

# “Prayer And a Forgotten Pair of Air Jordans In Your Closet” // Daniel 9 // *Shining in Babylon #8*<sup>1</sup>

## MUSIC

Hey, before we start this weekend, I just want to stop and update you, and thank God, that ALL of our campuses are back to meeting in person. All of them. Two of our campuses, however, our Chapel Hill and North Durham campuses, are still unable to meet on Sunday morning: the venues we've been in for years have not opened back up to us, and so a couple of local churches have graciously allowed us to use their space on Sunday evenings, which we are INCREDIBLY thankful for, but being able to meet on Sunday morning makes a big difference on their ability to reach people, so we want to ask God to restore that soon.

So could we pray together? CHC and NDC, we love you guys and keep hanging in there.

And one more thing before we pray. We continue to have more than 10K people engage our church online each weekend. That's a real number, btw, not a total number of clicks where people watch for 2 min, the actual number of people engaging the whole service. We record the online service live on Thursdays here at CPC, and here's my request to any of you hearing this: It may be hard for y'all to understand this, but it really helps me preach when I've got a congregation here responding to me. You develop a rapport with a people and it really helps me get more into what I'm saying. I love Thursday nights--I think it might be my favorite service of the weekend--the music is fantastic; I love the time; it's got the potential to be our best service. The point is, I want to ask a lot of you to consider coming--I think you'd love it and it would be a big help to me.

## Let's pray (PRAYER)

If you have your Bibles, open them to Daniel 9, where I want to talk today about what I believe is *the most undervalued resource of the church*.

Larry Awe, a maintenance worker at Milwaukee's Capitol Court Mall, was cleaning up a storage room in that mall right before it was to be demolished, when he found, in a trash pile, a pair of sneakers buried underneath some old boxes. They were used and showed obvious signs of wear, but as he looked more closely, he recognized Michael Jordan's signature on the side of one of the size 13 shoes, with the inscription, "My Very Best." 

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<sup>1</sup> **Works Consulted:** Mark Batterson, *Circle Maker*; Sidney Griedanus, *Preaching Christ from Daniel*; Danny Akin, "Back to the Future," sermon preached on August 2, 2004; Mark Driscoll, "Kingdom Down #9 - How to Live When the Future is Clearly Fuzzy," sermon preached at The Trinity Church, March 8, 2020; Beth Moore, "Daniel | Session 9: Unexpected Answers to Prayer," 2006; Tim Mackie, "So Righteous - Faithfulness in Exile," sermon preached on August 19, 2017.



Turns out, they were authentic--a pair of the original Air Jordans: Air Jordan 1's that Jordan himself had worn for a while. Nike had then loaned them to the store in Milwaukee to display in the store window. I guess everybody eventually forgot about them and so for 20 years they'd been sitting in a storage closet. They were valued at about \$20,000.<sup>2</sup>

**Prayer is the most undervalued resource of the church**--neglected by many, completely discarded by others. Scripture tells us, however, that many of the blessings of God are activated in our lives through prayer.

- You find a promise, and then pray it into existence in your life. I've heard it said that rather than read our way through the Bible, we should pray through it. The Bible is a book of promises--**it contains more than 3000 of them**, many sitting dormant until we claim them personally by prayer.
- Question: How many blessings for your life or for your family remain unactivated simply because you've never asked for them in prayer?
- You know, it seems that whenever I hear older saints talking about what they'd do differently in life--people whose lives you already want to emulate--most say that looking back they wish they'd prayed more.
- **Billy Graham**, for example: "Prayer is the most important thing we can ever do, and if I could do my ministry over again, I would pray more than I preached."
- Isn't it significant that the greatest saints at the end of their remarkable lives are more convinced that prayer is the place where real power resides?

