by God, according to verses 11 and 12, which were incentives to obedience. I mean the reason for a curse is to alert you to the consequence of disobedience. And there even came a great calamity, the Babylonian captivity, a terrible calamity, which is the righteous judgment of God. But in spite of that terrible calamity, yet, verse 13 says, "We haven't sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from iniquity and giving attention to Thy truth." Here the people are in captivity. The 70 years is almost over, and they still haven't done what is right before God.

So true confession is...is at the heart of a real intercession. This intercession becomes purer and purer as it rehearses sin. So any thought of injustice, any thought of divine unfairness or divine inequity...it disappears...I hear about people who quote unquote are mad at God because of some calamity in their life. What an utterly unthinkable reaction. You should never be anything but thankful to God for His mercy that you're not consumed, right?...So...God has kept the calamity in store and brought it on us, verse 14. "For our Lord, the Lord our God is righteous." In other words, what did you expect? You don't expect to have a perfect life, do you? You don't expect to have everything exactly the way you want it. Can't happen. Why? You're sinful, and He's righteous. And a righteous God cannot affirm sin. And so there will be negative consequence in life...

And so in verse 15, "Now, O Lord our God, who has brought Thy people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and has made a for Thyself, as it is this day--we have sinned, we have been wicked." This is essential. This is confession, and the door of confession is the end of chastening. "We have sinned." This is what strengthens real intercession, and it brings you down to where you know you deserve nothing, and you plead with God, whatever He does do, His mercy and grace upon grace, to His eternal glory. So true intercession, then, is strengthened in confession.

Number seven, just a couple more, it is dependent on God's character. As we pray in the midst of this, our prayers reach out to the consistency of God's character. Verse 4, "Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, Who keeps His covenant and loving kindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments." This identifies the consistency of God. God is great. God is awesome. God is faithful to His covenant. God is gracious...that's what loving kindness means...to those who belong to Him. Down in verse 7, again, the character of God, "Righteousness belongs to Thee, O Lord, but to

us open shame, as it is this day--to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those who are nearby, those who are far away in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of their unfaithful deed which they have committed against You." You're very different than we are. You are righteous. Righteousness belongs to You. So here we find in those two verses, God is great and awesome and faithful and gracious, and here He is righteous.

Down in verse 9, He is compassionate, and He is forgiving. And down in verse 15, He is mighty. Here are the characteristics of God that we bank on. His power, His awesome majesty, His faithfulness, His kessed, His steadfast loving kindness, His righteousness, His holiness, His compassion, His mercy, His forgiveness. And that's what we plead for. So when we go to God, we recognize our sin on the one hand, but on the other hand, we also realize that our prayers are being offered dependent on His character. Lord, we can call on You, because You are a great and awesome God Who will be faithful to us, because we are Your children. Who will show grace to us, because we are Your children. Who will show compassion and forgiveness for our sins, because we are Your children. And we come to You to ask You to demonstrate the consistency of Your majestic, powerful, righteous, steadfast, faithful, merciful, forgiving, compassionate character.

You could never ask God for what is inconsistent with His attributes. You could never ask God for what is inconsistent with His holy nature. So Daniel intercedes for his people, because he knows God loves his people and is gracious and merciful and compassionate and forgiving.

One final element of intercessory prayer comes in this chapter. Let's pick it up in verse 16. "O Lord...he's still praying...in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem." Jerusalem, remember now, has been sacked for nearly 70 years. "Thy holy mountain...he calls it...for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people...Thy people...have become a reproach to all those around us. So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Thy servant and to his supplications...and here it comes...for Thy sake, O Lord, let Thy face shine on Thy desolate sanctuary."

Let me give it to you. This is the final great element of intercessory prayer. It always consummates in God's glory. It's never for my sake and for what I want, but, Lord, for Your sake. Listen, the captivity of Judah was affecting the reputation of the God of Israel. What kind of God can't protect His own people from the Babylonians? Are the gods of the Babylonians superior to the God of Israel? Apparently so. The non-existence of Jerusalem, the non-existence of the great temple to the true and living God Who made the heavens and the earth, the destruction of the sanctuary, that terrible, terrible decimation effected by a nation of people worshipping false gods was a dishonor to the true and living God. And Daniel is saying, "I'm praying, because I'm seeking Your reputation. I want You to vindicate Your great and glorious name." That's the issue. That's why we pray.

I know You promised to do it. Do it, Lord. That it may vindicate Your name, which has been slandered by the people who sinned and brought about this judgment...This is a sad, sad situation. The terrible dishonor to the name of God that Israel has been conquered by the pagans. When that terrible nation came in, it was as if God was defeated. And that's how Daniel saw it.

There's just utter selflessness here. This is reminiscent of John 14:13, you know, "Whatever you ask in My name, I'll do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son." That's the end of all prayer. So Daniel is saying, "We are responsible. We are sinful. And because of our sin, Your name has been dishonored. O God, consistent with Your righteousness, consistent with Your mercy, consistent with Your grace, consistent with Your compassion, consistent with Your forgiveness, please, God, restore Your people. Please, God, bring this captivity to an end. Please, God, rebuild Your nation, rebuild Your city, rebuild Your temple. Put Your name there again."

