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Summer of Seeking / Prayer / Daniel 9:1–23

You know it's no secret that I have always been a fan of Michael Jordan, but what I appreciate more about Michael isn't just his talent, but it was the work behind his success. Often, we admire the success, but we seldom understand what it took to get to that level.

There's a story about Jordan when he arrived at the University of North Carolina as a freshman. He told his assistant coach Roy Williams that he wanted to be the best player ever to play there. Williams told him he'd have to work harder than he ever had. Jordan pushed back a little — said he already worked as hard as anyone on his team. And Williams stopped him and said: "Excuse me. I thought you just told me you wanted to be the best player ever to play here."

From that point on, Jordan understood what the goal required. His teammate James Worthy said that after two and a half hours of hard practice, he'd be walking off the floor exhausted — and here comes Michael pushing him back on, wanting more. His coach later summed up Jordan's entire career in one line: he was the only player who could turn it on and turn it off — and he never turned it off.

What makes people great at what they do is that they are willing to do what most others are not willing to do. To sacrifice what most others are not willing to sacrifice. The greatness we see is always the fruit of something happening behind the scenes.

And I think the same is true when we look at our heroes of the faith.

We read about someone like Daniel and we are amazed at what God did through him. The wisdom, the courage, the faithfulness across decades and empires. We think he must have something I don't have.

But I wonder if we're only seeing the highlights. I wonder if we're missing what was happening behind the scenes.

Daniel chapter 9 pulls back the curtain. And what we find is this. That faithfulness doesn't happen by accident.

Behind every faithful life is a faithful prayer life.

Let's look at it together.

Daniel is one of my biblical heroes, I admire him so much.

I'm just so amazed at the faithfulness of Daniel over so many years. His faithfulness to the Lord outlived Emperors and even empires. His life and ministry saw kings and kingdoms bow the knee to the Lord his God.

Spend some time reading the life of Daniel and you'll be amazed at his faithfulness to the Lord, his ability to persevere under severe trials, his unwillingness to compromise on the truth of God.

I look at a man like Daniel and think if my life can be used even in a fraction of the way to bring glory to God, I would have a life worth living.

And we wonder what is at the root of such a life lived for God? Where does that come from? I think the issue for many of us is that we want the fruitfulness of a life lived for the Lord, but maybe we aren't willing to invest in the root of it.

It's like we all want to be as great as Jordan at what we do, but are we willing to put in the time, energy, focus and passion that goes along with it.

See I think as we come to Daniel chapter 9 what we get is a peak into the devotional life of Daniel. And what we find is that Daniel had a deeply rooted devotional and prayer life and I'm convinced this is the root of the fruit in his life.

God was able to do extraordinary things through an ordinary man like Daniel, because Daniel had a deeply rooted devotion and prayer life.

Behind every faithful life is a faithful prayer life.

Daniel shows us what faithful prayer looks like here.

Here's the first thing Daniel shows us...

That faithful prayer begins in the Word.

THE WORD

Faithful prayer and a passion to know, to read, to study God's Word go hand in hand.

Prayer begins in the Word.

Daniel gets into this deep intercessory prayer for Israel, but look what started it all in verses 1-3

Daniel 9:1-3 ESV

¹ In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, by descent a Mede, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans— ² in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet, must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years.

³ Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

I Daniel perceived in the books... what books? Well the books of the prophets, the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet.

So Daniel was sitting one day reading through the prophet Jeremiah, the same prophet Jeremiah that we have in our bible today.

The same Jeremiah that is just two books before Daniel in the Old Testament, but notice Daniel calls it the word of the Lord.

Daniel understood that what was written by Jeremiah was not just his random thoughts and account, but the words recorded by Jeremiah were the word of the Lord; this is God's word.

As we open [Daniel 9](#) we see Daniel studying God's word... Amazing, isn't it? Daniel was a student of God's word.

In this case Daniel was studying Jeremiah's prophecy that Israel would be in exile for seventy years. Daniel wanted to gain understanding, here in verse 1 it says, "in the first year of Darius," so the Babylonian Empire has given way to the Persian Empire and Daniel is wondering, how much longer must Israel pay for their unfaithfulness to the Lord, how much longer must we live in exile? Daniel says, "Hey, let me go back and reread that passage of Jeremiah and see if I can't get a better understanding of what is being said."

So no doubt his studies would take him to passages like in Jeremiah 25:11-12.

Jeremiah 25:11-12 ESV

¹¹ This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹² Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.

He would read passages like

Jeremiah 29:10-12 ESV

¹⁰ "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.

So Daniel is still in exile with Israel as discipline from the Lord for their unfaithfulness and he would be reading passages like this and he would start doing the math and says okay, it says exile is for 70 years and it's been about... well 70 years now and we're still in exile.

