

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 30

Prayer and the Word

By

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Living in Christ Ministries

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We are in the book of Acts chapter 6 and we will begin to read at verse 4. We are looking at a very great matter, the kingdom of God and what it has to do with prayer and the word of God. We will start out in a moment looking at the overall general importance of prayer and the Word operating in our lives together. Then we will look at prayer affecting the work of the Word in our lives. Then we will turn it around the other way and look at the Word as it affects our prayer life. Finally, we will have a brief little postscript on prayer and the preaching of the Word of God. And that also involves something that most of us do together at least once each week and sometimes more.

Let's begin in ([Acts 6:4](#)) concerning the overall, general importance of prayer and the Word working together. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." That is what the early apostles said. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Let's think for a moment on that simple little connective word, "but." Why did they use that term? It is because they had just described what God wanted to do in order to meet a very, very important need in the body, the supply of the widows needs—particularly in the area of food. The Lord showed these apostles that other spiritual and wise saints would attend to those important matters and that the apostles must be involved in the vital areas of prayer and the Word.

This is a serious matter, I think to all of us, not to let the important eclipse the essential. And that is something that can happen so easily, particularly when you come to know the Lord and you hopefully want to be more responsible than ever before. Some of us did not even know how to spell "responsibility" until we met the Lord. I am making a personal confession on that one. But when we meet the Lord, His Spirit urges a responsible life of stewardship within us and important things become important to us. But it is very easy to get distracted and have the important things eclipse the essential things and that is disastrous in the kingdom of God. It always leads to a heaviness and burdensomeness weariness and lack of true spiritual productivity, though it might lead to a busyness of activity. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

There are many important things in the kingdom of God and those who were going to lead the early church were bound by the Spirit of God to give themselves to some essential things. They knew that the important things would have to be taken care of by spiritual and wise saints, who are full of the Spirit and full of the wisdom of the Lord. "But *we* will devote ourselves" The "we" in this case is the apostles, the leaders of the early church. It was critical for the church to have, pressing on in the forefront of the flock, those leaders who would be giving themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word. I think it is a good reminder to all of us, and it is a good word to pastors in this day and age, to teachers, to parents, to all who have any responsibility to give direction to others. These leaders need to give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

We, God's leaders, are the leaders of the church. In the true sense, every one of us is a leader in the Lord for someone else. This is a good word for all of us. There are many leading the people of God today who do not give themselves to prayer and the ministry of

the word. It can be weakening and tragic when that happens. There is no way to really lead without prayer and the word, being right with the Son. Because that is where the Lord reveals Himself and displays His life and power.

And these men said, “But we will devote ourselves to...” Devote is a heavy word and it does not mean “dabble in.” It does not relate to a weekly prayer meeting that you go to monthly. The weekly prayer meeting would not be enough for this, let alone dabbling in it! “We will devote ourselves to [an earnest, serious, persistent, intensive commitment to] prayer and the ministry of the word.” That is what the apostles were after. I confess personally that I see these two matters as my two basic shepherding responsibilities here in this part of God’s flock. There is no way in which prayer and ministry of the word would define the things the Lord has me involved in every week. It would only begin to describe it because there are so many other important things in the kingdom of God. But I cannot even begin to touch the others unless these two areas are happening in abundance. “We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” That is my desire.

Sometimes I sense a proper moving in that direction in my own heart and life. When it is not happening, it catches up with me really fast. How about you? There are times when the Lord has us moving and doing something so urgently and so strongly that the centrality of these matters may for a moment look like they fade a bit, but the fruit of them stay in the center of everything. In that sense they never fade. But if they seem to fade for a while, there is soon a sense that they need to get right back in the middle of who I am and what I am doing.

There is only one true shepherd and Jesus said, “I AM the good shepherd.” The real responsibility of undershepherds, which I feel God has called me to be, and I think God has called most of us to some type of shepherding of other lives—whether it is with our children or newer believers. Our basic responsibility in shepherding, the most critical one, is getting to know the only one who is the true shepherd and staying very close to Him. He knows where He is going, He does care for the sheep, He does lay down His life for the sheep. If you want to shepherd, stay close to the only Shepherd there really is. And prayer and the ministry of the word are critical to walking close to the Shepherd, because in that we hear from Him and he hears from us. And communication back and forth is vital to producing true intimacy between two persons. “But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

Prayer is talking to God, communicating with the Lord. The ministry of the word is letting God speak to us and then helping others through the Word hear from Him. Certainly these leaders were not going to neglect both of these things, but more than that, they were not even going to rely on one alone. “We will devote ourselves to prayer. That is it. We will just pray.” Wrong, that is not enough. “Ok then, we will just devote ourselves to the ministry of the word.” Wrong, that is not enough. Something is missing. Something vital is missing in both instances that only the other can provide and make each whole. It is prayer and the word, the word and prayer. These are essential to the progress of God’s people.

