

Main Idea: From Daniel's prayer in chapter 9, we discover five perspectives which are necessary for genuine, God-honoring prayer. We pondered the first three last week, and will focus on the final two this morning.

- I. He looks up (4).
- II. He looks back (5-6).
- III. He looks down (7-10).
- IV. He looks to Scripture (11-14).
  - A. We have transgressed the commands of God's law (11a).
  - B. We have experienced the curse of God's law (11b-14).
- V. He looks up again (15-19).
  - A. Praise God for His help in the past (15).
    1. He redeemed Israel from Egypt.
    2. He made a name for Himself.
  - B. Ask God for His help in the present (16-19).
    1. Recover Your reputation (16).
    2. Restore Your worship (17).
    3. Regard Your Name (18).
    4. Revive Your people (19).

Make It Personal: Let's resolve to do two things daily.

1. Let's admit our daily need for The Book.
2. Let's pray daily in light of what The Book says.

On this Fathers Day I want to issue a charge to the men. There's something that men in particular need to do, according to this text.

*Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-8*

Does the following sound familiar? "Hi, how are you today?" "Fine, thanks for asking. How are you?" "Fine. Have a nice day."

So goes a typical conversation in daily life. It's called "small talk." When asked, we tell people we're fine. It doesn't matter that our house just burned down, our spouse just left us, and the doctor told us we have six months to live! That's the way it is with "small talk." We say things we really don't mean.

It's unfortunate that we engage in so much frivolous conversation with people, but there's a far more serious situation which calls for our attention this morning. Far too often, we practice small talk with God. When it comes to prayer, we say things we really don't mean. Too often, prayer becomes little more than routine religious talk.

The church today needs men who will pray by the Book.

Do you ever think about why the American Church with all its wealth and resources seems to lack power in fulfilling its mission of making Christ known to the nations?

R. A. Torrey put his finger on something decades ago in his classic book, *How To Pray*. He wrote:

"Doubtless one of the great secrets of the unsatisfactoriness and superficiality and unreality of many of our modern so-called revivals, is that more dependence is put upon man's machinery than upon God's power, sought and obtained by earnest, persistent, believing prayer. We live in a day characterized by the multiplication of man's machinery

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

and the diminution of God's power. The great cry of our day is work, work, work, new organizations, new methods, new machinery; the great need of our day is prayer."<sup>2</sup>

The church today is in great need. The reputation of the Lord Jesus Christ is on the line. We cannot afford to play games with God. Getting busy for God isn't the answer. Humbling ourselves before God in prayer is the answer.

But small talk won't do. How can we get beyond small talk in our prayer lives? God has shown us how by providing us in His Word with models, and this morning we're privileged to consider a timely one.

Daniel. Daniel lived in a time similar to ours. He is a Jew, but he's living outside the promised land. As a believer in the Lord, he is a minority, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of people who not only don't know the Lord, but believe in false rival gods.

And he's not what we would call a clergyman. He's a government official, a man trying to make a difference for God in the secular world of politics.

There's much to learn from this man, and the book God used him to give us. As we'll see this morning, God can use Daniel to teach us how to pray.

From Daniel's prayer in chapter 9, we discover five perspectives which are necessary for genuine, God-honoring prayer. We pondered the first three last week, and will focus on the final two this morning.

Allow me to remind you what had happened to Daniel. Daniel had been in exile in Babylon for some 67 years when two things occurred. First, the Medo-Persians conquered the Babylonian empire which had ruled the world for the previous six decades.

Second, during the first year of the reign of the new king, Darius, Daniel was reading the Book written by Jeremiah the prophet, and discovered a promise of God. According to verses 1-2 he learned that God had foretold through Jeremiah that after seventy years He would judge the Babylonians and restore Jerusalem.

Daniel was gripped by the Book. True to His Word, God had just destroyed the Babylonians, and Daniel sensed that the fulfillment of the second half of the promise was just ahead. So what did Daniel do? He prayed! It was a *Bible-directed-prayer*, as ours should be.

What does a Bible directed prayer look like? It's a prayer marked by five perspectives.

#### I. Perspective #1: He looks up (4).

Daniel took his eyes off of himself, and lifted them upward to God. He began his prayer in verse 4, "O Lord, the great and awesome God."