The problem that Daniel is seeing is that I don't see Israel repenting, it's been 70 years and Israel still hasn't turned from their sin, they aren't even longing to be restored to this promise.

And so Daniel is so moved by this he begins to intercede for Israel, thinking if they won't pray, if they won't repent, then I will stand in the gap for them, if they aren't praying for restoration then I will begin to pray for and confess and repent on their behalf and so he does.

Verse 3 again, "Then I turned my face to the Lord God seeking Him by prayer and pleas for mercy."

You have to see how the two of these go hand in hand. It was in the study and meditating on God's word that drove Daniel to his knees, it was what the Holy Spirit was revealing to him in the Word of God that drove him to pray.

This should drastically change how we read and study God's Word and how we understand prayer.

Prayer and the Word go together.

Like, let's be clear there isn't always time to spend in God's Word before we pray. Like, sometimes you need a quick prayer before you have a difficult conversation or making a difficult decision or when reaching crossroads and you say well, we just need to pray.

But what we are seeing is the regular habit, the rhythm of devotion in Daniel's life. That a regular diet of reading and studying God's Word leads to a regular habit of prayer.

It changes how we read God's word doesn't it, because so often we read God's Word just to understand, to gain knowledge and understanding. But it should be doing more than that shouldn't it?

We don't just read God's Word to inform our minds; we read God's Word to influence our hearts.

That's what's happening here, isn't it? Daniel was moved; his mind wasn't just informed his heart was influenced.

Reading God's Word should move us to action, to do something, to pray, to worship.

As I read the account of creation and I see what an awesome, all powerful God we serve who created the world in six days, who created everything in existence just through the utterance of His Word, that should drive my heart to worship, shouldn't it, to be amazed at the power and praise God for His wonder and glory.

As I read of the history of Israel, and I see how stubborn they are before the Lord and yet how patient God is with them, shouldn't my prayer be Lord, I confess that I am as stubborn as Israel at times and thank you that you are patient with me as you are with them.

I read of the sacrificial system, the sheep, the lamb, the goats sacrificed for the sin of God's people, it should drive me to pray and thank God for His Son Jesus Christ who is the final and only sacrifice that could take away my sin.

I read of the life of Jesus, His teachings, His words and my prayer should be Lord, help me to be like Jesus, make me more like Him.

I read about the work of the cross, and my prayer should be filled with eternal gratefulness, Lord thank you for the cross, thank you for the resurrection.

I read of the spread of the gospel through the first century church, shouldn't it drive me to pray to see the same kind of spread, the same kind of movement of the gospel and kingdom building happening in my generation?

I read Revelation and of the coming of the Lord Jesus; shouldn't it drive me to pray, "Come Lord Jesus come."

This is the devotional life of faith. Faithful life is a faithful prayer life, and faithful prayer always starts in the Word.

Like let me ask you do you have time set aside during the day, maybe during the week where you are sitting down and reading God's Word and then praying over what you've read? Asking the Lord okay I understand what you're calling me to here, Lord help me live it out or maybe your prayer is Lord I don't understand what's going on here, help me, open my eyes, my heart to your truth.

When you read God's Word is it simply for you to gain more knowledge or does it move you to action and worship?

Yet maybe there are some here this morning who hear what I'm saying and are thinking, I hear you pastor, but man my heart is so heavy right now I can't even find the strength to pray, or to pick up a bible.

And I would say, I hear you. And there are Christians, people of God, who have been right where you are right now, in fact there are a whole series of Psalms – of prayers of Lament (or mourning) – of crying out to God saying, "Why?" These are passages that give you a voice for the dark seasons, and if all you have the strength for today is to read one or two verses, just read that. If all you have the strength for today is to cry out, "God, I need you, or give me strength," a prayer of honest desperation is always heard.

But maybe if you don't have the strength to pray, there are people around you who are willing to pray with you and for you.

That's what strikes me about Daniel here.

Daniel is so moved by what he reads that he doesn't even wait for Israel to pray for themselves. He steps into the gap on their behalf. And when he does, what comes out is one of the most honest prayers in all of Scripture.

It brings us to our second point...

That faithful prayer is ruthlessly honest before God.

HONESTY

That's what we see as a start to look at Daniel's prayer, we see so much of what Jesus has been teaching us about prayer.

Daniel doesn't come with any superficiality; he doesn't come with any pretense or trying to hide anything from the Lord, but he comes with just ruthless honesty.

And maybe he doesn't start where we might think, but he starts with being honest about who God is.

Do you see that in verse 4.

Daniel 9:4 ESV

⁴ I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

Daniel starts his honest prayer with sincere adoration of the God he's praying to. Isn't that how Jesus said that you and I should start our prayers remember... Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name...