All that to say, it's not surprising that at the end of Daniel's book, Daniel circles back around to the power of prayer. It's been a running theme of his life, and in the midst of all these prophecies, which we're going to finish up next time, Daniel gives us four action steps to build our prayer lives around. **This passage is amazing:**

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<sup>2</sup><https://www.insider.com/what-is-my-stuff-worth-2018-3#a-pair-of-sneakers-found-in-an-abandoned-mall-turned-out-to-be-michael-jordans-old-shoes-and-are-said-to-be-worth-20000-8>

a **one-of-a-kind passage** because it pulls back the curtains and shows us the inner workings of prayer. You better buckle up.

9:1 In the first year of Darius... I, Daniel, understood from the books according to the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah that the number of years for the desolation of Jerusalem would be seventy. Daniel reads in Jeremiah that the number of years God said he would send Israel into captivity for sin would be 70. Well, he and his friends were taken into captivity around 605 B.C. "The first year of Darius" he refers to here was somewhere around 538 B.C, and if you do the math, that means he's been there for around 70 years. So Daniel is like, "God, a promise! You said in Jeremiah that 70 years of desolation were appointed for Israel. Only 70! So I'm here to ask you to take us home like you promised."

3 So I turned my attention to the Lord God to seek him by prayer and petitions, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. 4 I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: Ah, Lord—the great and awe-inspiring God who keeps his gracious covenant with those who love him and keep his commands— 5 we have sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, and turned away from your commands and ordinances. 6 We have not listened to your prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, leaders, ancestors, and all the people of the land.

(Real quick, because this is not the main point for today, but I want you to notice something about Daniel as a leader. He confesses all these things, but **based on what we know about Daniel's life**, is that how you would describe it? 5 "...he'd sinned, done wrong, acted wickedly, rebelled, and turned away from your commands and ordinances. He'd "not listened to your prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, leaders, ancestors..." That seems a bit out of sync from what we read about Daniel, especially since the prophet Ezekiel describes him as one of the 3 most righteous people ever to live.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in vs. 6, Daniel confesses the sin of his ancestors, which clearly he couldn't have been guilty of since he wasn't even born yet.

Now, on one level, we can't inherit guilt from our ancestors. The prophet Ezekiel makes that clear.<sup>4</sup> But here's the thing: **A leader makes a problem their responsibility even when it's not their fault.** Let me say that again: **A leader makes a problem their responsibility even when it's not their fault.** My kids' mistakes may not be my fault, but as their leader I take responsibility to help them correct them. Men, do you sit around blaming your wife for your marital issues? Listen, I'm sure some of y'all's issues are her fault--she's a sinner too, of course. But a real leader doesn't deflect blame, he (or she) takes responsibility. Isn't that what Jesus did?<sup>5</sup> Our sin wasn't his fault, but he took responsibility and entered our world to fix it. That's what Daniel is doing; that's what leaders always do. Listen: this church has problems, and some of them may not be your fault. But only a Pharisee sits around and talks about how bad everyone is--"those people" do this, and "they" are like that; a leader owns the problem even if it's not their fault and brings the problem personally to God with "we" language, not "they" language. The same thing is true with how we see our community, our nation.)

**OK, back to Daniel's prayer:** 7 Lord, righteousness belongs to you, but this day public shame belongs to us... 11 All Israel has broken your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. 13 (and so) Just as it is written in the law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we (still) have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our iniquities and paying attention to your truth. (which again, that was not true of Daniel, that was true of the rest of Israel).

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<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 14:14

<sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 18:20

<sup>5</sup> I owe some of this insight to Mark Driscoll in his message on this passage.

15 Now, Lord our God—who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a strong hand and made your name renowned as it is this day... 16 in keeping with all your righteous acts, may your anger and wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain... Again, because you promised!

