

Daniel 9:1-23 Doing prayer the Daniel way

This is a key chapter in the book of Daniel. We learn important lessons on prayer. It's all about doing prayer the Daniel way. The chorus is right, 'Daniel was a man of prayer, daily he prayed three times!' We know that from chapter 6.

Daniel's big prayer is one of those passionate, heartfelt, touching the throne, rooted in Scripture prayers; the kind of prayer that says with Jacob and Jabez, *'Lord, I will not let you go until you bless me; Lord, I am pleading with you until I get an answer'* (Genesis 32:26; 1 Chronicles 4:10).

There are no shortcuts to cultivating such a bountiful relationship with God.

John Owen said, 'What an individual is in secret, on his knees before God, that he is and no more.'

There are five points worth noting:

(1) 9:1-2 The promptings of the prayer

You will notice that we are now operating under a different regime with a different king sitting on the throne, Darius the son of Ahasuerus. We meet Darius in the first year of his reign, around 539-538 BC. Babylon has fallen, consigned to the dustbin of history. That means we have transitioned from one world empire to another, Medo-Persia. A new day has dawned.

Such a momentous event is reflected in the timeline of this amazing book. The chapter order is as follows: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 5, 9, 6, 10-12. Did you see that? Daniel 9 sits in between chapters 5 and 6. That means, the octogenarian Daniel was in the den of lions after this prayer.

This was a critical hour in world history. It was a brand new experience for a whole generation of

real people, who were walking down a road they had never navigated before; they must have been incredibly worried, and apprehensive. They woke up each morning on tenterhooks, and went to bed at night with butterflies in their tummy. Such is the reality of life in Babylon in the sixth century BC.

And that is why Daniel finds himself, again, down on his knees, with an open scroll of Scripture in front of him. For him, this was the norm. In an hour of crisis, Daniel desperately longs to hear from God with a word from above. He knows the value of taking time out with God. Do we?

So far as Daniel is concerned, we need to realise that he considered the writings of Jeremiah to be the living word of the living God. What Scripture says is what God says, and what God says happens.

As Daniel pores over the sacred writings, he is suddenly arrested. Captivated. Like a bolt from the blue, something that seemed almost too good to be true gripped his heart. A light bulb moment. He kept his finger on the papyrus. He stopped. He reread it a time or two just to make sure he was not making it up, for this is what he read:

'This entire land will become a desolate wasteland. Israel and her neighbouring land will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. Then, after the seventy years of captivity are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his people for their sins, says the Lord' (Jeremiah 25:11-12, NLT). The God who spoke to Jeremiah has now spoken to Daniel in his apartment in the royal mews.

If he had kept on reading the scroll for another ten minutes, Daniel would have come across a letter penned in 597 BC to the exiles in Babylon (29:10-14), saying much the same thing!

For Daniel, now in his 80s, we are never too old to read the word of God. This was one of those red-letter moments when your silver hair stands on end. These few verses reminded him, after seven decades in exile, that the God who opened up the Red Sea would open up a way for his covenant people to return to their homeland.

Daniel begins to count from when he was deported in 605 BC and he quickly reckons that seventy years are as good as past. The Jewish captives are on the threshold of a new era.

(2) 9:3 The penitence in the prayer

The message from Jeremiah's scroll fired Daniel up to such an extent that it spurred him to prayer. He was oozing confidence in the sure promises of God, so he storms the gates of heaven itself. He has a lot on his mind, perhaps even more on his heart, so he prays ...

When we understand the truth of the word of God, then we make sense of the purposes and plans of God, and these combine to govern and guide our prayers. Having heard God speak, he is highly incentivised, for it drove him to action and to his knees. Daniel clearly heard from God before God heard a cheep from him.

When we unpack his lengthy prayer (spanning sixteen verses) you will see how it is bathed in the Old Testament with allusions to Leviticus 26:40, Deuteronomy 28:64, Psalm 44:14, and Jeremiah 25:11. This is a great prayer from a great pray-er.

We also observe how frequently he addresses his God as LORD for he is the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. It is the same name he used to reveal himself to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses.

This prayer is one of three noteworthy prayers recorded in Scripture and, ironically, they are all found in chapter nine of each book: apart from here in Daniel 9, there is Nehemiah 9 and Ezra 9. Daniel has been digging down deep into the word of God, now with the same zeal and humility he turns his face and lifts his eyes heavenwards to the Most High. We read that he sought the Lord by prayer and pleas for mercy. He poured out his heart in supplication, he emptied his emotions, he earnestly set his face consciously gazing upon his God. He was determined to get through to God. He was doing prayer the Daniel way!