I went to a seminary that is dedicated to the Word of God and the preaching of the Word of God. I have shared this before and I think it is ([2 Timothy 4:2](#)) that is their model. They are so dedicated that written on the walls, not in English but in Greek—I can still see it—was: *Kēruxon ton logon*. What did it mean? “Preach the Word.” And my heart thrills when I hear it. I remember one time in seminary when we almost died getting into the word, wanting to preach it and forgetting to pray! One of the easiest places to die on the spiritual vine is in seminary. There were more days with more hang-dog expressions, coming out of hang-dog spirits saying, “I have another lesson, another analysis of another book of the Bible.” And we would be bleary-eyed up all night, not praying, just studying. And the same can happen on the other side. Praying, praying, praying until you fall over weary from praying, but never hearing from God. So the prayers get stale and ramble off target, and they are not a joy but become a load to carry.

These early leaders of the church were going to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word. May the Lord give us nothing less than that same commitment. If God ordained to start the church that way, how is He going to finish the job? “Okay, they prayed, they heard up, they taught up, the rest of you can coast on to glory on the coat tails of the early apostles.” Not quite. If anything, the warfare is more intense today. Some do not agree with that and it baffles me how they cannot see it. I remember saying that once at a home Bible study and some young guy (maybe that was the deal, I did it too when I was young) begged to differ with me. Things have always been awful, granted, but they are worse now. The Scriptures say that in the last days, “evil men will go from bad to worse” (cf. [2 Tim 3:13](#)). They will wax worse and worse. May the Lord give us this heart to devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

And there was a man of God who pastored a big city church in Chicago whose name is A. W. Tozer. And that man has been an instrument used of God to touch my heart. He pastored a big city church and he walked what we are teaching right now. And someone shared a few sermons of his on tape with me recently. They are very precious. Oh, my heart just burned with the fire of God, as I listened to that man teach!

He was teaching on the classic rapture passage and those who sense the word teaching that the Lord is coming back before the great day of trouble. And then in the great tribulation there will be trouble like the world has never seen. Then the Lord will come back with His saints, according to Revelation 20 and establish His kingdom for a thousand years. And I was listening to A.W. Tozer teach on that great passage, which I have heard so many times, in fact, it is one of the cornerstones of the background of my teaching in the word. And I was just about to weep because my heart was so softened by his teaching in that passage. And what hit me as I was listening—get this—that man went into that passage devoted not only to the word and the truth of it but to prayer. He met God in that passage.

I have taught about the Lord’s return so many times where the major points of the passage are to order your prophetic calendar. Now have you got it right? Shift your pieces around, I mean you need to get it right! Amen, there is nothing wrong with being right. I have been wrong too much, maybe you have too. I would like to be right more often,

right in the Lord's sight. But there is something bigger than that. Tozer was teaching and preaching and boy, my heart was lifting up in the rapture of worship. I was not checking my calendar to see if I had the pieces on it right. He was dwelling on "and the Lord Himself will descend with a shout" (cf. [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#)). And he began to elaborate on what that meant to his heart. His eyes were off the calendar and on the Lord. "The Lord Himself will descend with a shout." He will catch us up and so shall we ever be with the Lord! And he preached the Lord Jesus Christ.

He challenged the saints and all of us. We are too earthly minded and we forget our citizenship is in heaven from which we look for the appearing of our Savior. We do not get shaken loose from earthly things or even from earthly religious things unless we are devoted to prayer and ministry of the word. It takes going to the word to get our prophetic calendar and some kind of accuracy, so we can walk in light of it. It takes some prayer to get light on it. It takes more prayer to go past that and have a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is coming back and then our citizenship will be made complete. Until then, we are "strangers in an alien land" (cf. [Hebrews 11:13](#)). We are pilgrims on our way. What are we leaning on—our prophetic calendar? And how right it is? If it is absolutely perfect and we lean on it, we will fall. He is the only rock we can stand on. He is the only rock.

It takes prayer in the word to meet the Lord in the word. It is prayer that rescues the Bible from being just a book, really a library of 66 books. Prayer lets us meet the Lord and God lives in our hearts as we commune with Him in the word. We must devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

Let's look now at prayer affecting the word in our lives. Let's look at that first because it is listed here first—'prayer, and the ministry of the word.' I think it is also listed first because we must approach the word prayerfully. That is the way to approach the word, seeking. You may say, "Yes, but I do not know how to pray, I am new at this." Get into the word saying, "Lord I want to find You." That is all the prayer you need to start out with, to begin with say: "Lord I just want to find You."