17 Therefore, our God, hear the prayer and the petitions of your servant. Make your face shine on your desolate sanctuary for *the Lord's* (your) sake. (That's a direct quote from Numbers 6. Daniel is praying God's promises back to him). And do it for your sake, God. 18 Listen closely, my God, and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations and the city that bears your name. (IOW, God, YOUR reputation is at stake! You said that when your children called on you that you'd hear them and forgive them and come to their help. And God, that's me right now.) For we are not presenting our petitions before you based on our righteous acts, but based on your abundant compassion. 19 Lord, hear! Lord, forgive! Lord, listen and act! (BTW, vs. 19 is a direct quote from Deuteronomy 30 where God promised to respond to his people if, in the midst of judgment, they prayed to him for forgiveness. Daniel is praying this promise back to God). My God, for your own sake, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name.

20 While I was speaking, praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel... 21 Gabriel, the man I had seen in the first vision, reached me in my extreme weariness, and... 22 he gave me this explanation: 23 At the beginning of your petitions an answer went out, and I have come to give it, for you are greatly loved by God."

When Daniel began his prayer, God issued an answer and Gabriel was sent to deliver it. While Daniel was praying, Gabriel was flying. And he got there right as Daniel finished up. **Y'all, I have so many questions:** How fast does an angel fly? Why didn't God just beam him straight there? But sadly, we're not giving any of those answers, so let's focus on what we do know. **Notice how Gabriel starts the answer: Daniel, "you are greatly loved by God";** some translations say "treasured by God."

**How amazing is that?** First, think about Daniel's life. He'd been kidnapped, enslaved, castrated; he's lived under oppression, been betrayed by his co-workers, lived under constant danger, survived several regime changes, yet... "You are greatly loved."

Do you understand that *God's love for you is not measured by your life's ease*?<sup>6</sup> After all, Daniel's life was by no stretch "easy." Yet he was greatly loved and treasured by God, because what God gave to Daniel is greater than any earthly ease. You see, just because you go through hard times doesn't mean God has abandoned you or he's forgotten you. In fact, God may allow you to go through those things so he can teach you about the things that are truly valuable. Don't look at the difficulty of your life and say, "God doesn't love." The cross and empty tomb are better evidence of how much God loves and treasures you.

**I share that because before we get into Daniel's 4 prayer principles,** I want you to understand that this confidence--that he was greatly loved and treasured by God--was the secret to Daniel's consistency in prayer. Sometimes we think that our failure to pray is a failure of self-discipline and today you are going to write down the 5 things I tell you like some action-list to master. But prayerlessness, at its root, is the result of failing to grasp how much God loves you, how tender he is to you, and how much he wants to hear from you. **Many of you think prayer is the way to get close to God. No, prayer is the result of knowing how close God is to you.** Jen Wilkin explained that for her, learning to pray was a little like losing her desire to eat Cheetos: Cheetos, she said, had always been her favorite snack. As a young woman she'd eat them non-stop, until **"they got sharp and started cutting into my tongue. But that was OK with me," she said, "a small sacrifice for a great**

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<sup>6</sup> Inspired by Mark Driscoll

**reward.”** Then, one day, she said, she made the mistake of looking at the Cheetos label. Two problems, she said: “One, I literally could not pronounce even one of the chemicals that went into my favorite food. Second, I realized that my Cheetos were missing... cheese. And that knowledge made a change in me. Prior to this revelation, it would have taken the self-control of a Navy Seal to quell my yearning for Cheetos. But after I understood what Cheetos were... or weren't... my heart stopped craving them as much. A change in belief led to a change in desires In the same way, when we learn the truth about God--when we believe that God listens to us, loves us, and desires to work through our prayers, we instinctively begin to do what all the self-discipline in the world hadn't been able to coerce us to do: pray. When we know we are greatly loved, we'll pray when we're happy when we're anxious, when we see God at work, and when we don't see God at work.”

**So as we work through this message, remember, the point is NOT just "pray more" or "pray like Daniel" –** the point of this message is to understand that you are greatly loved like Daniel was and to trust God like Daniel trusted him; then you'll pray naturally and instinctively like he did. Got it? You promise that you'll interpret these 4 principles as what happens when you know you're loved by God, and not as an attempt to earn the love of God?