That's where we must start, too, by looking up. God is great and awesome, One who established and keeps His covenant, and we must recognize who He is when we call on Him.

#### II. Perspective #2: He looks back (5-6).

In verses 5-6, Daniel proceeded to look back, and what he saw were the sins of his people. "We have sinned!" he cried. Daniel confessed both the wrong they had done, and the right they didn't do. The Israelites had rebelled against God time after time, and to top that, when God sent His prophets to call them back, they refused to listen.

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<sup>2</sup> R. A. Torrey, *How to Pray*, p. 95.

### III. Perspective #3: He looks down (7-10).

When you look back and see sin, the natural reaction is to look down in shame. A holy God cannot look upon sin, nor can sinners look into the face of a holy God. Daniel cries out twice, in verses 7 and 8, "O Lord, to us belongs confusion of face (AV)!" In the NIV, "We are covered with shame."

That's what happens when we look back and see our sin. We experience shame that causes us to drop our heads.

But Daniel doesn't leave the throne of grace in shame. Nor should we, because in His grace God sent Someone to take away our shame. At the cross Jesus Christ took upon Himself our sins, paid the deserved penalty for them, and therefore removed the shame.

There is now no shame, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).

After Daniel looked up, looked back, and looked down, he exhibited a fourth perspective in his prayer.

### IV. Perspective #4: He looks to Scripture (11-14).

Notice how Daniel grounded his prayer in Scripture in verses 11-14, "All Israel has transgressed *your law* and turned away, refusing to obey you. Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in *the Law of Moses*, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you.<sup>12</sup> You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing upon us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> Just as it is written in *the Law of Moses*, all this disaster has come upon us, yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth.<sup>14</sup> The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.

Please don't miss the obvious. For Daniel, prayer wasn't small-talk. It wasn't a therapeutic session where he "got things off his chest and told God how he felt."

Thankfully, because He's gracious, we can tell the Lord how we feel. But Daniel teaches us something here. His prayer was grounded in Scripture. His prayer was based on truth. His prayer demonstrated good theology. His prayer flowed out of his Bible study.

What does Daniel focus on as he prays? The Torah, the Law of God. He prayed by The Book.

Notice how he affirms two truths pertaining to God's law as he prays.

**A. We have transgressed the commands of God's law (11a).** Verse 11 again, "All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey You."

Notice an important connection. When we disobey God's law, what are we really doing? We are rejecting God. To ignore God's Word is to ignore God's Person. God's Law is God's standard.

And what happens, according to Daniel's confession, when we disobey God's Law?

**B. We have experienced the curse of God's law (11b-14).** Verse 11b, "Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you."

The language of Daniel's prayer is shaped by his knowledge of the Mosaic covenant, the background of which may be foreign to us. The Mosaic Law follows the format which was common in ancient Near Eastern treaties. When a king conquered a people, that sovereign would draft a legal document known as a "Suzerain-Vassal treaty." That covenant was a legally binding agreement between the parties.

The typical format began with a preamble, in which the king introduces himself to his subjects, followed by a historical prologue (where the king reviewed the historical account of his relationship with his subjects). Then came the stipulations, where the king wrote down exactly what he expected of the people under his rule. The stipulations were followed up by a section of blessings and curses, in which the king specified what would happen if his subjects chose to obey or disobey him.

That's exactly what the Lord God did with Israel in the 15th century BC. He redeemed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt, brought them to Mount Sinai, and entered into a covenant with them (known as the Mosaic covenant). As the Sovereign, He wrote down on two stone tablets the stipulations of what He required of His subjects (the Ten Commandments). Then He warned them, and had Moses record the warning in writing, with a list of blessings and curses.

We read the blessings in Deuteronomy 28:1-2, "If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God."

Moses listed the blessings in verses 3-14.

But then God detailed the curses beginning in Deuteronomy 28:15, "However, if you do not obey the LORD your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you."

One of the specific curses of which God warned was this. Deuteronomy 28:36-37 says, "The LORD will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your fathers... You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule to all the nations where the LORD will drive you."

All this was in Daniel's mind as he knelt before God that day. He had seen firsthand God's warning come true. God had judged His people just like He said He would. Daniel is praying by The Book.