We have sung part of it Psalm 119 which was sung by Israel and it is good to be a psalm singing gentile. ([Psalm 119:18](#)) is a prayer that affects the working of the word in our lives. "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things from Your law." That is the way to go to the word. "Open my eyes!" We do not have the sight we think we do. We can go into the word and read it and read it and then let someone else humbly seek God, read the same passage, open their mouth and we wonder where they got that! God opened their eyes—that is where they saw it. Have you not had that experience many times? I have countless times. You hear someone read a passage and you think, "I have that one tucked away." And then you hear them start to talk and you think: "What? Well, I'll be—they are right!"

Lord open my eyes. We can be so blind when we go to the word. So blind, we cannot see what God wants us to see in the word unless He opens our eyes. He can do it and He is willing to do it. And He wants us to behold wonderful things. The word is not just full of nit-picky details of history and religion. There are some of those details, but even they

can have a glory of their own. God wants us to behold wonderful things—wonderful things of salvation by grace, of new life in Christ, of faith and hope and love and peace and righteousness and power. Wonderful things!

That verse reminds me of a word God gave Isaiah the prophet. ([Isaiah 9:6](#)), “And His name shall be called, Wonderful” There are many wonderful things in the word but the one whose name is called “Wonderful” is the most wonderful One of all. There are many wonderful things in one way or another and if we ask God, He will show us how they are all tied into the One whose name is called “Wonderful.” His name is called: “Wonderful.” And then it says, “from whence cometh all these wonderful things?” This is right out of the Bible. The things of the Lord Jesus Christ are what make up the kingdom of God. And they come from God’s law which is another synonym or broad term for God’s word.

Also in ([Psalm 119:33](#)) is another set of prayers showing how prayer can affect the word of God in our lives.

33 Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes,
And I shall keep it *to* the end.
34 Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law;
Indeed, I shall observe it with *my* whole heart.
35 Make me walk in the path of Your commandments,
For I delight in it.
36 Incline my heart to Your testimonies,
38 Establish Your word to Your servant,

Is it not clear there, the perfect partnership between prayer and the word of God? This servant of the Lord knew how to go to the word, prayerfully, that the word might affect the life of the seeker. Do we not want to have the word taught to us? Do we not want understanding of the word? Don’t we want to walk in the path of God’s commandments? We want our hearts inclined to His word just naturally tending that way, instead of the unnatural bias our unredeemed heart had for the things of the world and the things of man. Don’t we want the word established to us where it is just a rock that is established in our hearts and holds us stable? How are we going to get these things? Prayer!

All of these phrases we just read are prayers concerning how we need our lives to be touched by the word of God. And the way we open up for it is through prayer: teach me, give me, make me, incline my heart, establish Your word. Those are not vows and promises made to God. Those are requests for God to go to work in us. It is such a bigger way to walk! God I promise that I will read Your word every day for the rest of my life. Eight days later, you oversleep, you are too busy, or a little mad at God anyway—I mean what is He pulling, it is not long before something new comes along. There goes a day and there goes the vow. How much better that God knows the hearts and He can see the hearts behind those promises. But there is a bigger way to live by casting our care upon Him. Do we care about these things? I think we do. Let’s cast them on Him. “Lord, You

teach us. You give us understanding. You make us walk. ‘You work in us to do of Your good pleasure’” (cf. [Philippians 2:13](#)).

Prayer and the word, they just go together like love and marriage. They ought to anyway.

Let’s look at the other side, the word affecting our prayer life. It works back the other way. We pray that the word might affect us. As the word affects us it affects how we pray. It works in a reciprocal, back and forth, kind of arrangement. We looked earlier at the prayer promises of the Lord. His promises stir faith in us to ask great things of God. That is one way that the word works. We have already seen that as we looked at the prayer promises. Let’s look at one other word from ([1 John 5: 14-15](#) NASB).

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (NASB)

I just love that reasoning, it is so fantastic—that is heavenly reasoning. I do not know how it hits your heart, but it is convincing to me. That sounds good! This is the confidence which we have before Him as we go before God in prayer. “If we ask anything according to His will He hears us.” How do we know whether it is His will? The safest way of all is to pray in accord with His will as revealed in Scripture. Pray according to the word of God, letting the word define our prayers. If we are praying things revealed in the word that are the will of God, knowing they are things He wants then, oh, what a confidence we have! “If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us!” And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the request which we have asked from Him. When we pray that way, we can know that the moment we ask, it is not a matter of waiting for the answer, we know that we have the request which we have asked. That is a pretty quick answer, isn’t it?

We are to pray for things according to His will and as we ask them we have the confidence to say: “I’ve got it, it is mine!” I will just rise up and walk and see it revealed—it is mine. That happens as the word reveals the will and guides our prayers and we know He hears. We are then confident that we have it. That is the word affecting our prayer life.