*If you promise, then you're ready for:*

## Daniel's Four Prayer Principles

### 1. Root Your Prayers in God's Promises (9:1–2, 17–19)<sup>7</sup>

- As I noted, Daniel's prayer was inspired by discovering a promise of God in Jeremiah and other promises embedded in Deuteronomy and Numbers, and Daniel is praying back these promises of God to God.
- I love Martin Luther's definition of powerful prayer: **Power in prayer = catching God in his words.**<sup>8</sup>
  - My kids do this with me. My 11 year old son Adon never lets me forget a promise, no matter when or how off-handedly it was made. Shoot, he doesn't even need a promise, just a casual implication. We drove by Frankie's Fun Park a couple of months ago and he said, "Dad, we should go back there sometime," and apparently I said, "Sure son, we'll do that one day." You parents know what that means. It doesn't mean anything! I promise you he brings that up every week, on the week. And I feel like I have to do it now so he doesn't lose confidence in me. Veronica has been redecorating our girls' room and he said, "Mom, are you ever going to redecorate my room?" and she said, "I'm sure we'll do that sometime." Now, it's like every time we go in there now to tuck him in for the night, he says, "Have you ordered that new furniture yet?"
  - Of course, we parents sometimes make casual statements that we don't mean. But the point is, God never does. He means everything he's ever said and he wants us to find every promise he's made and claim it for our own.

**Notice, specifically, how Daniel ties God's glory to his faithfulness to his promises.** He says, "God, you were the one who said that you would be merciful to us when we prayed and restore us when we called. So now your reputation is on the line!" So here's my question for you: What has God said to us that we can pray back to God and put his reputation on the line? Let me give you a few that I'm praying right now:

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<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, "1. The prayers that start in heaven are heard by heaven; 2. Do It Daily; 3. Don't Give Up on Day 20; 4. Say Woof when you Pray

<sup>8</sup> Quote from Martin Luther, sermon on Genesis 32.

- Jesus said: **“All authority is given to me in heaven and earth, so go and make disciples of all nations...”** (Matthew 28:18–20). **“Ask of me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance.”** (Psalm 2:8). So, I say, “God, this is what you said... so I’m asking. In all the craziness of COVID, I’m asking you to build your church. You promised that you would make your name known in our generation if we asked (Ps 102:18). So I’m here to ask you to do it. Your reputation is on the line.”
- Here’s another one I read in the Summit Bible reading plan recently and wrote down: **“Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who finds great delight in his commands. His children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.”** (Psalm 112:1–2) **“The children of the righteous will be delivered.”** (Prov 11:21) And I say, “Lord, do this with my kids. Make them mighty in the word in the land. Let your faithfulness extend to them as my children. And do this with the kids at our church.”
- **These are a couple very personal to me right now that I am praying.** You say, “Well, those don’t exactly apply to my situation and where I’m at.” I want to say this as nicely as possible, but: **YOU’VE GOT TO READ THE BIBLE FOR YOURSELF.** I can’t mine all these promises for you. But they’re all here for you, like a pair of 20K Air Jordan’s in your closet. In this book are promises about forgiveness and restoration after sin, joy in suffering, godly marriages, parenting, provision in time of need. **Read it for yourself.**
- **Here’s another great definition of prayer:** ***Effective prayer perceives the gap between where something is and where God wants it to be.*** And where do you learn how God wants something to be? The Bible. Again, the Bible is a book of promises. It’s our job to find them and claim them.
  - In the Model Prayer, Jesus taught us to say, as we pray, *‘Your will be done earth as it is in heaven.’* I want to know what heaven wants here because I know it will be good. So, I pray, *‘In the Summit Church as it is desired in heaven.’* *“In the Greear family as you want it in heaven.”* *“In my marriage as it is in heaven.”*
  - Of course, that has to be said with humility because we don’t always know the full will of God. But his Word tells us a lot of it.
  - ***Effective prayer perceives the gap between where something is and where God wants it to be.*** What this means, practically, is that the quality of your prayer will be directly related to the quality of your knowledge of the Bible. The prayers that start in heaven are heard by heaven.
  - When you read the Bible, we encourage you to use the HEAR method: **HEAR** stands for **Highlight, Examine, Apply, Respond.** When I read the Bible, I see a promise or something that God indicates that he desires. So I highlight it and pray it back to God. That’s how you should pray, too. It’s the real secret to power in prayer. Truly amazing things happen when you do this.