There were three useful aids to his season of waiting upon God for we read that he did so with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. Daniel assumes the garb and guise of a remorseful soul; he saw himself as a beggar hammering at the back door of God's mercy and grace.

(3) 9:4-14 The particulars in the prayer

Daniel launches into his prayer with a recognition of who God is. Before a single word of heartfelt confession is said, he worships his God - a sense of adoration and admiration of the character of his faithful God.

Always a good place to start. So unlike us as we tend to rush in with a shopping list of all that we want God to do for us! Before you tell God how big your problem is, tell God how big he is!

He is a promise-keeping God who can be trusted at all times; he warmly responds to those who embrace his statutes and obey his precepts. He is marked by firmness and fairness when it comes to dishing out justice to those who flout his commands and ignore his guidance. His steadfast love is legendary, as it reminds us that God never fails; we let him down so often when we sin in thought, word, and deed, but he loves us still.

In the space of four lines on the page of your Bible, when compared to the rest of his prayer which encompasses almost eighty lines, Daniel makes every word count as he joyfully extols the unimpeachable attributes of his sovereign Lord.

When Daniel engages with his God and begins to confess the sins of the people in verses 5-6, he tells it like it is. It is interesting to note that at no time does he point an accusing finger or play the blame game. It is not them and us.

He identifies with this generation of people in every way and that is a defining point of a godly man's intercession. His solidarity with them is most impressive. Like Nehemiah, he stands alongside them in their hour of need; he is shoulder to shoulder with a generation of people, most of whom he doesn't even know; and he is devastated over a problem he did not create.

Daniel's candid honesty and frankness in admitting the grievous sins of the people is highlighted when he describes their intransigence using five different expressions in a single verse.

One, *'we have sinned'* indicates they missed the mark and fell dramatically short of God's gold standard. **Two**, *'we have ... done wrong'* means they are perverse and allowed the bias in their

hearts to dictate the way they lived; time and time again they were crooked in their dealings and bent in their outlook. **Three**, *'we have ... acted wickedly'* suggests they are lawless and ungodly and their gross impiety is seen in their restless, turbulent behaviour.

Four, *'we have ... rebelled'* informs us that they have revolted against the Lord who redeemed them. They adopted an attitude of mutiny and, basically, wanted to do their own thing and go their own way. **Five**, *'we have ... turned aside'* implies that they spurned his love and flatly rejected the divine law. Sadly, they knowingly turned two deaf ears to the prophetic message.

The bottom line is, times without number, they defiantly and deliberately sinned against a holy God. They consistently snubbed every overture of divine love and grace extended to them. They gave God the cold shoulder when they silenced the prophets of old. God has said so much and they have listened so little.

Does that ring a bell? Fast forward to the third millennium and Daniel's insights are a running commentary on what is happening all around us and, sadly, the waters are muddied as all of us have been caught up in such a rat race at one time or another. Have we become desensitised to sin? Perhaps we have sanitised sin and we no longer call a spade a spade but a sharp-edged gardening implement? A heartfelt prayer of confession used in the time of the Reformation says, 'Deepen the sorrow within us for our sins.' So far as the people are concerned, they are enveloped in a filthy garment of total shame, as Daniel shows us how far they have defected and

wandered away from the Lord. There is nowhere to hide. Daniel brings it all out into the open and it is not a pretty sight.

What a stark contrast between them and God when Daniel outlines a five-point affirmation of God's flawless persona in this paragraph, from verses 7-11.

One, he speaks of the purity of God for he is righteous in that he is true to himself at all times, never acting out of character. He never does the wrong thing. **Two**, he refers to the purpose of God for he has scattered them here, there, and yonder. **Three**, he talks of the pity of God for he exercises an abundance of rich, tender mercy in all his dealings with them. **Four**, he highlights the pardon of God for he is willing to forgive them even though they have ridden roughshod over his word. **Five**, he upholds the promise of God for he fulfilled his side of the agreement when he withheld his blessing from them, just as he said.

The age-old principle has not altered, it is the law of cause and effect, we see that in verses 12-14. The people provoked God so they have no one else to blame but themselves when they look at the mess they're in. It was self-inflicted. A case of getting their just deserts. God did what he did because they did what they did, and in all of this, there was only going to be one winner. And it wasn't them! It all seemed to run off them like water off a duck's back, such was their woeful complacency.

It seems to me that is a challenge for all of us to take on board: Are we guilty as charged? If we are, the best we can do is hurriedly run to the Lord, pleading for mercy and humbly admitting

that we are sinful and guilty before him. Thank God, when we mourn over our sins, our gracious God abundantly pardons.