Now, listen carefully to Daniel's prayer again in light of what we just learned. This is verses 10-14 in the *Living Bible* paraphrase:

"Oh Lord our God we have disobeyed You; we have flouted all the laws You gave us...we have turned away from You and haven't listened to Your voice. And so the awesome curse of God has crushed us--the curse written in the law of Moses Your servant (11). And You have done exactly as You warned us You would do; for never in all history has there been a disaster like what happened at Jerusalem to us and our rulers (12). Every curse against us written in the law of Moses has come true; all the evils he predicted--all have come. But even so we still refuse to satisfy the Lord our God by turning from our sins and doing right (13). And so the Lord deliberately crushed us with the calamity He prepared; He is fair in everything He does, but we would not obey (14)."

You may be wondering, "Okay, so what can we learn from all this?"

Good question. In light of Daniel's prayer, we can draw a couple of conclusions about God that should affect the way we pray.

1. *God is the law-giver.* What's the reason that we shouldn't use the company credit card for personal purchases? Because we might get caught and lose our job? No. Why is it that we should not have an affair with another person? Because it would cause embarrassment for the kids? No, that's not the primary reason. Why is it that abortion is a blight on our country? Is it because of the economic problems incurred by eliminating 50 million potential tax-payers? No. What's the basic problem with each of these scenarios?

The problem is that each is a violation of the stipulations of the law-giver.

God said, "Thou shalt not steal." God said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." God said, "Thou shalt not murder." Where did He say that? In His written moral Law, which is the reflection of His holy character.

There are lots of ways to sin, but it boils down to this. Daniel specifies the evil of his people in verse 13. We refused to "turn from our sins" and failed to "give attention to your truth."

So what happens when people do that, when they violate God's law? Daniel teaches us that...

2. *God deals with law-breakers.* What's the result of evil living? Three times in this section, Daniel repeats a word which underscores the consequence of law-breaking:

"bringing upon us great **disaster** (12);"

"all this **disaster** has come upon us (13);"

"The Lord did not hesitate to bring **disaster** upon us (14)."

Disobedience brings "disaster" (the KJV translates as "evil;" here it doesn't have moral connotations, but refers to calamity). God deals with law-breakers.

Listen, friends. A holy God isn't interested in hearing sinners bring to Him irreligious small-talk. Here's what He wants. Honest confession. *We have sinned. Our sins have resulted in the disaster we're experiencing.*

What can we do to pray more God-honoring prayers? Do what Daniel did. Let the Scriptures shape what we say to God when we call upon Him.

In fact, I would offer a very practical suggestion. Pray the Scriptures. By that I mean this. With your Bible open before you, pray through passages. Read a text such as Matthew 6:9-13 or Ephesians 1:15ff., and talk to God about what you've read, one phrase at a time.

Let the Scriptures shape your prayers. If you see an attribute of God in a text, praise Him for it. If you see a provision of God, thank the Lord for it. If you see a promise from God, affirm it and express your desire to see God fulfill it in your life. If you see a sin, confess it. If you see a command, ask for strength to obey it.

A pioneer missionary to Mongolia, James Gilmour, wrote the following a short time before he died: "When I feel I cannot make headway in devotion, I open the Psalms and push out my canoe and let myself be carried along on the stream of devotion that flows through the whole book. The current always sets toward God and in most places is strong and deep."<sup>3</sup>

George Mueller did the same. He established orphanages in Bristol, England in the 1800s, cared for as many as two thousand orphans at a time, yet never made the needs of his ministry known to anyone except God in prayer. Yet prayer involved a learning

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<sup>3</sup> in Wallace, 155

process for Mueller. He says early in Christian life he struggled with being distracted in prayer. Until he began to pray by the Book. He explains:

*The difference, then, between my former practice and my present one is this: formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably began with prayer. . . . But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour on my knees before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often, after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then really began to pray.*

*I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental [today we would say “experiential”] fellowship with God, I speak to my Father and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it) about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word. It often now astonishes me that I did not sooner see this point.<sup>4</sup>*

Regarding Mueller, Donald S. Whitney remarks, “Mueller had over fifty thousand specific recorded answers to prayers in his journals, thirty thousand of which he said were answered the same day or the same hour that he prayed them. Think of it: that’s five hundred definite answers to prayer each year—more than one per day—every single day for sixty years! God funneled over half a billion dollars (in today’s dollars) through his hands in answer to prayer.”<sup>5</sup>

If we want to get beyond small talk in our prayer lives, we need to pray by the Book. Which means, as did Daniel, we will look up, look back, look down, and then look to Scripture. Then one more...

