

When should we pray? Daniel 9:1-19

If we wanted to change something important in our world, what could we do? Or what would we need to make a difference?

There are **four** standard things that people look to.

- Power
- Privilege
- Pounds
- Protest

People say that if we want to change what is wrong then we must do what works - and what works is either power, privilege, pounds or protest.

What about **prayer**? How persuaded are we that prayer changes the world? Maybe instinctively we might say, "Of course we do. We're Christians aren't we? Surely we of all people should see prayer as one of the most effective ways to bring change?" However, I wonder what our practice reveals. What does our behaviour reveal about our true beliefs?

I remember a few years ago talking to another Christian leader about why busy church leaders often never sent prayer requests to each other so that they and their churches could pray for one another. What was the ultimate reason? Busyness? Distraction? Imagine he said that a rich businessman sent a message offering financial help to anyone who replied to his message by the end of the day. Do you think those pastors would find the time to reply? Definitely! What this reveals that in our darkness moments we don't really think prayer changes anything.

Power - yes. Privilege – yes. Pounds – yes. Protest – yes. But prayer? Well maybe if we've exhausted all the options we could pray. But as a first instinct? As a first port of call? The Bible says yes! Because in prayer we are asking the God of infinite resources, the God of infinite power and love to act for the good of his people and the glory of his name.

As we reach **Daniel chapter 9** we are presented with an example of a man of prayer. This is not designed to make us feel guilty but to galvanize our prayer lives with fresh vision and energy.

There are **three** things I want to point out about Daniel's prayer.

- It is motivated by God's book (Vs 1-3)
- It is motivated by God's character (Vs 4-14)
- It is motivated by God's honour (Vs 15-19)

First, it is motivated by God's book (Vs 1-3)

Look at verse 1. **Read verses 1-3.**

The first thing to notice is that Daniel is a man of the Bible. God does speak to him in dreams and visions but Daniel's primary way of engaging with the God is through God's written words in the Bible. Obviously Daniel doesn't have access to all 66 books that are in our Bibles. But the principle is vital for us to see. The people of God have always treasured Scripture, that is the written down words of God.

Please do not think you are a second class Christian if the way you rely on God speaking to you is through engaging with the Bible. This is promised and primary way of speaking with us.

Please don't wait for some audible voice before you make a decision to become a Christian or before you make a decision about how to live as a Christian.

In short, let's trust that God has given us everything we need in his wonderful book to live fully for him.

As Daniel read his Bible he came across a promise of God in the book of **Jeremiah**.

Jeremiah 25:11-12, "This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation."

Jeremiah 29:10-11, “This is what the LORD says, ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

The number 70 is probably a round number for the life span of a generation. So we shouldn't get too distracted by trying to work out all the mathematics of the dates.

But what we should do is notice how Daniel responds to this promise he finds in the Bible.

He doesn't just sit back and wait for it all to unfold. No, he gets on his knees and prays.

Why? He understands the link between the clear plans of God and the normal means that God uses to achieve what he promises.

God's people are not to be passive spectators in the unfolding drama of God's story. No we are to be active participants as we pray and proclaim the truth.

Sinclair Ferguson, “God's sovereign purposes are never revealed in Scripture as excuses for our personal indolence but as incentives for action.”

Let's dig into our Bibles and be refreshed again by the promises and desires of God. Let's pray them.

The gospel will go to all nations. Fantastic! Let's pray this in as we seek to evangelise in Scarborough and in other towns and villages, as we support our Mission Partners and as we link with other churches through AMiE and Gafcon. What a motivation to pray!

Let's see the Lord's desire to build his church, not just in number but in maturity. His promise to complete the work of sanctification that he has started in our lives. Let's pray for increased faith, love and hope.

At this point I'd like to make a comment about what we pray about. It's pretty obvious that all of us have limited capacity to pray. We have limited time and limited head space. We need to be careful what we ask people to pray about and what we pray for.

I have a concern that **good prayers** can easily take the place of **great prayers**.

Please don't misunderstand me. We can and should pray about all things. But let's be careful that our focus is not forever on the good things to pray about – health and jobs and stress. If so, we'll never get round to praying the great prayers for **salvation** and **sanctification**.

Second, Daniel's prayer is motivated by God's character (Vs 4-14)

That is, he is inspired to pray because of who God is.

It's pretty obvious why this is so important.

- Suppose the God in heaven is nice but powerless, why would we pray?
- Suppose God is powerful but unconcerned, why bother calling him up?
- Or suppose God was only interested in speaking to the good people who had never made any mistakes then what would be the point of a sinner weighed down by guilt speaking to him?

What do we **discover about the character of God** in verses 4-14?

First, that he is **great** and **awesome**.

Listen to verse 4. **Read verse 4a.**

He is not puny and poor. He is all-powerful and therefore has everything his people need to live for him.

We need a **grand** and a **greater** vision of God if we are to pray.

I like to take **gospel risks**. Why? It's not because I have a particular personality type but because I believe God is the great provider. Let's pray that he will resource us for the mission he has set before us.

Second, he is **righteous**

Look at verse 7. **Read verse 7.**

God always does the right thing.

This is so important because it means he is consistent.

We are always sure of how we will respond because he always does what he says.

Third, he is **merciful**

Listen to verse 9. **Read verse 9.**

The LORD desires that we do the right thing. This is good for us and for the glory of his name.

We mustn't excuse when we do the wrong thing saying things like, "Oh, we're only human."

But we must know that God is merciful.

What's your vision of God as you pray to him?

- Angry with a big stick?
- Disappointed with a frown?
- Or arms open ready to give you a big hug?

The example of the parable of the lost son in Luke 15.

Friends, the character of God should motivate us to pray.

Third, Daniel's prayer is motivated by God's honour (Vs 15-19)

After an honest account of the sins of his own people, which in itself is a wonderful example for us because we are often prone to speak about the sins of the world before we confess the sins of the church, Daniel changes tack in verse 15 as he asks God to move to change their desperate situation.

Let me read them to us and as I do listen out for the **big reason** why Daniel wants God to act.

Verse 15. **Read verses 15-19.**

God you made a name for yourself when you rescued your people from Egypt. But look at them now. And so for the sake of your reputation will you act? And will you act quickly?

Suppose you are a sales rep for a sweets company and they gave you a tattered out uniform with holes in it and a rusty old bike to travel with.

When you arrive to meet your clients what message do you communicate about your company?

What a challenge for us as we consider our prayers! How often are we motivated by the honour of God's name as we pray? We say it in the Lord's Prayer, 'Hallowed by your name' but how much does this impact what we pray about and why we pray?

Consider the state of the church in the UK. Small. Apathetic. Theologically light. Worldly. For the sake of your reputation, please act.

Consider what people say about the uniqueness of Jesus when they dare to put him on a level with other religious teachers. Lord for the honour of your name please act. Give us courage to speak and proclaim the unique saving identity of Jesus.

What does all this mean for us?

Very simply, let's not be crushed by guilt. But let's be freshly moved to pray. When I say this, I don't mean let's be challenged to merely think about prayer. No, I mean, let's actually start to pray more.