John Paton was a young Scottish pastor in the 19th century who was leading a very successful church, but he grew increasingly burdened about a group of islands he’d heard about in the Pacific that was inhabited by people who had never heard the gospel. The problem was that these islands, named the New Hebrides, were filled with cannibals.

But Paton in his diary said he knew that God had said in his word he desired all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, and he was confident that if he went, God would help him. Because God had said in his word that he desired them to hear the gospel. So Paton went. His ministry there was grueling. His wife, whom he loved dearly, died bearing their first child there. He had to sleep on their

graves for 3-4 nights to keep the cannibals from digging them up and eating them. He was under constant siege day and night, always on the lookout for his life. Eventually, though, after years of prayer, he saw a breakthrough, and a couple of the tribe leaders came to Christ, and that was followed by person after person. They say that when Paton arrived on that island in 1858 there was not a single Christian, and when he died 35 years later, on that same island, there was not a single islander who had not professed faith in Jesus Christ.

But one of my favorite stories from his biography is where, after this chief came to Christ, he asked him, "When you first got here, who was that army that guarded your hut each night?" Apparently, as he prayed each night, the angels of God surrounded his family each night to preserve this gospel witness.

Amazing things happen when you take the purposes of God and pray them into reality. The prayers that start in heaven are heard by heaven.

Where do you perceive a gap in what God's word says he wants and where it is now? In your marriage/ In your kids/ In your job... Say, "In \_\_\_\_\_ as it is in heaven."

## 2. Make It a Daily Habit (chps. 1–9)

- We saw in Daniel 6 that for Daniel prayer was a daily discipline--a routine. Daniel prayed 3x a day, every day, for 70 years.
- **I've told you that Daniel's remarkable life all goes back to a couple of rather mundane decisions he made as a young man.**
  - First, "he's resolved not to defile himself in the king's palace with the things God had forbidden." He determined that he would not compromise his convictions to get ahead in the palace. At several points that resolve threatened his future career. But his refusal to compromise was the place where God came through for him.
  - **The second was that he prayed daily.** Every day, no matter what was going on, 3x a day he opened his window toward Jerusalem and prayed. **And from that daily time with God he drew an enormous amount of strength.**
- This discipline characterizes all great men and women of God. **Even Jesus.** The Gospels tell us that whenever Jesus needed strength or wisdom, he retreated by himself to pray.
  - **For example, Luke 6 tells us that before Jesus chose his 12 disciples, he spent all night praying to God.** I would suggest to you that if there were ever anyone capable--wise enough-- to choose co-workers, it would have been Jesus. Yet before he chose a single one, he spent all night in prayer to God. **How many big decisions have you rushed into without seeking God's direction?**
  - Or to come at it from another way: on the night before Jesus went to the crucifixion, he went out in the Garden of Gethsemane to... what? To pray. To seek strength from God before this hour of trial. He took with him 3 of his closest disciples--Peter, James and John, and told them... what? That they should pray "lest they fall to temptation." And what did they do? They fell asleep. I'm sure when Jesus woke them up they gave some lame excuse like "Oh, I was just resting my eyes" or "No, no, I was praying!" (I've told you that if you ever get caught sleeping in church, when someone wakes you up just say, "In

Jesus' name; Yes, Lord, let it be to me according to thy Word, Amen," and that person will think you are SO spiritual.) But Jesus wasn't fooled, of course. He said, "Hey, could you not even watch and pray with me for an hour?" Jesus prayed, they slept. And later that night, what happened? All 3 caved in the hour of trial. Here's my question: What if they had stayed awake for that hour of prayer? Jesus told them, "pray that you would not enter into temptation." Had they done that, maybe they wouldn't have crumbled and made the greatest mistake of their lives that night. I fear that some of you may fall into temptation and make some terrible mistakes because you don't develop the habit of daily meeting with God.