That's how Daniel starts his prayer with worship and adoration of the God he serves, the Lord who is the great and awesome God, the God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments.

Now he's being specific in his worship, in his adoration of the character and nature of God, because it is this character of God that he is going to be appealing to.

Daniel is seeking the God of covenant faithfulness, and it is God's covenant with Israel that he is pleading for, the promise that God made to Israel, the promise of restoration and healing and forgiveness.

He is going to be praying and interceding to the God of steadfast love.

Daniel is remembering how God describes Himself in His word, as the God who is merciful and gracious, the God who is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He is going there; he is appealing to that nature and character of God because he knows that will orient his heart and his prayer towards the will and heart of God.

It's like he's saying, "What I am going to be praying for Lord is in line with who you are and what your heart desires. Your heart desires repentance and restoration, your heart leans towards mercy and grace, you are the God of steadfast love, that's what I am calling on today."

Here's why we start our prayers with worship, because how we view God impacts how we pray. How we see God, our perspective of who He is, impacts how we pray.

As you read through Daniel you find out that Daniel has a big view of who God is. He knew and lived and walked with the God of all authority and power.

Think about how Daniel describes God in chapter when he says...

Daniel 2:20-22 ESV

***"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.
He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;
he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;
he reveals deep and hidden things;***

***he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him.***

Or how God is described in [Daniel 4:34-35](#).

Daniel 4:34–35 ESV

³⁴ ***... his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom endures from generation to generation;
all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
and he does according to his will among the host of heaven
and among the inhabitants of the earth;
and none can stay his hand
or say to him, “What have you done?”***

Do you see? This is the God that Daniel served, that you and I serve, this is the God to whom Daniel is seeking and praying to.

The God of wisdom and might, the God who is sovereign over kings and kingdom, the God who sees all and knows all, the God whose dominion and authority is over all of history, every generation, whose dominion is everlasting to everlasting, the God who can and does whatever He wills and none can say to Him what have you done and stop Him from accomplishing whatever He wants to accomplish.

That’s the God who Daniel is seeking, that’s the God who Daniel serves... is that the God who you pray to?

Our confidence in prayer is not in the words we say or the power of our prayers, but in the might and strength and power of the God we serve, that’s why we start with adoration.

But Daniel isn’t just honest about who God is, he gets honest about sin.

And this is where the ruthless honesty is so important. Because Daniel doesn’t try to sugar coat it, he doesn’t minimize his sin or Israel’s sin. He lays it all out there. And what I notice specifically is that Daniel is interceding on behalf of

Israel, his concern is the sin of his people, but he includes himself in the confession.

The problem isn't those people right there, but Lord, I'm guilty of these things as well.

Look at Daniel's confession here.

Daniel 9:5-11 ESV

⁵ we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. ⁶ We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. ⁷ To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. ⁸ To us, O LORD, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him ¹⁰ and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. ¹¹ All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him.

Daniel is praying shamelessly before the Lord isn't he? He's not holding anything back; he is ruthlessly honest about his sin and the sin of Israel.

We have sinned and done wrong, we have rebelled, we have disobeyed, we have dishonoured, you, your word and your covenant with us, oh Lord.

And not only is he honest about their sin, but he is also honest that we deserve the punishment you have given us. You are right and we are wrong, you deserve

righteousness, we deserve open shame, you were right, oh God, in punishing us with these 70 years of exile because we have disobeyed.

You know that's when you know true repentance has taken place. That's when you know you are truly sorry for your sin. When you stop trying to make excuses, and when you just own it, and take responsibility and when you're ready to accept the consequences.

Like I think back to when I was a kid and my parents came down on me, and they pronounced punishment on me, like I remember there were times when tears would come to my eyes, but it wasn't because I was wrong, it was because #1 I got caught, and #2 I had to endure the punishment they gave me.

I don't ever remember thinking to myself, you know what my parents are right in this punishment, you know what I deserve it.

Looking back and now that I have my own kids, I can see clearly, my parents had more patience for me, than I would have had.

But true genuine repentance can happen only when we are willing to not just confess what we have done but are willing to take responsibility for our actions.

What does confession look like to you, like are you ruthlessly honest with God about your sin? Do you try to minimize it, justify it or are you willing to accept responsibility?

See here's why we can be confident as we go before the Lord and confess, it's this promise He gives us in 1John 1:9.

1 John 1:9 ESV

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

That's a promise to take to memory... if we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ. And the confidence of taking our sin and confessing it to

the Lord isn't so that we can shame ourselves, but so that we can be reminded of what Jesus Christ has done.

