

“Daniel’s Masterclass on Prayer” – Daniel 9

A few years ago, I subscribed to an online video education platform called Masterclass. Have you heard of it? You have your choice of something like 250 different classes on all different subjects. And they get the very best in the field to teach the classes. If you want to learn how to write a novel, they have videos of six of the greatest novelists in the world to teach you. If you want to play an instrument, Ringo Starr will teach you how to play the drums. Carlos Santana will teach you how to play the guitar.

They have almost every category you can think of. Tony Hawk teaches skateboarding. George Bush and Bill Clinton teach politics. Serena Williams teaches how to play tennis. Natalie Portman teaches acting. I actually watched the series by Christina Aguilera on how to sing. So, now I’d like to sing “Genie in a Bottle” for you. Are you ready? No?

No, you don’t want me to sing it because even though I watched the videos and I did everything she said to do, I still can’t sing very well. Masterclass gets the best of the best to teach these classes and they are chosen based on their success. But just because you do everything they do doesn’t guarantee you will have the same success. But it probably helps you be better than you were. I wish they had a class on how to preach or how to pastor. You don’t have to say “amen” to that.

Well, if they had a masterclass on how to pray, I believe Daniel would be qualified to teach that class. If you will turn in your Bibles to **Daniel chapter 9**, you will see that Daniel says he pleaded with God in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. And I guarantee you could do all of that exactly like Daniel did and you might not have any success in your prayer at all. Prayer just doesn’t work that way any more than singing works like that. But when we do everything like Daniel did and have the heart that Daniel did and the faith and the fervency, then we will start to see more success in our prayers.

If you remember, Daniel was taken as a young man out of Israel and into slavery in Babylon. The nation of Israel was almost completely destroyed as a result of their sin. God had warned them and when they didn’t listen, the prophecy came true and they were exiled. But Daniel proved himself to be wise and godly and was trusted to be a servant of the king and to even explain dreams. This is the same Daniel that was thrown into the lion’s den for not worshiping the king but praying to God instead.

So, evidently, Daniel was reading what parts of the Bible he had one day and realized from reading the prophet Jeremiah that their nation’s exile was prophesied to last 70 years. Daniel gets out his calculator and does a little quick math and realizes the time was almost up.

That had to be good news, of course, but the problem was that Daniel knew they weren’t really ready. There had been no real repentance. Israel had been enslaved by another country because of their rebellion toward God and Daniel is not seeing any real heart change in his countrymen. So, let’s see how Daniel prays in **Daniel chapter 9**. We will read **verses 1-3** to begin with.

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom— 2 in the first year of his reign, 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 seventy years. 3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.

*I heard the story of an agnostic man who was on a cruise ship somewhere around the turn of the twentieth century. He put two oranges in his pocket and walked out the door of his cabin and made his way across the deck of the ship. He was on his way to a meeting and saw an elderly woman sitting in her deck chair fast asleep. Her hands were open. In the

spirit of fun, the agnostic put the two oranges in her outstretched palms. After the meeting, he saw the old lady happily eating one of the pieces of fruit. "You seem to be enjoying that orange," he remarked with a smile. "Yes, sir," she replied, "My Father is very good to me." "Your father? Surely your father can't be still alive!" "Praise God," she replied, "He is very much alive." "What do you mean?" pressed the agnostic. She explained, "I'll tell you, sir. I have been seasick for days. I was asking God somehow to send me an orange. I suppose I fell asleep while I was praying. When I awoke, **I found He had not only sent me one orange but two!**"* (sermonillustrations.com)

I think I have told that true story before but I really like it and it goes to show the power of prayer. But how many times have you prayed for something and not gotten it? Most of us have had that happen many times. And sometimes that's a good thing. We don't always need what we pray for. But sometimes you really do need something and so you pray and pray and nothing happens. Did God not hear you? Is He not powerful enough to answer you? Does He not really love you enough to answer you?