- And be clear: this prayer time is not just to check a box or a chance for you to dump information on God that he already knows. **The point is this is time to be WITH him. To commune with him. To have his Spirit fill your mind and heart** with his wisdom and strength. **Strength for God (you see) comes only from time with God.**<sup>9</sup>
- Listen: The biggest practical difference between success and failure in your life might be setting your alarm clock 30 min earlier so you can read the Bible and pray before the day.<sup>10</sup>
  - You say, "But I don't know how to pray." **I have 3 suggestions for you: First, start with the Summit Bible reading plan on the app.** That's what I do. Read the passage and pray back to God whatever promises or warnings you see. So that's my first suggestion.
  - **The second suggestion is to pick up a copy of this book that I am just releasing called *Just Ask*.** This is a very simple "how to" book I wrote on praying to give you practical help on praying.
    - I tried to make it as practical as I could: For example, one thing I do when I pray is I pray back the phrases of the Lord's prayer and just riff on them. When I pray for daily bread, think about the myriad places you need God's provision and power. I also have little cards for each day of the week that direct me to different things to pray for. I have a set of Monday requests and Tuesday requests and etc. Then, I pray through my daily schedule.
    - So that's in this book--it explains the promises of prayer and what to do with them. Now, I don't have copies yet because it's not officially out yet, but you can already order it on Amazon and it will be released in a couple of weeks.
  - Finally, text the word **"PRAY" to 33933** and we'll send you some prayer resources you can start to use daily RIGHT NOW.
  - Here's my challenge--try it. Set aside 10 minutes a day, either morning or night, for 21 days to pray. (Why 21? They say after you do something for 21 days it's harder to stop than it was to start.)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> On July 16, 1969, Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Buzz Aldrin propelled into space aboard Apollo 11. The rocket they were in weighed 102,907 pounds, but carried 5,625,000 pounds of fuel. In order to break earth's gravitational orbit they had to get going 17,500 mph. When they finally did it, Aldrin quoted John 15:5--"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." I don't know what was in his mind, but it's great symbolism. Prayer connects you to the vine of Jesus' power and gives you the power to break the gravitational orbit of the world. Mark Batterson, *Circle Maker*, p. 172-73.

<sup>10</sup> From Mark Batterson

<sup>11</sup> I'll also say that I've found prayer to be what leadership experts call a "keystone habit," that is a habit that spawns a bunch of other good ones. (For example, the habit of working out often makes you eat better, organize your day better, sleep better. Budgeting works the same way.) Spiritually, a daily habit of prayer will make you more attuned to the activity of God in your life, more wary of temptation, more attentive to God's word and aware of his purposes.

- 21 days. Wake up 10 mins earlier. Or 10 mins before you go to bed. Watch 10 less mins of the latest Marvel movie. Or just cut it off at the credits. Those take like 20 mins anyway. Or, for that matter, in your car on the way to work. Pray about your life, your family, your kids, your job, your school, your neighbors. Some of you can pray about your prayer life--tell God you want to know him. Start with 10 min a day; let's cover our lives in prayer. Alright? Let's do it.

### 3. Don't Give Up In Year 69 (9:21)

Did you notice that vs. 21 says that when Gabriel arrived Daniel was **weary** from praying. Of course he was. He's been praying these requests faithfully for 70 years. **Question: Would you pray for something for that long?** How long before you gave up and lost faith?