(4) 9:15-19 The petition in the prayer

After a substantial, no-holds-barred confession of sin stretching to eleven verses, Daniel finally gets to his main petition when he says, *now*. Over the next five verses, in this people-oriented prayer, he earnestly pleads for God to step into the dreadful situation in which they presently find themselves, so that his name might be magnified and glorified. This is all that matters to Daniel for it is the glory and splendour of God that is at stake.

Daniel batters heaven with appeals to God's honour. Says, 'Lord, it is time for you to act.'

Daniel lists again some of the consequences of their heinous sin when he talks about the holy city of Jerusalem having been destroyed and the sacred places desecrated, the land being left desolate, and the people being the object of scorn and derision. Bad times.

He harks back to the mists of time when God redeemed and delivered his people from bondage in the land of Egypt. A show of omnipotence; a declaration that he is one who saves and rescues his people when their backs are against the wall. They did not deserve it then. They do not deserve it now. Since he has done it before, it was time for him to do it again. Then, he brought them out; now, he will bring them back.

Again, we see how God-centred Daniel's prayer is because it is soaked through with references to the matchless character of God. In a few breaths, he speaks of his righteousness, his anger, his wrath, and his mercy. Daniel knows that the great

God of heaven is not deaf, yet he longs for him to open his ears to his pleadings for help. He knows that the Most High seated on the throne is not blind, yet he yearns for him to open his eyes to see all that is going on.

Daniel never forgot his roots and he was ever mindful that every blessing he enjoyed came from the open hand of a generously kind God. He knows that he has nothing to offer because he recognises that he is the recipient of God's undeserved favour. There is absolutely nothing in him (or them) that merits any tokens of divine big-heartedness.

That is precisely why Daniel rounds it all off with a crescendo of intense, staccato-like phrases in verse 19, *'O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act!'* Daniel, on his knees, throws himself upon the warm mercies of the God of heaven. Daniel's aspiration is summed up in the line of a Graham Kendrick song, 'Restore, O Lord, the honour of your name.'

He has poured his heart out in fervent prayer, he can do no more, he has given it every fibre of his being. Prayer is work. Hard work. Remember, Daniel is no spring chicken, so he was exhausted physically, mentally, and spiritually, for we read of his 'extreme weariness' in verse 21. The big question is: Did Daniel get to finish his prayer with a hearty amen?

(5) 9:20-23 The power in the prayer

Did you see that? Daniel prays an unfinished prayer. He never did get to the end of it, for God interrupts him mid-sentence. Yes, God heard his prayer! Thankfully, he always does. Daniel is in full flow at the peak of his prayer when the angel

Gabriel is again despatched from heaven in fast flight mode to minister to him.

The angel talked with Daniel giving him sweet assurance that his prayers will be answered. No need for him to fear or fret, for even when he began to pray, the answer was already on its way. Gabriel refers to Daniel as one who is greatly loved or 'highly esteemed' (NIV). That is quite an accolade by any stretch of the imagination, and it is one that he certainly deserves. He has a reputation in heaven. God noticed. He has caught the eye and ear of his God.

He is someone who is precious to God, greatly valued by God, treasured by God, loved by God, and who matters to God. A noble testimony, because he lived his life out-and-out for God. What gracious encouragement. Those words must have thrilled him no end.

Jesus referred to the apostle John in the same way for he was known as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (John 20:2, 21:7, NIV). Come to think of it, Peter writes in a similar vein when he addresses us, the people of God, as 'a chosen people, a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession' (1 Peter 2:9, NLT).

Samuel Davies penned a wonderful hymn, when he wrote, *Great God of wonders! all thy ways, Are matchless, godlike, and divine; But the fair glories of thy grace, More godlike and unrivalled shine. Who is a pardoning God like thee, Or who has grace so rich and free?*

We read that 'the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results' (James 5:16, NLT). In his epistle, James is focusing on the prayers of Elijah, he could have

opted for Daniel as another brilliant example of intercession.

The tremendous news in all this is that the prayer of a righteous person can change a life, a home, a marriage, a church, a school, a community, and an entire nation (such has happened in days of yore with times of heaven-sent revival). Abraham discovered that only ten men of this calibre were needed to save Sodom (Genesis 18:16-33). The challenge for us is this: are there 10 people here in Braodstone who are willing to be watchmen and stand in the gap and pray?

For you and me, we admire Elijah, sure we do, but we emulate Daniel when we take on board his mindset, and get down on our knees, and watch how God changes our world. That is doing prayer the Daniel way!