I'll be the first one to say that I don't know exactly how prayer works. I know it does. I've seen the power of prayer in my own life and in the life of this church many times. But I believe one of the problems we have is that the first time we see an answered prayer, we try to do the exact same thing the next time because we think we did it in a way that God will answer. So, the next time we pray, we sit in the same spot we did before and we say the same things and we act the same way and we expect the same results. And we almost always wind up disappointed. Why is that?

See, God is not looking for you to do all the right things and check all the right boxes. He's looking for you to BE right. He wants you to be righteous or right with Him. That's what He's looking for. And that was the beauty of Daniel's prayer. Daniel knew he and his countrymen were not right with God and so this whole prayer is Daniel doing his best to be right with God.

This whole prayer is based on God -His love and mercy and forgiveness. Nowhere does Daniel say anything about how good Daniel was or what he had done or how he was a smart man or wise or anything about himself. This whole prayer is based on God. And I believe that is how we ought to pray as well.

God says in Isaiah chapter one that when you "check all the right boxes" and come to Him in prayer that He doesn't even listen to that stuff. He actually says, **"When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening. Your hands are full of blood! 16 Wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight; stop doing wrong. 17 Learn to do right."**

So, it's not about saying the right words. It's about being right with God. And when you are right with God, you understand better how to pray. We are told in **1 John 5** to pray in God's will and how do you know what that is if you aren't right with Him? So, that is the first point we learn from Daniel this morning. Prayer is only effective if you are right with God, with no unconfessed sin in your life.

Now, let's look at how else Daniel prayed. Again, it doesn't matter what you say or how you say if you aren't in God's will and right with Him but if you are, we can learn some things from Daniel in **verse 3**. He starts off by saying he "turned to the Lord God". The King James says he set his face toward God. He's not distracted. He was focused on God and God only. He wasn't doing something else and also praying. He was laser-focused on God as he was praying.

Then Daniel says he pleaded with God in prayer and petition. I looked those words up in my big concordance and do you know what that word "prayer" actually means? The Hebrew word is "tephillah" and it literally means...to pray. Yea, just prayer like we know the word. And that next word, "petition" or "supplication", is a word I can't pronounce and won't try to (tachanuwn) but it simply means "earnest prayer". So, there ya go. Be blessed with that knowledge.

But it's really the next few words that I want to focus on in the time remaining where Daniel says he fasted in sackcloth and ashes. You know what fasting is. You probably hear it more today in the context of being healthy or losing weight

and not as much how Daniel did it. The church today doesn't talk much about fasting and maybe that partly explains the moral state of the church. Did you know that Christians are expected to fast?

In **Matthew 6**, Jesus said, *"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."* Jesus said, **"When** you fast..." not "if you fast."

Let's say it's Thursday evening and you have lots of chores to do. You need to clean house and wash clothes. There are a few bills to pay. Oh, and your favorite Gunsmoke episode is coming on at 7 so you don't want to miss that. But then your best friend from high school calls you. They had moved out of state and you haven't seen them in a while but they are coming into town and wanted to stop by. You love this person and can't wait to see them. But when they get to your house, you keep dusting the furniture, running the vacuum and paying bills all the while trying to carry on a conversation. How's that going to work? Then at 7 o'clock in the middle of your friend's story, you turn on Gunsmoke. How do you think that person is going to feel?

It's sort of like that when we pray. There's nothing wrong with praying while you're driving. Nothing wrong with praying while doing anything else. In fact, we are told to pray all the time. Pray without ceasing as it says in **1 Thessalonians 5**. But there is something special about setting aside some time when you are doing NOTHING else but praying. God has your full attention. There's nothing magical about fasting. It's just one way of telling God that your priority at that moment is to be alone with him. You want Him to know that you are serious about talking to Him AND hearing from Him.

Nowhere does scripture command us to fast and nowhere in scripture does it really give any guidelines for it. We have lots of models of people that fasted including Jesus Himself but it never tells us how long or even from what we should fast. Although fasting in Scripture is almost always a fasting from food, there are other ways to fast. Anything given up temporarily in order to focus all our attention on God can be considered a fast.

