

HOW TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE

9 In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, ²in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of Jehovah that came to Jeremiah the prophet, the number of years [appointed] to complete the desolation of Jerusalem, [namely,] seventy years. ³So I set my face toward the Lord God, to seek him by prayer and petition, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes.

⁴I prayed to Jehovah my God and made confession, saying, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant and lovingkindness with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁵we have sinned, we have gone astray, we have done wicked things, and we have rebelled; we have turned away from your commandments and your ordinances. ⁶Neither have we listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and to all the people of the land. ⁷O Lord, righteousness belongs to you, but for us there is shame on our faces to this [very] day—to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, both those who are near as well as those who are far away, [scattered] through all the countries where you have driven them because of their trespass that they have committed against you. ⁸O Lord, for us there is shame on our faces, for our kings, for our princes, and for our fathers, because we have sinned against you. ⁹To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, even though we have rebelled against him. ¹⁰Neither have we obeyed the voice of Jehovah our God, [instructing us] to walk in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. ¹¹Indeed, all Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey your voice. Therefore, the curse has been pronounced upon us, and the oath that has been written in the Law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against him. ¹²He has confirmed his words he spoke against us, and against our judges who judged us, by bringing upon us a great calamity; for under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. ¹³Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not sought the favor of Jehovah our God by turning from our iniquities and paying attention to your truth. ¹⁴Therefore Jehovah has watched over the calamity and brought it upon us; for Jehovah our God is righteous in all his works that he does, and we have not obeyed his voice. ¹⁵Now, O Lord our God, you who have brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have gained fame that endures to this [very] day, we have sinned, we have done wickedly. ¹⁶O Lord, in keeping with all your righteousness, let your anger and your wrath be turned away from your city, Jerusalem, your holy mountain; because our sins, and the iniquities of our fathers, have caused Jerusalem and your people to become an object of scorn to all those around us. ¹⁷Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayers of your servant, [listen to] his petitions; for the Lord's sake, cause your face to shine upon your sanctuary that [now] lies desolate. ¹⁸O my God, incline your ear, and hear; open your eyes and look upon our desolations—the city that bears your name! We do not present our petitions to you on the basis of our righteousness, but on the basis of your great mercies. ¹⁹O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act! For your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name.

²⁰While I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my petitions before Jehovah my God on behalf of the holy mountain of my God—²¹while I was still speaking in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the previous vision, being very weary, touched me at about the time of the evening sacrifice. ²²He instructed me and said, O Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. ²³When you began to make your petitions the word was given, and now I have come to instruct you; for you are greatly loved. Therefore, consider the message and understand the vision. ²⁴Seventy “weeks” have been decreed for your people and for your holy city [in order] to restrain transgression, to seal up sins, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to complete vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy [Place]. ²⁵Know and understand that from [the time] the decree is issued to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until [the coming off] the Anointed One, the Prince, there shall be [a period of] seven “weeks,” and [then there shall follow a period of] sixty-two [“weeks.”] It shall be rebuilt extensively, but within limits, in distressful times. ²⁶At the end of the sixty-two “weeks,” the Anointed One shall be cut off and have nothing—the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary (but [his] end shall come with a flood.) War shall continue to the end—it has been decreed that there shall be desolation. ²⁷He will establish a covenant with many for one “week;” and in the middle of the “week” he will cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease. This one who causes desolation will come at the pinnacle of abomination. But [he shall continue only] until the destruction that has been [divinely] decreed has been poured out upon the desolator. (Dan. 9:1-27)

Introduction

Do you have an effective prayer life? Is your prayer life such that God would be moved to send an angel from heaven to assure you that your prayers are being heard and that you are very precious to God?

Especially in his prayer does Daniel reveal his character, and it is a character (and a prayer) that causes God to declare him to be *“greatly loved”* (vs. 23).

Do you have a prayer life that is pleasing to God? Do you have a prayer life that is very precious to God? Or do you find yourself in the same category as those addressed by James, when he writes, *“You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask for the wrong reasons”* (Jas. 4:2b-3a)? As that passage of James indicates, there are times, perhaps many times, when our prayers are less than pleasing to God.

If you want to have an effective prayer life, you must pray in a manner that is pleasing to God, adhering to such biblical guidelines as are found in Daniel chapter nine.

I. Be God-Centered in Your Prayers (Dan. 9:20b)

In verse 20 Daniel sums up the thrust and objective of his prayer: *“I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my petitions before Jehovah my God on behalf of the holy mountain of my God.”*

Do our prayers have a focus, a definable objective? If so, what is that objective? Is it self-centered, or is it God-centered? If we could tape record our prayers, what would we hear? Would we hear, “Give me, help me, bless me, give me some more;” or, “Help me to know and do Your will, Your will be done.” Is the focus of our prayers this world oriented, or is it spiritually oriented? Do those prayers simply consist of such petitions as, “Bless this world with peace, and bless me and my loved ones with health and happiness;” or do they give first priority to such requests as these, “May Your Holy Spirit bring many souls to peace with You through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and may I and my loved ones be found walking with Christ.”