Throughout the Scriptures, God teaches us that some answers to prayer only come through persistent asking. Jesus compared it to a neighbor who shows up at your house to borrow PopTarts from you at 3am and the only reason you get up and help them is because you know they are not going to leave you alone. Or he compares effective praying to a woman who gets a settlement from the Judge only because he knows that she is going to come to his door, unrelentingly, day and night until he responds to her request. Jesus said, "That's how you should pray." Persist in asking.

Let me show you another angle on this from Daniel's life that's even more fascinating. In the next chapter, chapter 10, Daniel was praying about something else, and this time he prayed for 21 days with no answer. And then, on day 21, [10:10] Suddenly, a hand touched me and set me shaking on my hands and knees. 11 He said to me, "Daniel, you are a man greatly loved by God... [12] From the first day that you set your heart to humble yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. (But) [13] the prince of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me..."

- I have so many questions. On the day that Daniel started to pray, God again dispatched an angel with an answer--probably Gabriel. But as he's flying through the air, he gets tangled up with the prince of Persia, a frisky demon up to no good in the Persian empire who is trying to thwart God's purposes. So Gabriel and his Prince of Persial basically get into a cage match bout for 21 days.
- And during all this time, Daniel keeps praying. Thinking he's not getting an answer. So God dispatches another angel, Michael, who I guess is like the Chuck Norris of angels, who comes in and opens up a can of whoop-tail on this demon. Evidently, Gabriel is like the Nicolas Cage of angels--silver tongued and savvy, but in need of some help for a true extraterrestrial tumble. So God sends in Michael, the Chuck Norris of angels.

**Again, I have so many questions. But the point is, who knows what is happening up there as you pray?** So you've prayed for 20 days, no answer. Keep praying. Help is on the way. You've prayed for 69 years, no answer. Keep praying. God gives some things only in response to persistence in asking.

You say, "Why does he do it this way?" I don't know. Maybe it's to test our resolve. To see how much we actually trust him. Or to see how quickly we'll turn away from God and pursue some other means. **Martin**

**Luther** compared it to the father who has something his kid wants in his hand but won't let it go at first to test his child's resolve, to see how bad he wants it. Maybe God is doing that with us. Do you really trust me? How quickly are you going to turn away to some other source? Don't give up. He promises never to turn you away.

I can't help but think here of the story here of Joan and Tommy Swain in our church. Many of you don't know them, but Joan really got on fire here 30 or so years ago. Before I got here. But her husband Tommy didn't want any real part of it. She came, and he stayed at home. So Joan prayed for him. And prayed and prayed for him. And she stayed with him. Eventually he moved out, left her—for 20 years—but she kept praying. And then, in Feb of 2009, through some pretty remarkable circumstances, God saved him, brought him back—we baptized him here in the Spring of 2009—I can still remember the joy of that moment. And they are now reunited to God and each other and they served in our church together every weekend until they were medically unable—all this because a woman prayed faithfully for him for 20 years and didn't give up. Don't give up on year 69. Who knows what is happening up there.

*Finally,*

#### 4. Hope in God's Mercy, Not Your Goodness (9:18)

MUSIC

What Daniel says in vs. 18 might be one of the most **significant** "secrets" of prayer: **18 For we are not presenting our petitions before you based on our righteous acts, but based on your abundant compassion.**

"God, I'm not asking you to give this because I'm worthy of it. I'm asking you to supply this out of the rich storehouse of your grace." Summit, the longer I walk with Jesus, the less confident I grow in my abilities to change people, and the less convinced I am of my worthiness to demand anything from God. When I first started out in ministry, I was pretty confident, "If I just explain this to them the right way, and with the force of my personality, I can change this person." Y'all, I can't even keep myself in the path of righteousness, much less get somebody else there. So I pray, "God, I'm not asking you to work in this person's life according to the measure of my abilities. And I'm certainly not asking you to reward me for my righteousness, because I don't really have any--on my best of days I'm still an unprofitable servant. No, give me according to the abundant riches of Christ's mercy. According to the abundance of his capabilities." Because that's a well that will never run dry.