Years ago, I had a pastor who tried to fast for 40 days. It's very biblical and that's what he wanted to do. But he said it was incredibly hard because everywhere he turned there was food. He said every commercial on TV is about food when you are fasting. And I remember thinking, *"If you are fasting, why are you watching TV?"* Fasting is meant to be a special time when you can get alone with God and concentrate just on Him. If you are fasting and doing other things, you are just missing meals.

Maybe you need to fast from TV. Maybe you need to fast from your phone or your computer or even your spouse or your job. And if you choose to fast from food, I don't recommend starting at 40 days. Maybe just one day. Maybe just try fasting for one meal. Maybe you ought to pray about how long to fast and from what you are to fast. And I know that sounds extreme...and it is. It's supposed to be extreme.

Let me ask you this, and don't answer out loud. Don't react. Just think about it. What is that pet sin in your life that you struggle with? You know what I mean? What is that one thing that you just can't shake? Lying, cheating, stealing, lust, murder? I hope it's not murder but who knows? Maybe it's gossip or worry, drugs or alcohol. You do it and you hate it when you do it. You ask God for forgiveness and you know He does but you're pretty sure you're going to do it again and you hate it. You ask God to help you with it but it keeps coming back into your life. What do you do?

This is a perfect case for fasting. All through scripture, including the passage we are in here in Daniel, fasting has been used along with prayer as part of repentance. Repentance means to be going in one way and then turn around and go the right way. Fasting helps you do that because it allows you to hear from God like you might not otherwise. There is

something special about fasting that brings you closer to God. It is a part of true and sorrowful repentance and asking for forgiveness. If you are asking for forgiveness while planning to sin again like you always do, something is wrong.

Again, I know this is extreme but the question is, how bad do you want it? How bad do you want to hear from God? How bad do you want to break that sinful stronghold in your life? How bad do you want God to answer your prayer or give you wisdom or change your life?

Prayer is hard to do. Fasting is hard to do. It's uncomfortable to be that vulnerable and that honest with God. It takes a lot of effort. It is humbling. It's supposed to be. When Daniel says he fasted and prayed and was wearing sackcloth and ashes, that was a symbolic sign to God that he was humbling himself before God. I read one commentator say that you can't be clean, comfortable or proud when you are wearing sackcloth and ashes. Maybe that would be a good practice to bring back today just to remind us that we are not coming before God with anything or because we are anything.

Fervent prayer and fasting are extreme measures for extreme times. But everybody goes through extreme times and every mature Christian is expected to respond to those times like a mature Christian and that sometimes requires prayer and fasting. But, again, just because you do all the right things and pray in all the right ways and say all the right words doesn't mean God is now indebted to you and has to answer you like you want. It's not about checking all the boxes just like singing is not about doing what great singers do. It will help you be better at it but there are no guarantees in the results.

God is not in the "results" business. He is in the heart business and it all comes down to how you really feel and what you really want. Do you want God to answer your prayer like you want Him to or is it more important to get wisdom from God to be able to pray in His will? When you pray for wisdom to be able to pray according to His will, do you think that is a prayer God wants to answer? Absolutely.

But I believe the most important aspect of prayer is not the earnestness of it or fasting or saying the right things. It's being right with God. And you can't be right with God with unconfessed sin in your life. Do you have that right now? Let's bow our heads and pray right now before we go any further.

Maybe you don't have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus at all. All you have to do is believe that Jesus is the only way to Heaven and that His sacrifice on the cross for you was enough to satisfy God's penalty for your sin. But that belief will show itself as a changed life. When you ask God for forgiveness of sins and ask Him to be Lord of your life, God's Holy Spirit will come to live in your life and will start to change you and make you more like Him every day. If that change is not obvious in your life to you and to others, then maybe there is no relationship.

But it's not too late. If you don't have that or you aren't sure if you do or not, I want to pray with you right now. Do it now as the music plays.