What does Daniel ask the LORD to do in his prayer?

O Lord, in keeping with all your righteousness, let your anger and your wrath be turned away from your city, Jerusalem, your holy mountain; because our sins, and the iniquities of our fathers, have caused Jerusalem and your people to become an object of scorn to all those around us. (vs. 16)

*Now therefore, **O our God, listen to the prayers of your servant, listen to his petitions, for the Lord’s sake, cause your face to shine upon your sanctuary that now lies desolate.*** (vs. 17)

O my God, incline your ear, and hear; open your eyes and look upon our desolations—the city that bears your name! We do not present our petitions to you on the basis of our righteousness, but on the basis of your great mercies. (vs. 18)

It is striking how Daniel’s prayer focuses on the kingdom of God; praying for the preservation, the restoration, and the building up of that kingdom. This is in keeping with the way in which the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray: *“This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven”* (Matt. 6:9-10.)

According to Daniel, why should the LORD act? What reason or motivation does Daniel hold up to “induce” the LORD to act?

*Now therefore, **O our God, listen to the prayers of your servant, listen to his petitions; for the Lord’s sake, cause your face to shine upon your sanctuary that now lies desolate.*** (vs. 17)

O my God, incline your ear, and hear; open your eyes and look upon our desolations—the city that bears your name! We do not present our petitions to you on the basis of our righteousness, but on the basis of your great mercies. (vs. 18)

O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act! For your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name. (vs. 19)

Again, it is striking how Daniel's prayer focuses on the honor and glory of God; this, too, is in accord with the way in which the Lord Jesus instructs us to pray: *"This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name"* (Matt. 6:9.)

Do our prayers focus on the kingdom of God and the glory of God? Is this the heart of our prayer life? Does this God-centered orientation throb through our prayer life? With regard to this God-centered focus, consider the following petition found in the Lord's Prayer: *"Our Father in heaven, ... Give us today our daily bread"* (Matt. 6:11.) Consider the God-centered orientation perspective as that petition, as it is presented for us in the Book of Proverbs:

... give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with the food that is my necessary portion [i.e.; my daily bread]. ⁹Otherwise, if I have too much, I may disown you and say, "Who is Jehovah?" Or I may become poor and steal, and [by doing] so dishonor the name of my God. (Prov. 30:8b-9)

We are to ask for our daily portion of nourishment so that we neither forget the LORD (if we have a superabundance of material resources we are tempted to think that we do not need the LORD) nor cause His Name to be blasphemed (if we have no material resources to meet our daily needs we will be tempted to resort to stealing.) Thus, even the petition for our daily nourishment is God-centered.

Daniel's prayer is motivated by God's promise and God's purpose: *"I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of Jehovah that came to Jeremiah the prophet, the number of years [appointed] to complete the desolation of Jerusalem, [namely,] seventy years"* (vs. 2.) Daniel is referring to such passages as Jeremiah 25:11-12 and Jeremiah 29:10-12,14b,

This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. ¹²But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt, declares Jehovah, and I will make it desolate forever. (Jer. 25:11-12)

This is what Jehovah says: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place;

11for I know the plans I have for you, declares Jehovah, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. 12Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. 14... and bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares Jehovah, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile. (Jer. 29:10-12,14b)

Daniel discerns that the time for the fulfillment of the LORD's promises has come, and thus he engages in earnest prayer for their fulfillment. Note that the certainty of God's promises and purposes becomes the motivation for action, (in this present case the motivation for active prayer,) not an excuse for complacency. By way of contemporary example, when your favorite soccer player has a clear shot at an empty goal, the anticipation of a certain score does not motivate you to disinterested complacency; on the contrary, it motivates you to exuberant involvement in the game. Likewise, as was true of Daniel, so also, may the promises of God, and the certainty of those promises, motivate us to earnest prayer.