I tucked this little sheet in my Bible and it is from the study when we were looking at praying together in one accord, out of ([Acts 1:14](#)) and elsewhere. This fits just as perfectly to what we did then because these dozen or so prayer requests were written out of the word, out of Ephesians where the will of God is abundantly revealed. We ask Him to let us join together in speaking and praying these matters to our Lord in heaven. Do you know that as we pray these, we can stand up confident that we have what we have asked? Why? It is because these requests are according to the will of God, revealed in His word. Oh, how the word can affect our prayer life! It shows us what to pray in accordance with God’s heart, but it also gives us such confidence. “Hey we’ve got it!”

Oh, to pray like that way, according to His will, knowing that we have what we have asked.

One last little postscript: prayer and the teaching of the word. In ([Ephesians 6:19](#)) Paul writes: “And pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel” (NASB).

Oh, how God revealed the mystery of the gospel to Paul! The mystery of the gospel being those aspects of the Good News that could only be understood as God revealed it. That is the mystery of the kingdom. The mystery part is that which can only be known as God reveals it. And that basically applies to the whole kingdom. There is not a kingdom known by man that isn't revealed by God. God so richly showed the mystery of the gospel to Paul. But Paul did not take that for granted. He did not say, “Oh, God has shown me the mystery of the gospel, I will just go out now and proclaim the mysteries of the gospel. No, he said, “Pray on my behalf that utterances may be given me in the opening of my mouth to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel.”

God wants us to open our mouths to share what He has shown us of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He wants us to make it known so that others might know. He wants us to make it known with boldness. Do you know what that calls for? Prayer. As a preacher of the word of God, I would ask the same thing. And I know some of you do that and I rejoice in that. My heart appreciates it and I know it is in accordance to the will of God. Myself and others stand among us to preach the mysteries of the gospel. It is so good to know that there are, in the family of God, saints praying that utterance will be given to make known the mysteries of the gospel and to do it with boldness. I confess that I need that absolutely!

If you have recently opened you mouth to make known the mystery of the gospel, haven't you wanted others to be behind you in prayer? Don't we do that sometimes? “Hey, I am going to go spend the weekend with Aunt Rose. Pray for me that utterance will be given to me in the opening of my mouth that I might make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel. That is what Paul is telling us. We need that and we should be doing this for our teachers as they teach the children. We should be doing it for each other as we minister the word to others and to ourselves. It is right. It is the will of God!

Do you know that you can affect the preaching of the word of God in the church that God has you in by praying this to the Lord? Why? Because it is His will and it is His word. Pray it and I wonder if you will get it? Pray it and you have it! If I am not opening my mouth and uttering with boldness the mysteries of the gospel, shame on me!

Through the years, how many preachers I criticized when I should have been praying for them. Boy, did I waste my time! And the most that the criticism did was lend to their discouragement or irritability or whatever else that the flesh begets. I do not mind saying it, “I need your prayers.” You may say, “I thought you were the professional.” Since when is the kingdom of God a job? I believe I am called to this, but I cannot do it. But

God can and I am willing to stand and see if He will do it, if you will pray with me in the project. That is how it happens.

Prayer and the word of God. The early church leaders devoted themselves to both. I want to do the same. I do not want to neglect any important thing that God wants me to do. I do not even want important things to eclipse my own desperate need and responsibility to God to devote myself to prayer and the ministry of the word.

I can remember when the revolution began to dawn in my own teaching ministry many years ago. It was when I got my nose out of the lexicons and I got my knees more on the floor and with the word open I talked to God. I have learned more in prayer with the word open before God than I ever learned out of any book on earth. I am not downgrading that which others have done to bless us in the academic field. If that is approached prayerfully, that can also be sanctified as a vessel of value. But prayer and the word are critical to the kingdom of God. It is prayer and the word together.

We have looked at prayer affecting the word in our lives. Whatever we need the word to do in us, we ought to pray to God to do it for us. That is the way it is to work. We looked at the word affecting our prayer life. Also in 1 John we see that keeping the commandments keeps the doors open for God to say, “Yes.” A willingness to obey lets the Spirit move without being quenched in rebellion. And then if we pray anything according to His will, we have it. This is the word affecting our prayer life.

Preachers and teachers of the word need prayer for their ministry of the word. They need this desperately.

May the Lord grant in our lives that we would respond to God like Mary did in Luke 1:38 when she had a word from God through an angel, she said: “Behold the bondservant of the Lord, be it unto me according to your word.” She is an example for the ages to everyone. May it be this way for us. We also are bondservants of the Lord. We can say with Mary, “Be it unto us according to Your will.” In this great area of prayer and the word let us be together as a church.

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is in grave danger of repeating a tragic mistake that God’s people, Israel, made more than two thousand five hundred years ago. We need to understand what this mistake was and then like Daniel of old cry out with prayer for God’s people. Again this study on prayer involves a prayer from God’s word. This prayer was a prayer uttered unto God by Daniel, one of the most unique and godly men in all of the history of the kingdom of God. Daniel was drug off with many of the Israelites by the godless kingdom of Babylon. He grew up as a young teenager in what is called the Babylonian captivity, yet he had a resolve to follow the Lord and there was no turning back. He faced many tough consequences in light of that but the Lord kept honoring his faithfulness and commitment. And he rose to be a prime minister, a leader in that godless kingdom.