Verse 18, "O my God...he says...incline Your ear and hear. Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Thy name...It's Your city. It has Your name...for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but account of Thy great compassion. Let the world see how compassionate You are. Let the world see how forgiving You are, how gracious You are." So verse 19, here's the final petition, "O Lord...really, this is the first petition he's given...O Lord, hear! O Lord...here it comes...forgive! O Lord, listen, take action...and here's the reason...for Thine own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name. Your reputation is my concern. Your reputation is my concern."

It reminds me of Henry Martin when he went to India and went into the Hindu temple for the first time and was so shook by his experience that he burst into tears. He wrote in his journal he ran top speed out of that Hindu temple and wrote, "I cannot endure existence if Jesus is to be so dishonored." He saw all of that as a dishonoring of Lord Jesus Christ, and that set him to prayer for the nation of India that the Gospel might be spread across that nation and God would not be continually dishonored there. By the way, Grace To You is part of the answer to his prayer as we broadcast every day of the week across the entire nation of India, the truth of the Word of God. But it's for the glory of God that we pray. It's not for some personal agenda.

So here we see prayer initially generated by the Word of God, consummated in the glory of God. Here, forgive, take action, don't delay. That's...that's the...request element of this long prayer. Most of it is confession, as it should be. But in the end, it's all for the glory of God. Now, by the way, that's the kind of prayer that gets answered, verse 20. "Now, while I was speaking and praying...in the middle of the prayer...and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God on behalf of the holy mountain of my God...and here, he literally summarizes everything right there, everything that's in the...the prayer is all summarized there...while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel came, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in my extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering." Boom, in the middle of

the prayer, here's Gabriel with the answer. And the answer is the incredible prophecy that ends the chapter. We won't go into that.

That's the kind of prayer that gets answered. Prayer generated by the Word of God, grounded in the will of God, characterized by fervency, realized in self-denial, identified with others, strengthened in confession, that depends on God's character and that pursues, ultimately, God's glory. That's how we pray. That's how we pray. Just the way Daniel prayed. "O God, forgive, forgive. Lord, take action, and do it for Your own name sake, for Your own glory, to put Yourself on display." That's how we pray. It's...it's not...there's nothing about it that's personal. There's nothing about it that's selfish. There's nothing about it that's material, particularly. There's nothing about it that's physical. It all has to do with, "God, You do what glorifies You, and, Lord, we confess that we aren't worthy of any of it. But we do know this. You are a God of mercy, grace, compassion, forgiveness. That's Who You are, and when You do that, You, therefore, put Yourself on display. Let the world see You as a God of grace."

And we know God did do that. God led His people out of Babylon. They went back, and they rebuilt their city, and God has continued to be gracious, even in the midst of judgment to Israel. And as the end of the chapter shows, there's coming a time when Messiah will come and actually die. Verse 26 talks about the Messiah being cut off. He will come and He will actually die for His people. Prayer was answered by an incredible prophesy, if you...you wanna study that passage, you can get the tapes from our study in the book of Daniel.

So here we learned how to pray, and I hope this has been instructive and helpful for you and will stimulate a greater commitment to pray out of the Word of God, according to the Will of God, and for the glory of God.

Father, we come to You now even in this moment of prayer, brief as it is, confessing our sins and our unworthiness, confessing that we don't deserve anything, and you have given us all spiritual blessings and heavenly, as in Christ Jesus. And we do pray, O God, that You would forgive all of our sins, and that You would continue to cleanse us and wash us, that we might be an honor to Your name, and that we might be useful to the advancement of the Gospel and the extension of Your glorious Kingdom. We pray for Your church. We...we know that You're building Your church, and, yet, Lord, we look at the church and there is so much there that dishonors You. Your name is so dragged down and dishonored by false teachers and false doctrine and sin and apathy and indifference and shallowness. Lord, we...we ask that You would...that You would restore Your church, that You would make that ragged Cinderella into a beautiful bride, that You would transform the church into that chaste virgin. God, we confess the sins of those who call themselves Christians. The sins of those who say they're at Your church. We ask, O God, that You would not allow Yourself to be dishonored, but that You would take action to glorify Yourself in the midst of Your church. That includes us. That includes all who profess Your name.

We grieve in our hearts that You are so often dishonored. It's as if we see Your church in a kind of exile, literally engulfed by the Babylon of our times, literally sucked as captives into the world, and being affected by that, and Your holy mountain, as it were, the...the glory and wonder of Your truth and the exal...exaltation of Your name has been so terribly diminished as the Babylon of our times has taken the church captive. We pray, O God, that this captivity would end, and that Your church would come forth freed from that captivity, washed and cleansed and purified. To lift up Your name again, and to hold the banner of Christ high. We know, Father, that these are times of judgment and, yet, we would pray against that. We would rebel against that with all fervency and ask that You would, again, glorify Your name.

We thank You that You have called us to prayer, and that our prayers are used as part of the means by which You accomplish Your great purpose. Glorify Yourself. Glorify Your Son. Glorify Your name in the church. This is our prayer. We are utterly unworthy. We seek nothing for ourselves, but only for the glory of Your great name. For Christ's sake, Amen.

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