Note, too, that part of the fulfillment of the LORD's promise involves the active participation of prayer:

*This is what Jehovah says: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place ... 12Then **you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you ...** 14**and bring you back from captivity.** I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you, declares Jehovah, and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile. (Jer. 29:10,12,14)*

Daniel's prayer is permeated with the Scriptures. There are numerous references to Old Testament passages and events, such as the promises recorded in Jeremiah as mentioned above. But note, too, the references to the Exodus in verse 15 and to the Law of Moses in verses 11 and 13. In a sense, our prayers need not be original, we need only to know the Scriptures and fashion our prayers in accordance with the will and promises of God as they are revealed in His Word. With regard to prayer for ourselves and our fellow Christians, consider such passages as these:

I pray that your love [for Christ, His kingdom and His people] may abound more and more in knowledge and all insight, 10so that you may discern the things that are worthy, in order that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ—11being filled with the fruit of righteousness, which is through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11)

For this reason, I, indeed—having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and the love [that you have] for all the saints—16do not cease giving thanks for you, mentioning you in my prayers. 17[I pray] that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ,

the Father of glory, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation [to gain insight] in his knowledge, ¹⁸[since he has] enlightened the eyes of your heart. [I pray that] you may know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance for the saints. ¹⁹And [I pray that you may know] the immeasurable greatness of his power [available] to us who believe. (Eph. 1:15-19a)

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. ¹⁰We pray this in order that you may walk in a way that is worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, and ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience with joy, ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. (Col. 1:9-12)

With regard to prayer for the world, consider such passages as the following:

Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, see that they are already white for harvest. (Jn. 4:35); we should pray that the Holy Spirit would make the “fields” of the world ripe for harvest in our day as they were in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ; that is to say, that the Holy Spirit would prepare many hearts and bring many souls to saving faith in Christ Jesus.

And when he [the Holy Spirit] has come, he will convict the world about sin, and about righteousness, and about judgment. (Jn. 16:8); we should pray that the Lord would grant for the Holy Spirit to do His convicting work as it is described by the Lord Jesus in John 16:8.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. (Lk. 10:2); we should pray that the Lord would call Christians to go out and bring in the harvest of souls for the Lord Jesus Christ.

“... our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction.” (1 Thess. 1:5a); we should pray that the preaching of the gospel would be accompanied by the mighty witness and working of the Holy Spirit, resulting in conversions to Christ, as it was when the Apostle Paul preached to the Thessalonians.

Then, too, we may take the actual prayers found throughout the Scriptures and apply them to ourselves, our families, the church, the community, the nation, and the world. We should certainly use the Lord’s Prayer as our guide for prayer, and above all make first priority the petition for the coming of God’s kingdom and the glorifying of God’s great name:

This is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, ¹⁰your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ¹¹Give us today our daily bread. ¹²And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ¹³And bring us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. (Matt. 6:9-13)

II. Be Serious with God in Your Prayers (Dan. 9:3)

Daniel set his face towards the LORD, and determined to seek and gain his objective by prayer and supplication (vs. 3.) Note that verse 3 also makes reference to fasting—the denial of one’s bodily needs for a designated period of time in order to devote one’s self to concentrated service to God.

Based on verse 21, we might even reverently say that Daniel “wore the LORD out” with the spiritual intensity of his prayer and supplication. Verse 21 is sometimes translated, *“Gabriel ... came to me in [my] extreme weariness;”* but, as the brackets indicate, the pronoun “my” is not present in the Hebrew text. A more accurate translation would be, *“Gabriel, being very weary* גַּבְרִיֵּל בְּיָגוּעַ,” came near to Daniel. Often in the apocalyptic literature of the Bible, an angelic figure is used to represent the LORD and His ministry (see more on this in the lesson on Daniel 10:1-11:1); so here the angel Gabriel is here used to represent the LORD Himself. The point is not that the LORD actually becomes physically weary and exhausted, but rather what is occurring here is the very thing commanded by the LORD in Isaiah 62:6-7,

I have posted watchmen upon your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who are Jehovah’s [palace] recorders, give yourselves no rest, ⁷and give him no rest, until he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of [all] the earth. (Isa. 62:6-7)

There is the need for spiritual involvement and spiritual intensity in prayer, the kind you sense on those occasions when you bring a pressing personal need before God; note, for example, the instance of Jacob’s wrestling with the angel of the LORD,

Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.” But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” (Gen. 32:24-26)

Another dimension of this seriousness and spiritual involvement in prayer is persistence and perseverance. According to verse 21, Gabriel appears to Daniel *“about the time of the evening sacrifice.”* As he appears to Daniel, Gabriel reports, *“When you began to make your petitions the word was given;”* i.e.; the command

was issued to go and give Daniel instruction and assurance (vs. 23.) The instruction Gabriel gives is that Daniel's prayer for God's kingdom will be realized, but only after encountering severe and Satanic opposition (vs. 24-27)—**see the accompanying Appendix for a consideration of The Seventy "Weeks" of Daniel 9.** The delay between the beginning of Daniel's prayer and the appearance of the angel Gabriel in the evening ("*When you began to make your petitions the word was given, and now I have come to instruct you,*") as well as the content of the angel's message, is intended to emphasize to Daniel that there is a spiritual conflict (see Daniel 10), and therefore there is need for perseverance in prayer.