- **I often use the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman** who came to Jesus to ask for healing for her daughter to illustrate this. She was a Gentile. And Jesus said, "Woman, it is not proper to take the food intended for the children (Jews) and give it to the dogs (Gentiles)..." At first, that sounds a little like a racial slur, but it's not. The woman perceives it to be a description of her unworthiness. When it comes to demanding things of God, none of us are any more worthy than a dog. So, she says, "Yes, Lord, but in a rich man's house, even the little dogs get to eat from the crumbs that fall off the Master's table." In other words, I know that when it comes to worthiness I'm a dog, but I believe there is SO MUCH GRACE overflowing your table that

there's even enough for an unworthy person like me." And Jesus said, "I've never seen faith like this in Israel." Because her hope was in the abundance of Jesus' mercy, not her goodness.<sup>12</sup>

- Friend, you can never hope too much in his goodness.

BTW, this is what you are saying when you pray *in Jesus' name*. That phrase is not just a little verbal signal to God that you're about done, like saying "in conclusion." That's what many Christians think. I had a guy leave me a long rambling VM on my phone one time and he said at the end, "In Jesus' name," and then he caught himself and was like, "Oh, sorry..." He was just so used to concluding long, rambling things with "In Jesus' name;" it was his way of saying "in conclusion." No, when you say "In Jesus' name," You are saying, "God, I'm not praying according to my worthiness, but yours. My hope is not in my righteousness or your ability--so I bring this prayer not in name; but in your grace and power--so I pray in yours. I'm not asking this based on my worthiness to receive it but his worthiness to give it."

Summit, over what area of your life do you need to come and throw yourself at the mercy of Jesus?

Summit, listen, teaching on prayer is great. Reading about it is great. But the most important thing we can do is act on it. And that's what we are going to do right now. Yes, I hope you'll take the challenge for the next 21 days and pray for at least 10 mins a day. But right now, at all of our locations, we're going to turn TSC into a literal house of prayer.

At all of our locations our prayer teams are making their way forward. Here's what we're gonna do:

1. Some of you have a request and you can come forward and pray *with* one of these folks or have them pray *for* you. You don't even have to tell them your name or anything...Some of you have provisions you need God to supply. Life is falling apart. You need a job. Your marriage is on the rocks. You need deliverance from an addiction. A prodigal to come home. I want you to come and believe God together with one of these.
2. Others of you need to grab the person you came with and come down here to the altar at your campus. Yes, I said it—altar. Come. Posture yourself before the Lord and cry out to him.
3. Or, you might just wanna turn your chair into a prayer altar. Get on your knees in your chair. The best prayers are desperate prayers, so put yourself in a desperate posture.
4. Or for some you can pray with your family or with those around you. Maybe you're sitting with your SG.

Whatever it is, every single person should be approaching God right now. And praying out loud. You say, "I'm embarrassed to pray out loud." What do you think the church is? It's supposed to be a place where people call out on God, a "house of prayer." I believe this is what God is calling us to do in this season—to seek him. If we are to be a church known for anything then, Lord, let us be known as a church that seeks you.

Friend, YOU are greatly loved, you are treasured by God--I know that because Jesus came to die on a cross for you, to save you out of your sin, if you are willing to receive that. Give up trying to make yourself worthy for

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<sup>12</sup> Her appeal was not in her worthiness to be delivered but his worthiness to be worshipped.

God to hear and just receive it as a gift in Jesus. It's ready for you. Once you do, God is ready for your burdens, and when you pray, the angels move. So are you ready to bring your request to God? Let's bombard heaven with requests and prayer and praise...Then someone from your campus will come close out and lead you. Our prayer teams are in place. Our worship teams will play quietly as you pray. Come now.