#### V. Perspective #5: He looks up again (15-19).

Daniel closes his prayer as he began it, with his eyes fixed upon the greatness of God. He teaches us that as we look upward, we should engage in two God-centered activities.

**A. Praise God for His help in the past (15).** Listen to Daniel again as he reflects on what God did in the past. Verse 15, “Now, O 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.”

Remember, Daniel lived in the sixth century BC, a time in which the Jewish people desperately needed help. So what does Daniel do? He looks back 900 years to the fifteenth century to another time when God’s people needed help. Daniel meditates on what God did for his ancestors. He affirms that God accomplished two things.

1. *He redeemed Israel from Egypt.* Throughout the Old Testament, the Israelites constantly looked back to what God did when He miraculously rescued His people from Egypt. We look back, too, but not to Egypt. We look back to the Cross, for it was there that our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, rescued us.

In every prayer, we look back. That’s what it means to pray *in Jesus’ name*. We don’t just pray in the name of God generically, but in the name of, in dependence upon, the One who rescued us, *in Jesus’ name*.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.crossway.org/blog/2015/07/what-george-mueller-can-teach-us-about-prayer/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.crossway.org/blog/2015/07/what-george-mueller-can-teach-us-about-prayer/>

In verse 15, Daniel says that in addition to redeeming His people, God did something else in Egypt. What was it?

2. *He made a name for Himself.* We live in a society in which people are enamored with themselves. Years ago Doug Marlette probes this indictment by adjusting the following hymn lyrics to fit our theology,

*Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a stunted self-concept like me;  
I once was stressed out, but now am empowered, was visually challenged, but now I see.*

In contrast to our self-absorbed culture, consider Daniel. Daniel was captivated with God, when he prayed, and in the way he lived. Here he praised God for His help in the past.

The hymnwriter understood the value of looking back when he wrote,

*O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home!*

Like Daniel, we should praise God for His help in the past. Only then are we prepared to proceed with a second God-centered aspect of prayer.

E.g.—

**B. Ask God for His help in the present (16-19).** Daniel asked God to do four things in verses 16-19. What's ironic is that he didn't ask for one thing for himself. All four requests have to do with something for God.

1. Recover Your reputation (16).
2. Restore Your worship (17).
3. Regard Your Name (18).
4. Revive Your people (19).

1. *Recover Your reputation (16).* Verse 16, "O 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 fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us."<sup>6</sup>

This is a bold petition. Daniel asks God to turn away His anger from Jerusalem. Why? It's not a selfish request at all. Daniel says, "Lord, we deserved the judgment You sent our way. Jerusalem is in shambles today because we sinned. Yet Lord, because You've judged us, the pagans are mocking us, and You. Please act, Lord, for Your reputation is being unjustly blasphemed. Help us, Lord, for the sake of Your reputation."

One thing's for sure about Daniel's prayer. It's a God-centered prayer. Just notice what we learn about God from the prophet's prayer. He is great, awesome, and faithful (4). He's righteous (7, 14), merciful and forgiving (9). He's a revealing God (10), a judging God (11), a trustworthy God who keeps His Word (12).

We learn a lot about God from Daniel's prayer. What would a listener learn about God from hearing one of *your* prayers? Kind of convicting, isn't it?

Parents, do you allow your children to hear you pray? I'm talking about more than the pre-meal ritual, "Thanks God for this food, Amen." Do your children ever hear you pray, "Lord God, You are holy, righteous, and faithful."?

You say, "But my four year old doesn't understand those words." Maybe not, but you're not talking to your child when you pray, are you? By letting your child hear you

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<sup>6</sup> AV, "O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from thy city, Jerusalem, thy holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us."

pray, you are stretching and shaping your child's view of God. You're showing him or her that the God we pray to is greater than daddy and mommy. You're teaching your child that we come to God on *His* terms, not ours.