Daniel saw the people of God, Israel, much hampered, hindered in bondage, and oppressed. He saw their great needs and in captivity he cried out this prayer for God's people. The prayer is in ([Daniel 9:4-19](#)). Verses 4-14 are a confession of sin. In the first three verses 4-6, we will see the sin that is their tragic mistake.

I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed and said, “Alas, O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned, committed iniquity, acted wickedly and rebelled, even turning aside from Your commandments and ordinances. Moreover, we have not listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land.” (NASB)

This is another prayer that begins with the attention on God, just as we saw in the disciples' prayer, “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,” that is the basic way to start in prayer is to put our attention on the Lord. One of our greatest needs as people is to get the attention off of ourselves and on to the Lord. And prayer is a beautiful opportunity to do that. We put our attention on the one we are speaking to. We do that when we speak to each other, but we often fail to do it when we speak to the Lord.

And so as Daniel begins to pray he says: “Oh Lord, the great and awesome God.” He speaks of the glorious nature of God and the fact that God strikes awe in his heart when he thinks of the Lord. And he describes God as the One who keeps covenant and lovingkindness. He told the Lord he knew that He was the one who keeps His commitments. He is going to speak about how Israel did not keep their commitments, but God keeps His commitments. He keeps His covenants and He pours out loyal steadfast love. That is lovingkindness to all who love Him and obey Him. Daniel knew that and that is really the foundation of anyone's relationship with the Lord, knowing that this is the kind of God that we seek and serve.

And then he said in ([Daniel 9:5](#)), basically that we have been sinful, wicked rebels. Basically that was it. There are two aspects to the sin: one, he said that the people of God turned away from the word of God. And second: they did not listen to those who warned them. Those were the basic sins of Israel and it brought them into captivity. Israel who was given the word of the Lord, through Moses and through the prophets, they were told God's heart and His plans and His purposes. They had turned away from the word of God. They had become more interested in the ways of the nations around them. They wanted to be like all the other nations. They wanted a king, they wanted idols, they wanted indulgences. And then when God sent the prophets to warn them, they did not listen to those who warned them. In fact, they stoned and killed some of them. Their basic sin was turning away from the Lord's word and not listening to the warnings of the Lord's servants.

You know the church world in many ways is doing the same thing. It is not that different from Israel's sin. It is amazing how we can read about Israel and say, “My word, how can they be so dumb and blind and hard? Look at what God did for them. Look at what God

gave them. And look at how they responded.” Have you looked lately at the church world today? Think of these two sins of Israel, their great tragic mistake was turning from the word and ignoring those God sent to warn them that their actions were wrong, dangerous, and troublesome. In the church world, in church after church there is little attention to the word or no word at all. Some of you have been in this church or a church like this and it is the only kind you have ever known. You can hardly imagine that you could go into other churches and they would not do what we are doing. They would not open the word and spend a significant portion of their time in the word of God. I will guarantee you that is the way it is out in the church world.

There are some thirty churches in this city and do you know that significantly less than half of them preach the word of the Lord. Do you know that? Right here in this city! This is what Israel did and this is what the church world is doing today. The church has become more interested in entertainment than in the truth of the living God. The church has sold out to the, “whatever attracts people,” philosophy—do it. Instead of looking into the word of God to see what God has to say and just saying it; Instead of looking into the word to let Christ build His church, men are out trying to build religious organizations and plaster the name of the Lord Jesus Christ upon it. Whatever it takes to get people—that is what the church world is tempted to do today. This is just like Israel twenty-five hundred years ago. God’s people were in a miserable path then and many are walking that path today.

God in His word has told us how to find wholeness of life, but now the church is more interested in what the psychologists have to say. What the sociologists have to say. What the consultant has to say. It is tragic. It is the same tragic mistake that Israel made. When problems come into people’s lives, if they are not too serious, the church might address them. But if they look real serious, we recommend them to the so-called “experts.” Basically we are throwing the lambs to the wolves. It is a tragic mistake. It is an absolute kinship with the path that Israel was walking.

The apostle Peter wrote that “the Lord Jesus has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness” (cf. [2 Peter 1:3](#)). And the church turns from that promise and goes out to feed on the dregs of this world. It is a pitiful situation. It is a tragic mistake. Any believer who walks that route is going to diminish their walk with God if not eventually destroy it. And I am personally not talking in just theological or theoretical terms, though these statements are true from that perspective. I have watched it happen in life after life and in church after church. This is the path the church is walking. We actually think that insights to living from men like Freud and Jung and Maslow and Rogers can actually do more for us than the living word of the Lord Jesus Christ applied by the Spirit in the ministering context of the family of God. How blind can we be? This the same mistake as in Daniel’s time.