Every time we bring our sin before the Lord it isn't just a confession of what we've done wrong, but a reminder of what Christ has accomplished... that all my sin was paid for at the cross... all my sin, past, present, future. All my disobedience, all my idolatry, all my lust, all my greed, all my anger, all my hatred, all my foolishness was paid for at the cross.

When we come to the Lord in sincere repentance we receive grace, we receive mercy.

And it is this that Daniel is appealing to as he turns to the Lord with his request, he's honest about what he deserves.

Daniel 9:18 ESV

¹⁸ O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy.

Do you see what he's saying... Lord as I start to ask you what I am about to ask you, I ask you not because of our track record, not because we deserve anything, not because you owe us anything, but I am asking for mercy.

That's our heart any time we come before the Lord isn't it? Like it's never a question of whether God is able to do what we are asking Him, He is able to do exceedingly and abundantly, our prayer is that God you're willing.

You're willing not because you owe us, not because we deserve it, but because you're gracious and you're merciful.

But it gives us confidence all the more doesn't it? To those who feel unworthy to go into prayer, it's this reminder that we never go into prayer because we're worthy, the honest truth is we're never worthy. The whole basis of our prayer

relationship with the Lord is not based on our worthiness, but on His grace and His mercy towards us.

You are never too far gone from God to go into, but on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done at the cross we go boldly before His throne.

And notice that Daniel shows that boldness, that shameless audacity in his prayer.

In verse 16 he says, “O Lord, according to all your righteous acts let you anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem.” In verse 17, he is crying out shamelessly, “O Our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy and make your face shine upon your sanctuary.

In verse 19 he’s so specific, so clear, “O Lord hear, O Lord forgiven, O Lord pay attention and act; delay not.”

Boldness, clarity in what he is asking of the Lord.

Daniel shows us what faithful praying looks like, being honest about who God is, honest about our sin, honest about what we deserve.

But here is the sweet, sweet assurance we get about our prayers...

When we come before the Lord with humility and sincere hearts, here’s what Daniel shows us.

That faithful prayer is always heard.

ALWAYS HEARD

This amazing scene take place

Daniel 9:20–23 **ESV**

²⁰ ***While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God,*** ²¹ ***while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening***

sacrifice. ²² He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, “O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. ²³ At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved. Therefore consider the word and understand the vision.

Imagine this scene in your mind, Daniel is praying his heart out to the Lord confessing his sin and the sin of his people and while he is praying Gabriel, the angel come to him, and he helps him understand... and he tells him at the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out and I have come to tell it to you, he says you are greatly loved.

Notice what prayer is about... Gabriel didn't say I came to answer your prayer, he said I came to give you insight and understanding.

You know over and over again what we see when we study prayer in the bible, we find out that prayer is so much more than just asking God for things and getting those things.

Prayer isn't some commercial transaction with the Lord, Daniel's prayer is heard and God sends Gabriel to give Daniel understanding, to give him insight into God's will and plan, here's what you need to understand Daniel.

But Daniel you need to know that you are loved.

God heard your prayers Daniel, He heard your cries for mercy. There is more than needs to happen, more that needs to unfold, but you are not forgotten, and neither is Israel, Daniel you need to know that you are loved.

Prayer is not commercial, prayer is relational.

It's about aligning our hearts with God's, sometimes it's not about getting answers, it's about getting perspective, understanding. It isn't always the words we say, but the word we hear. The subtle reminder, I hear you, you need to know you are not forgotten, you need to know that you are loved.

I wonder how long Daniel was praying before Gabriel came to him. Notice Gabriel says when you first started praying a word went out.

How long was he praying for, I doubt it was a few minutes. This is a long prayer. Perhaps what we have here is a summary of Daniel interceding for a few days, a few weeks, maybe a month. We get the sense that Daniel didn't get his response right away, it took time, but the delay in response doesn't mean he wasn't heard, Gabriel says when you first started praying a word went out.

I have to assure you, your prayers are heard, you are not forgotten, you are loved.

And maybe that's the message that God wants you to hear this morning. Those simple words, how encouraging that must have been for Daniel to hear.

That simple reassurance, you are loved by God. You've been labouring in prayer, laboring in His word, calling out to Him, interceding for God's people, you need to know God hears' your prayers, beloved, you are loved by God.

Behind every faithful life is a faithful prayer life.

That's what we see in Daniel. Decades of faithfulness, across empires, through trials that would have broken most of us. And behind all of it — a man in the Word, on his knees, ruthlessly honest before God.

We look at Daniel and we think God just used that man in a special way. But I don't think that's it. I think Daniel was an ordinary man who showed up. In the Word. In prayer. Day after day after day.

And the God who met Daniel while he was still speaking is the same God who meets you.

The same God who sent word to Daniel — you are greatly loved — says the same thing to you this morning.

The question isn't whether He hears you. He does. You are greatly loved.