

Knowing God in Prayer

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[0 : 00] Please send your Bibles back to Daniel chapter 9. You can find it on page 800 and 92.!

So, let's consider a question. When do we usually pray?

Not properly as a church, but individually, personally. When do we usually pray? One statistic somewhere indicates that many Christians pray only when they're in need, or when they have something they want, so they ask God.

Sometimes I afford to that temptation of God. And the problem of praying only when we have a request is, well, first of all, we don't pray that often, because we don't always feel that we are in need, even when we are, but we don't feel it.

But also, second, it treats God sort of like a vending machine, rather than our Father. In Jesus, we are God's children. How would we feel if our kids only came to us to ask for money and for nothing else?

[1 : 40] Daniel 9 gives us an example of relational prayer, where our knowledge of God and our relationship with Him shape the way we talk to Him.

So, this passage opens with Daniel reading the Scriptures in verse 1. In the first year of Darius, he explains who Darius is, 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 17 years.

You might remember the story, the history of Israel. They did wicked things, they did evil things, they disobeyed God's laws, they practiced injustice towards each other, and so God punished them by sending them to the Babylonian exile.

And here's Daniel during the Babylonian exile, this time under the rule of a Persian king named Darius. And he was reading the scroll of Jeremiah.

He was reading his Bible. He would have read Jeremiah 25 or 29, where God declared that after 70 years, he would bring his people back from exile.

[3 : 03] Maybe Daniel would give them that. It's almost 70 years since Jerusalem fell. God's appointed time was nearly fulfilled.

Now, here's the surprise. After that, Daniel didn't roll up the scroll and say, Great! This prophecy is going to be fulfilled soon.

Let's expect that to happen. No. Verse 3. So, I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting and sacral and ashes.

Daniel prayed. He turned God's promise into prayer. He didn't just wait. He treated the reading of God's word not only as something that a good Hebrew man would do, but as a catalyst for a relationship.

He prayed, and he prayed emotionally, out of his heart, with fasting, saccloth, and ashes, which are symbols of lament. We can see the emotional relationship that Daniel had with his God.

[4 : 23] Anglican theologian Jim Packer says, Knowing God is more than knowing about him. It is a matter of dealing with him as he opens up to you and being dealt with by him.

Knowing God is an emotional relationship as well as an intellectual one. Daniel read Jeremiah's prophecy, but he did not treat it as a formula.

Oh, 70 years from 605 BC. It's almost there. Good. Now let's wait. No, he treated God's word as a conversation.

For Daniel, the Bible was not a dead book of letters. It's words spoken by the living God. God speaks.

Daniel responds in a prayer. Now, Daniel read about God's promise to free them from the Babylonian exile.

[5 : 29] Haven't we read about a greater work of salvation and work of redemption? Not from a political bondage, but from the bondage of eternal death and sin.

Haven't we seen an even greater deliverance? We've heard just last week how sin enslaves us, how it chains our desires and blinds our hearts.

If Daniel could be moved by a promise of national restoration, which was not eternal, how much more should we be moved by the promise of eternal redemption?

When we read the gospel, are we moved into prayer? Do we respond? God speaks. Do we respond?

If Daniel prayed because he saw that God would restore, we should pray because we have already experienced that restoration, beginning with a cross.

[6 : 39] And we long for its completion when God delivers us into the new creation. Let the Bible lead you into prayer.

When you read the gospel promises in Christ, respond like Daniel with worship and petition. Don't just say, oh, Jesus has promised to come and deliver us into the new creation.

Okay, I'll just wait and do nothing. No, pray along with John. Come, Lord Jesus. Pray, Lord, bring about what you have promised.

Soon. When God's word speaks, don't let it end as information. Let it become a conversation between you and God.

So, Daniel prayed and he began like this in verse 4. Oh, Lord, the great and awesome God who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments.

[7 : 56] We don't often pray like this, do we? When we pray, we start with a shopping list. When Daniel prayed, he encountered God and God is great and awesome.

I think every prayer should begin not with our needs, but with seeing the one with whom we converse. Daniel was meeting God in prayer, encountering his greatness, and that encounter immediately made him realize his smallness and his sin.