The Church world is turning away from the word of the Lord. I know as a pastor it is the passion in my heart, as long a God gives me life and breath on this earth, to just be consumed with a fire to preach the word of God. There is no other light shining to show us where we are. “It is a lamp to our feet.” (cf. [Psalm 119:105](#)). There is no other light

shining to show us where to go. It is a light unto our path, only the word of the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ is going to be allowed to shine forth across this nation the way He wants. And here is the lamp that He is going to shine it through—the word of God. May we treasure it, love it, give into it, live by it, and freely give it away to anyone who will listen.

Turning away from the word of the Lord is a tragic mistake. Israel not only did that, but she did something else. When God sent forth men to warn the church, they would not listen to those who warned. Now we ask: “How could they do that?” We are doing the same thing today! God is sending forth men with a warning message that churches are being seduced and Christians are ignoring the word. God has sent forth the men and what does much of the church do? They say that these men are on a witch hunt. That is a tragic mistake. When God raises up people to warn us that we are off track, we need to humble our hearts before them and listen. We need to listen, and repent and turn.

I thank God for these bold men. I rejoice in their spiritual courage. I know these men have broken hearts for the people of God. I know that they are not vindictive men. I know that they are not out to shoot people down. They are out to win the war for the hearts and souls and minds of men. God forgive us and protect us and change us. May we not turn away from the word and when the Lord sends those who warn us that we are doing it, may we listen to them.

I am so blessed by a man who read “The Seduction of Christianity,” which is about the seduction of the church, and he put a two-page ad in a magazine. It said, “Thank God for telling us what we needed to hear. When I read this book I fell to me knees and wept for hours.” That is responding to the word of God. He came from the theological tradition that could have had much reason to get uptight over that book. Praise God when men will humble themselves in the sight of God when they hear the truth. May we not make this tragic mistake again. God protect us from turning from the word and then not listening to the leaders of God’s people when they warn us.

Well, that is how Daniel started out his prayer. May we pray like Daniel. We talk about praying like Daniel, here is how Daniel prayed. He cried out to God in light of God’s glory and he cried out to God that the people of God were turning from the word and would not listen to the prophets. May we pray that way for God’s people. This is a day and age to include in our prayers, prayer for God’s people. Oh, yes, we need to pray for the world. Yes, we need to address our own brokenness and needs. But may we include in our praying, prayer for God’s people.

In verse 7, ([Daniel 9:7](#)) addressed their shame.

Righteousness belongs to You, O Lord, but to us open shame, as it is this day--to the men of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those who are nearby and those who are far away in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of their unfaithful deeds which they have committed against You.

See this is the problem with all of this sort of living is against God; it is not just against a religious movement or against man, it is against God. And Daniel called this shameful. Again he ascribed truth to the Lord, “Righteousness belongs to You O Lord.” It is so right for us to intersperse in our prayers telling the Lord what we have found Him to be. He is the one who is listening. He is the one we are talking to. It right through our prayers time and again to ascribe unto the Lord that He is righteous and to tell Him that righteous belongs to Him.

And then Daniel contrasts that, “But to Israel, shame.” He said, “You are righteous, God, and Your people are shameful. We have become a disgrace and a dishonor to You.” It was not just Israel then though, again it is the church now. There is much disgrace in the church world. I read the “religion” page of the local newspaper. Somewhere in there every now and then you find the church of the living God. But in article after article I am just amazed when I am through reading them. Inside I feel like: “Lord that is disgraceful. That is not pleasing to You.” It is disgraceful and we call ourselves the church and speak in these ways. I read an article the other day from one of the biggest churches in Orange County. The Lord Jesus Christ was not mentioned once. The word of God was not mentioned, and prayer was not mentioned. What can you talk about as a pastor if you do not address those things? It talked about issues with people and making them happy, blessed and more comfortable, I guess. It is disgraceful and it is a shame.

Twenty-five hundred years ago people shamed God by the way they lived and we are on the same path today. May God shake us and wake us up.

In ([Daniel 9:9](#)),

To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against Him; nor have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in His teachings which He set before us through His servants the prophets. "Indeed all Israel has transgressed Your law and turned aside, not obeying Your voice; so the curse has been poured out on us, along with the oath which is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, for we have sinned against Him [against God]. “Thus He has confirmed His words which He had spoken against us and against our rulers who ruled us, to bring on us great calamity; for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what was done to Jerusalem [their bondage, their captivity].”

Again Daniel ascribes truth and glory to the Lord. Verse 9, “To the Lord our God belong compassion and forgiveness.” That is exactly what Israel needed—the compassion of God and the forgiving work of God. And there is another work of God that we will see in a minute as it comes forth in his prayer.