Years ago, a woman came with her son to see her pastor, R. A. Torrey. She was in desperation because her son was out of control and hardened, and said to Torrey, "What shall I do with him?" In relaying the story, Torrey writes, "I asked, 'Have you ever tried prayer?' "She said that she had prayed for him, she thought. I asked if she had made his conversion and his character a matter of definite, expectant prayer. She replied she had not been definite in the matter. She began that day, and at once there was a marked change in the child, and he grew up into Christian manhood."<sup>7</sup>

Daniel's first request, "Lord, work with Your people for your honor. Recover your reputation."

2. *Restore Your worship (17)*. Verse 17, "Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary."<sup>8</sup>

What did Daniel ask God to notice? The desolate sanctuary. The temple.

You see, Daniel knew that he and his people had a problem. He knew God had said, "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins (Lev 17:11)." For hundreds of years, the blood of lambs had been shed to make atonement for the sins of God's people.

And where did that happen? First in the tabernacle, and later in the temple. So here was the problem. The temple was in shambles.

Daniel knew that a holy God required sacrifice in order to forgive sins. No wonder he asked God to do something about the condition of the temple. What Daniel did not fully realize was that the day was coming when God would answer his prayer once and for all. And how? God Himself would enter history and make a final sacrifice for sin, on a hill outside of Jerusalem called Golgotha.

Daniel was concerned for God's worship. He longed to see people's sins atoned for, so that those people would give God what He deserves from their lives. Do you share that burden? Are you praying for God to rescue sinners and turn them into true worshippers?

3. *Regard Your Name (18)*. Verse 18, "Give ear, O 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."<sup>9</sup>

Daniel was gripped by God's Name. "Lord, look what's happening to the city that bears *Your* name. Please help us for *Your* name's sake. We don't deserve this, but *You* do."

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<sup>7</sup> Torrey, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Here's how the LB paraphrases Daniel's supplication in v 17, "Oh our God, hear Your servant's prayer! Listen as I plead! Let Your face shine again with peace and joy upon Your desolate sanctuary--for Your own glory, Lord."

<sup>9</sup> AV, "O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called *by thy name*; for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousness, but for thy great mercies."

Brothers and sisters, it's our privilege to bear God's name. He has given it to us. We are His children. Christ is our Savior. We are *Christians*. So what we do affects the reputation of His name. And we should pray about this.

Lord, cause Your name to be regarded highly at WBC, and in our families, and in our lives. May people see us and honor Your name.

4. *Revive Your people (19)*. Verse 19, "O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."

Notice the fast pace, repetition of verbs for Daniel in this verse. This is no rote prayer, but a heartfelt cry. In the AV, "O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, hearken and do; defer not, for Thine own sake, O my god; for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name."

Daniel prays with the perspective the Lord later taught His disciples to have, "Our Father, hallowed be *Thy* name, *Thy* kingdom come, *Thy* will be done."

These were the requests that were on Daniel's heart, which he brought to God in prayer. For God's reputation, for God's worship, for God's name, and for God's people.

How did he learn to pray that way? From The Book. He's praying by The Book.

I began this message with a quote about prayer by R. A. Torrey. I want to finish with another.

"It was a master stroke of the devil when he got the church so generally to lay aside this mighty weapon of prayer. The devil is perfectly willing that the church should multiply its organizations, and deftly contrive machinery for the conquest of the world for Christ if it will only give up praying. He laughs as he looks at the church today and says to himself:

'You can have your Sunday-schools and your Young People's Societies, your Young Men's Christian Associations and your Women's Christian Temperance Unions [Torrey wrote this in 1900], your Institutional Churches..., your grand choirs, and your fine organs, your brilliant preachers and your revival efforts too, if you don't bring the power of Almighty God into them by earnest, persistent, believing, mighty prayer.'"<sup>10</sup>

My friends, we need to stop and pray. Really prayer. We need men who will lead the way, and the rest to follow.

Make It Personal: Let's resolve to do two things daily.

1. *Let's admit our daily need for The Book.*
2. *Let's pray daily in light of what The Book says.*

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<sup>10</sup> R. A. Torrey, p. 95.