In verse 5, immediately he said, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled. rebelled. We have turned away from your commands and laws.

That's the reflex of awe. Daniel met God's greatness. So, immediately he said, oh, my God, you're so great and in front of you we're sinful, we're wicked.

He responded to God's greatness with confession. Again, we don't often do this. And I think the problem is that we often don't see God's greatness.

[9 : 15] Either because we don't know him deeply enough through the Bible or because we think of ourselves too greatly. Or both. We think of ourselves too greatly because we don't see how great God truly is.

But if the greatness of God makes us feel small, why not run away? Why didn't Daniel flee from God's greatness? Why did he draw nearer?

Because, verse 4, God's greatness is expressed in his covenant love. We've encountered this word before.

Last week, Andrew talked about chesed. It's a Hebrew word that can't be easily translated into English. It's God's unfailing eternal love.

It's God's long and deep love. God is not just great. He loves us.

[10 : 17] And so, in his prayer, in the presence of this great God, Daniel didn't try to flee or hide his flaws. He confessed them all because he knew that God loved him.

He prayed in verse 7, Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame. The people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, and all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

Daniel didn't just confess his sins, he confessed the sins of his people. And as he confessed, the contrast between God and his people became clearer and clearer.

God had been righteous. In verse 12 to 13, you have fulfilled the word spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing on us great disaster.

Yet, we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins. It's not God's fault that they're in exile, it's the people who have been unrighteous and rebellious and unfaithful.

[11 : 43] Verse 10 to 11, we have not obeyed. All Israel has transgressed people. These are relational terms.

The people were the ones who broke the relationship with God. You see, Daniel didn't try to hide or justify anything. He confessed them all.

Yet, right in the middle of his prayer in verse 9, God's God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him.

The same God whose righteousness exposed our sin is also the God whose mercy can cover it.

God is And that's why Daniel went to God confessing everything because he loved him and he's merciful.

[12 : 56] I was trying to think of an illustration. There was a story to illustrate this, but actually Jesus already gave us an illustration for this. And he told us the story of the prodigal son.

In the story, the son demands his inheritance even when his father is still alive. He breaks the relationship and then he goes away and squanders the inheritance and when he runs out of money and life becomes hard, he remembers the joy that is there in his father's house.

So he plans to go home. Now if you read the story, you'll notice that he doesn't know if his father will take him back. And so he rehearses a speech.

He says to himself, I'm going to say, Father, I have sinned. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants. He doesn't expect that his father will take him back as his son.

But when his father sees him back, what does he do? He runs to him. The father doesn't even allow him to finish his speech.

[14 : 11] He embraces him, kisses him, and clothes him with honor. It seems that the son in that story doesn't know the character of his father well enough.

He didn't know whether his father would take him back as his son or not. And so he planned to ask to be a servant. But we do, don't we?

We know our father. And we know how loving and gracious he is. Chesed, long, wide, deep love.

We know our father's arms are always open. We know his love is never ending. He even sacrificed his one and only son so we can be adopted to be his children.

Now if the prodigal son came home to talk to his father in repentance even though he was unsure of how his father would respond, how much more should we come home to our father in repentance every single time we sin?

[15 : 18] Because we're confident that we will receive forgiveness. Again, our knowledge of God should not stop here in our brains.

Now it should not make us say, oh, God always forgives me, I don't need to pray. No. Like Daniel, our knowledge of our father should make us pray, return to him in prayers, in confession again and again for forgiveness.

Especially because in Jesus we see God's mercy and love clearly, don't we? Jesus died for us out of faithful love so that the depth and width of our own sins are covered by his blood.

sin. And so when we read the Bible and his word exposes our sin, let's not hide. Let's lament and confess in prayer.

And let our repentance mirror the greatness of God's attributes that we fail to emulate. Like Daniel, God, you're great. We're sinful.

[16 : 45] Lord, you've been such a patient father, but I've been so harsh with my kids. I'm sorry.

You've forgiven me deeply, but I've held grudges. You've been so faithful to me, but I've been forgetful about you. and yet, Lord, I have the assurance that you love me so much because you have given me your one and only son.

You see how our knowledge of God shapes our prayer, shapes our confession, and it gives us assurance that our father's arms are always wide open.