Daniel said what they were experiencing was a curse which came through an oath that Moses delivered to his people. He is speaking of passages like Deuteronomy 28 and

elsewhere. Do you remember Deuteronomy? *Deuteronomous* means “second law.” This was the second giving of the law. Why give the law again? God gave it to Israel coming out of the land of Egypt; but after they wandered in the wilderness and it was time to go into the Promised Land, He sat them down and gave them the law again.

And in ([Deuteronomy 28](#)) there was a promise of blessing for obedience, and a curse for disobedience. Another way of saying it is: “We reap whatever we sow.” And that is what is being spoken of here in Daniel. He knew the word of God. Remember if we ever want to learn to pray God’s way, we will learn to do it in the word of God by praying and letting the word be our guide in prayer. And that is what Daniel is doing. In his prayer he sees that the curse that God had given is sort of a conditional threat: “If you live wrongly, this will happen to you.” And God gave it with an oath. He said, “It will happen. I swear it will happen if you rebel against Me.”

You cannot get away from the promise of God. There are many rebellious people in the church world today. There are many rebellious people in leadership and there are some rebellious who are currently training to be leaders. God will not let them get away with rebellion. Although they may look like great things to the religious world, God will humble their hearts one way or another before He is done. There is a curse that comes upon rebelliousness and God has an oath to go with it, “I will take care of it.” It was the oath written in the law and it is written in the word of God. It shall hold up in our experience. The curse was for disobedience, for rebelliousness, and for idolatry; and Israel went that path. The promise was that it would bring upon them destruction, scattering, bondage, fear, misery, and every uncertainty of life. That is exactly what Israel found when she rebelled. Daniel called this great calamity or disaster—“the captivity of God’s people.” The tragic thing, and some of the saddest parts of the word of God, is to read what happened to Israel.

But you know the history of God’s people, in another way, is still being written now. We are the people of God upon the earth today. We are the form of the kingdom He is building. Jesus said, “I will build my church.” We may be headed toward a great calamity just like this. You say, “Well, what do you mean? They are not going to come and drag us off to Babylon.” Well, no the man who tried to rebuild Babylon was greatly disappointed recently, although in the end the Babylonian system of humanism and self-centered living will circle the globe. It will fall when God judges it in the tribulation. But the Babylonian system, the world’s system is against God. It is everywhere. It is thriving in commerce and in education and in government.

([Genesis 11:4](#)) says, “With God out of the way, let us build for ourselves a tower to heaven” (paraphrased). And I think the church world is crawling into captivity through worldly ways. We are slipping into captivity and do not even know it. Just because they did not come and change our geography, we may think we are doing okay because we are in free America. Listen, most Americans are turning away from the word of God. Most Americans are not listening to the Lord. Where are most Americans today? They are out getting the BBQ ready and they are living it up! They are going to celebrate this weekend. But will they have anything to do with listening to God—for most Americans,

no. Our nation could fall under a similar kind of judgment that the whole nation of Israel fell under when her godly people strayed away from the Lord.

The church is being pulled into the ways of the world. We are to be influencing the world as salt and light. The world is beginning to dictate how we think, how we function, what we say, how we minister, and whether or not we minister. That is just bondage. That is just a subtle form of spiritual captivity. In the midst of that Israel was not turning to God, verse 13.

As it is written in the law of Moses, all this calamity has come on us; yet we have not sought the favor of the LORD our God by turning from our iniquity and giving attention to Your truth. Therefore the LORD has kept the calamity in store [He has done what He said He would do] and brought it on us; for the LORD our God is righteous [He does rightly, He is righteous, He is just] with respect to all His deeds which He has done, but we have not obeyed His voice. ([Daniel 9:13](#))

In the midst of this mess they were drug off from their beloved land where they were to live under the rule of God, and they were taken to a godless nation. Don't you think that people would be crying out to God? They were not. "Yet we have not asked Your favor." They did not turn to God for grace. They did not turn from their wicked ways or turn to God's truth. In Babylon they kept sinning as they sinned in the Land of Promise.

But there were some who turned to the truth of God; there were some Daniels. Praise the Lord for the Daniels! May God give us a generation where many Daniels rise up who will not compromise the things of God. The health of the church will depend upon it and even though our nation does not know it, the health of our nation will depend on the health of the church. If we are not salt and light, they will be decaying and in darkness.

God is righteous and His judgments were right for Israel. You know if God judged the church of America or judged America as a whole, it would be deserved. You heard the statement that someone made and I think it is quite accurate, "If God doesn't judge America there will be an apology due Sodom and Gomorrah." There is a lot of truth in that. If we do not turn to God, there is going to be some heavy judgment and calamity upon our nation. We have already seen some cracks and crevices. You can see how easily a nation can fall. We are straining and groaning as a nation. May we be turning to God and not go on in our blind ways.