Let us remember the counsel of our Lord Jesus Christ when, in Luke 18:1, He exhorted His disciples, "*always pray and not give up*" or, "*do not become discouraged*" or "*lose heart*" (ἐγκάκω). Daniel is an example of the Scripture's teaching of the need for persistence and perseverance in prayer, without losing heart and giving up. We might illustrate this principle of effective prayer in the following way: Billy said he wanted a toy train for Christmas, then he gave up on that request and asked for a toy boat, a few days later he gave up on the request, too, and asked for a toy plane. When Christmas came he got none of the above because his parents did not know what he really wanted. Bobby, on the other hand, said he wanted a model car for Christmas. Every day for weeks he said the same thing, persistently insisting that that was what he wanted. When Christmas came he got his model car. When persistent prayer is offered in accordance with God's revealed will, such prayer will be answered at the appointed time, but not before.

III. Be Honest with God in Your Prayers (Dan. 9:4-6)

Daniel is perfectly honest with God about the condition of Israel, and his own condition before God. He confesses the sinfulness of the nation and his own sinfulness:

... we have sinned, we have gone astray, we have done wicked things, and we have rebelled; we have turned away from your commandments and your ordinances. ⁶Neither have we listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and to all the people of the land. (vs. 5-6)

Furthermore, Daniel acknowledges the righteousness of God:

O Lord, righteousness belongs to you. (vs. 7a)

Therefore Jehovah has watched over the calamity and brought it upon us; for Jehovah our God is righteous in all his works that he does, and we have not obeyed his voice. (vs. 14)

Consider the confession of a Russian Jewish doctor held prisoner in a Soviet concentration camp:

On the whole, you know, I have become convinced that there is no punishment that comes to us in this life on earth that is undeserved. Superficially, it can have nothing to do with what we are guilty of in actual fact, but if you go over your life with a fine-tooth comb and ponder it deeply, you will always be able to hunt down that transgression of yours for which you have now received this blow. (quoted by Charles Colson in *Loving God*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids MI, 1983, p.33)

Having confessed his sinfulness and having acknowledged the righteousness of God, Daniel appeals to the LORD for His mercy:

O my God, incline your ear, and hear; open your eyes and look upon our desolations—the city that bears your name! We do not present our petitions to you on the basis of our righteousness, but on the basis of your great mercies. (vs. 18)

From the LORD's response to Daniel's prayer, we learn that the man who offers such a prayer is greatly loved by God and his prayer is effective; as the angel Gabriel testifies to him, *"When you began to make your petitions the word was given, and now I have come to instruct you; for you are greatly loved"* (vs. 23a.)

In contrast to Daniel's prayer, we hear the prayer of the Pharisee:

The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week and give a tithe of all my income." (Lk. 18:11-12)

The Pharisee views himself as being holier than others, and not to be classified as a sinner (vs. 11.) Daniel was known for his piety; when King Darius approached the lions' den he called out to Daniel, *"O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to save you from the lions?"* (Dan. 6:20.) Nevertheless, Daniel, being aware of his own sinfulness, identifies himself with the sinful nation of Israel (vs. 5-6.) Whereas the Pharisee prides himself on his religiousness (Lk. 18:12), Daniel appeals to the mercy of the LORD.

How honest are we with God? How honest are we even with ourselves? We tend to re-label sin: re-defining it as a mistake, a shortcoming, or "brokenness." We tend to rationalize sin: protesting that because "everybody does it" we should not be blamed nor expect that our sinful conduct meets with God's righteous displeasure. We tend to minimize sin: we wish to compare our sin to the puffy white seeds of the dandelion that can be easily blown away, when in fact our

sinfulness must more accurately be compared to the root of the dandelion, which is exceedingly deep.

If we want to have an effective prayer life, we must approach God and appeal to God on the basis of His mercy (vs. 18) and His righteousness provided by Christ at Calvary. In the final analysis, Daniel could only pray the words of verse 16 (*“O Lord, in keeping with all your righteousness, let your anger and your wrath be turned away from your city, Jerusalem”*) because of the righteousness of Jesus the Messiah and the righteousness of God being satisfied by Christ at Calvary. When God inquires, “Why should I listen to your prayer?” the only acceptable answer is, “For Jesus’ sake.”

Conclusion

How is your prayer life? Is it God-centered? Is there spiritual involvement and intensity and earnestness? Is there honesty with God; do you approach God and appeal to God on the merits of Christ our Savior? If you want to have an effective prayer life, you must pray in a manner that is pleasing to God, by adhering to such biblical guidelines as are found here in Daniel’s prayer.

See accompanying Appendix for an Exposition of Daniel 9:24-27