Now, Daniel didn't stop at confession. He continued with intercession. So, last point, verse 15 to 16.

He prayed, Now, Lord, our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong.

[18 : 01] Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath, from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

Daniel remembered God's past work of salvation in Exodus and made it a basis for his intercession.

He's basically saying, Lord, you've done it before, do it again. Redeem us from Babylon and Persia. And notice Daniel's motive.

His plea is not for our sake, but God's sake. In verse 17, now our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servants for your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.

Daniel is not asking God to make Israel comfortable. He's asking God to make himself known.

[19 : 14] Because when he does mighty acts of salvation, the nations will see him and he will be glorified. God's name.

And so Daniel ended his prayer in verse 19 with, O Lord, listen, O Lord, forgive, O Lord, hear and act for your own sake, my God. Do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name.

Daniel's prayer is not selfish, it's God glorifying. And Daniel's hope is not naive optimism, it's historical faith.

The God who acted once will act again. The God who made a name for himself in Egypt can make his name glorious again in Babylon.

Now, if Daniel remembered Egypt, what do we remember? Calvary, the cross, the cross is the greater exodus, isn't it?

[20 : 30] Jesus' death and resurrection are the decisive act of deliverance. And our redemption is not from political exile, but from eternal death and sin.

And if God went that far once by sacrificing his one and only son, do you think he's not going to finish his work to deliver us into the new creation? He gave us his one and only son to redeem us from sin.

Do you think he's not going to move heaven and earth to bring us home? God's God's to God's God's work of redemption in the past should propel us to pray for the coming redemption.

You have done it before, Lord. Do it again. And so when we see wars, we can intercede. Lord, save us from this madness.

When we see our brothers and sisters in Nigeria and Congo being brutally killed, we can cry out, Lord, you have bought them with the precious blood of your son.

[21 : 46] Defend them. Save them from evil and tyranny. me. But, Lord, when I consider the promises you have made, that those people who stand tall in the midst of persecution and die for Jesus will be standing confidently in front of your throne praising you, all people from all tongues and tribes and nations, oh, I rejoice that our African brothers and sisters who have died will be there too.

we pray invoking God's past work of redemption with the hope of God's future work of redemption.

And we don't just intercede for Christians. We can use the same principle to intercede for non-Christians too. I often take a prayer walk these days.

I try anyway, meaning I go to a park with my dog and I pray while my dog sniffs around. It takes her ages to sniff around, so I've got ages to pray, 30 minutes, 45 minutes, one hour.

Just the other day I went to the park down the road, just that way. It's currently in construction if you've been there. And so I met some builders there.

[23 : 13] and one of the builders stopped and talked to me because there's a dog and for some reason dogs spark conversations. And after talking, it wasn't a long conversation, but after talking I went back to walking and praying and I was thinking, where was I in my prayer?

And then I thought, actually no, I'm going to pray for that builder that I just talked to. And so I prayed, God, you created humans in your own image.

Thank you for creating her in your own image. Thank you for giving her all the gifts and talents that she's now using to serve people through building things.

But Lord, you have expressed your desire to save all people, 1 Timothy 2. and you desire that so much that you have sent your son to die, not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world, 1 John 2.

And so I pray, Lord, if she doesn't know Jesus yet, that you would reveal Jesus to them for your sake, I pray. You see, our relationship with God shapes our prayer.

[24 : 38] prayer. Knowing God, His character, His plan for the world, His desires, and He's revealed all this in the Bible.

Knowing all this should propel us to pray, to talk to Him. And we pray using the language that God has used in the Bible. Friends, in our relationship with God, we pray not only to ask for things.

We do ask for things, and that's okay. But not only for that. We pray to relate, to converse, to see God, to know Him, and to grow in our knowledge of Him.

God, to Him. So let's pray now. Father, we thank You that You have made Yourself known, that through Your Word, we can know You, and we can fellowship with You in prayers.

We thank You for sending us Your Son, Jesus, who showed us Your greatness and love most fully through His death and resurrection, and through His sacrifice, we can draw near to You in prayer.

[25 : 54] And so now help us with the power of Your Spirit to grow in our desire to know You more, to seek You in prayer, and to delight in Your presence.

Amen.