Well at this point, the last and smaller portion of this prayer in Daniel turns from confession of sin to request for restoration. And in the beginning of ([Daniel 9:15](#)), Daniel asks God to shine upon his people.

And now, O Lord our God, who have brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for Yourself, as it is this day--we have sinned, we have been wicked. O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn

away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all those around us. So now, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary.

He was referring to the headquarters of God on earth, the temple at Jerusalem that was desolate and destroyed.

In this part of Daniel's prayer, he recalls God's mighty deliverance from Egypt—when Israel was in bondage to the world and yet God brought her out. And that was the basis of their expectation for new and mighty works. They were in bondage again. It is sort of like, "God you did it in Egypt, do it again now in Babylon, would You?" And of course that is a picture of our deliverance from bondage. Israel is being brought out of bondage in Egypt and it is like us being brought out from bondage to sin and death and into Christ. God saved us from the deadness of the world when He forgave us in Jesus Christ our Lord. And in this study on prayer, the central issue is speaking to a God of deliverance, a God of rescue and a God of salvation.

If you have never been forgiven your sins; if you have never come out of the world to live in Christ and among His people, I am sure this is what God would want you to consider today. You cannot really pray to a God that you do not really know. You cannot really talk in depth to a person you do not know. You get acquainted with the Father of glory through Jesus Christ the Son. He died for your sins. He paid the price to set you free from the spiritual Egypt—sin and guilt and death.

Call upon the name of Jesus and you will have an exodus. He will bring you out of sin into forgiveness and out of darkness into light. And then that deliverance that we found in Christ becomes our basis of expectation for God to work some more! We who had Him save us from sin and guilt can see challenges, problems, needs, and we can pray to the God of deliverance: "Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus who delivered us, work now. You saved us, deliver us. You gave us new life, set us free to fullness of life."

And Daniel says that God's people Israel at that time had become a reproach—that is a discredit to God. They were to be an honor to God and they had become a reproach because they rebelled and turned from His word. They walked in the ways of the world. And in the midst of all that Daniel says in his prayer to God in verse 17: "Listen to the prayer of Your servant and to his supplications, and for Your sake, O Lord, let Your face shine on Your desolate sanctuary." Daniel cries out for God to shine His favor on His people. Daniel asks God to pour out His grace on His people, to shine His light upon His people, and basically to restore His people. In the mess therein he cries out, "For Your sake, just grant us favor, restore us."

And then in verse 18-19 he concludes his prayer by asking God to forgive and act on their behalf.

O my God, incline Your ear and hear! Open Your eyes and see our desolations and the city which is called by Your name; for we are not presenting our supplications before You on account of any merits of our own, but on account of Your great compassion. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, listen and take action! For Your own sake, O my God, do not delay, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

Oh, this is tremendous praying! This gets right down to the heart of the kingdom. Daniel says, “See our desolations and forgive us.” He says, “We are called by Your name. We know we are doing wrong, but we have dug Your name down into the mud. And we ask these requests, Lord, not on our merits but on Your great compassion.” You see that is the way we come to the Lord. We do not come to Him and say, “Now Lord, You watched me this past week and I was pretty good, huh? I know You are probably feeling a little bit ingratiated and indebted to me, and so I come before You now to take what’s mine.” Can you imagine praying like that?

Some of our modern day “Use-God” theology prays like that, talks like that, and thinks that. It is ludicrous, isn’t it? It should be: “We are begging You for all sorts of things and believe us it is not because we think we deserve it. We are not crying out because we think You owe us anything, God. We are crying out because of Your great compassion. We just know the heart You have for Your people.”

And then Daniel said, “Forgive us and take action for Your own sake. For Your honor and glory, lift us out of the muck and the mud and the mire. Pull us back to give attention to Your word. And with every servant You send forth, cause us to listen to him. And shine forth upon us. We want to see Your work restored upon the earth.”

Now that is praying. That is the way that God would have us pray. Listen, there are many, many things to pray about. Let’s be sure in our praying that we include prayer for God’s people. We need to pray this kind of prayer. Daniel’s prayer is one of the greatest prayers in the Word of God. And God can teach us to pray like that. God can use us to pray like that.

We can be the Daniels of our generation who see the work of God restored in a Babylonian world. It is not because we deserve it and not because we can do it, but because we know the God of deliverance, power, might, righteousness, compassion and forgiveness. And if we will call out like this, I believe He will shine upon His people and restore us, just like He did the nation of Israel. He gave them permission through their worldly rulers to go back into the land where Ezra and Nehemiah rebuilt the work of God. Let’s ask for the same passion for prayer. I do believe that He will be faithful to answer.

Let’s pray,

Father it is the desire of our heart to call upon Your name even as Daniel did. May our confession be, “I will call.” And may we call upon You

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consistently and persistently until we see You do among us that which is pleasing in Your sight, restoring Your people and bringing them wholeness of life. Lord we call upon You in Jesus' name. Amen