



Honest Prayer

Daniel 9:1-9

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Well, good morning. My name is Becky Bastien, and I am the elementary pastor here at BelPres. And I want to start off by telling you a little bit of something about our kids.

If you are looking for a group of people who are terrible at keeping secrets, or who will share their opinions with no filters whatsoever, look no further than children. Now, don't get me wrong, I love this about our kids. It's one of the things that brings me great joy in our job.

Our kids are honest. If their parents had a fight last night, I might hear all about it on a Sunday morning. And if their neighbor had an interesting surgery, I might be learning medical facts that for sure are HIPAA violations. And if I got a haircut like I did last week, and they don't really like it, they might say, I think you should put it back how it was. And then they run off to play, like that's a normal way to greet me on Sunday morning.

Now this blunt honesty, I think, is one of the reasons that Jesus loved hanging out with kids so much during his time on earth. They don't do the thing that adults do where we maybe try to make ourselves look a little bit better, curating our social media profiles so that we look just right. They don't hold back. They are who they are, and there's something beautiful about that.

And I think God likes honesty from us for many reasons, but one of them being that he already knows. He already knows what we're going to say and what we think, and so he wants us to just be honest with him. And today in our text, we see Daniel pray some real, honest, bold, blunt prayers. And these prayers might be ones that you and I might be scared to pray, nonetheless, to write down for other people to read in the future. And yet we see him write these honest, bold prayers.

Now this summer, if you've been with us, you know that we have been preaching and teaching through the book of Daniel together as a congregation. And at this point, Daniel

is living in exile under the Babylonian rule. And the reason for this was that God's people have been scattered out of the promised land after their disobedience to God. And at this point, they've been in exile for nearly 70 years. And at this point, Daniel opens up his scriptures and sees that Jeremiah said that after 70 years, God would bring them back.

Now, if I'm honest, my reaction to reading this, if I was in his shoes, would have been like, woohoo, we get to go home, we're getting out of here. Or maybe even like, wow, I'm so proud of how we have survived under the Babylonian exile and not abandoned God. But Daniel's reaction has no excitement or pride. Instead, there's no ego in how he reacts at all. Instead, Daniel immediately humbles himself to go before God in prayer. And there are a few things that I want us to learn from his prayer today.

But before I get there, I want to talk about why we talk about how to pray. Because I feel like sometimes when we talk about how to pray, it can feel like I'm handing out a to-do list to you. Not everybody likes being handed a to-do list. If you know me, I like to make my own to-do list. And I often find that it can be hard for people to receive this, especially if they come from a more legalistic background and it's been hard for them to hear somebody telling you how you should interact with God.

But I'm asking you to hang in there with me because I actually think that God gives us these examples and that we should follow them, not because they limit our prayer life, but because they actually deepen it by encouraging us to talk to God about all the aspects of our life. Sorry, I lost my place. I don't normally do that. Excellent, okay, sorry, guys.

All right, so when I talk to our kids about prayer, one of the things that I do is I talk with them about how prayer is supposed to be this open conversation with God. It can be something they can do anywhere, at any time, about anything. But I also want to teach our kids that prayer is not a wish list. You know, never ending Christmas things, the things they would like God to give to them.

But if I'm going to do that, then I have to teach them about all the different aspects of what prayer is. That it's saying sorry to God when we've done something wrong. That it's praising God by telling him the things that we like about him. Thanking him for the things he has done for us or given to us. And of course, also asking for his help or for things we would like in our life.

And it's all of those things that we see throughout the scripture as we look at prayer and that Daniel uses throughout his prayer in this book. We also see these different parts of prayer written in the Lord's Prayer that Jesus taught to his disciples.

Now a healthy prayer life is like a healthy diet. We need the fruit and the vegetables, and we need to say I'm sorry as often as we're saying thank you to God.

So what does Daniel have to teach us about prayer? There are three main things that I want us to talk about today. The first is praising God and thanking him even when things are hard. The second will be apologizing like we mean it. Ooh, that's hard. And three,

praying with boldness. All right, so number one, praising and thanking God even when it's hard.

Now, I don't think it can really be overstated how rough life was for Daniel and his friends during this time in the exile. At this point, they've survived a fiery furnace, a lion's den, too many dream interpretations to count, and that crazy handwriting on the wall thing. Seriously, if you missed that part, go back and read it, the Bible is not boring.

But have you ever lived through a season like that? Where it's hard, where it seems like the hits keep coming, and you're just waiting for the next shoe to drop, because it seems like it always does. Daniel is in that kind of season. It's rough for him. But we still see Daniel able to praise God with sincere, heartfelt prayers.

Daniel says this, Lord, the great and awesome God, you see, Daniel has known God to do great and awesome things even in their time of exile. He's holding on to those memories, even on the hard days. He's remembering that God is great and capable when it would be so easy for him to be in despair and worry that God has forgotten all about them.

He goes on to say this, God who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments. This is important. Daniel is saying that God is faithful in a time when it would be easy to despair and believe that God is not with them. Daniel is reminding himself that God is still with them, God is true to his word even if his people have not been.

God's goodness does not stop when we are imperfect. There's still praise to be given on a difficult day because that day does not define who God is.

Now, when I think about praising God in difficult circumstances, I think of Corey Ten Boom and her family. And I'll be just honest with you, I wrote my sermon before listening to Colin's sermon from last week, in which he also talked about Corey. But I think we have a lot to learn from her.

Now, if you missed his summary, Corey and her family lived in the Netherlands during World War II, and they brought into their house Jews to hide them from the Nazis. They were eventually captured and caught doing this and sent to a concentration camp.

Now, when they got to the camp, they saw the barracks where they would be staying, and they saw that they were infested with fleas. Just terribly, terribly infested, more fleas than they could imagine. But having read the Bible and being Christians, Betsy knew that they were meant to praise God in all circumstances. So she turned to her sister and said, we should praise God for everything, including the fleas.

Now, I have an older sister. I can picture this conversation. The fleas? Are you serious? You want me to thank God for the fleas? Really? And yet, Corey eventually agreed and

followed her lead, and they thanked God that they were together, that God was with them, and even for the gross fleas.

Now, during the day, they would work hard at the camp, but at night, they would go back to their barracks and they would read their Bibles and pray together and worship and draw on God for strength and encouragement in a really terrible situation. But they started to wonder why the guards were allowing them to do this. You see, no other part of the day would they have been allowed to do anything that brought them joy or expressed their faith. But eventually, they would come to learn from one of the guards that the guards avoided their barracks in particular because of the fleas. They were so gross, they wanted nothing to do with it.

Corey and Betsy praised God during difficult circumstances, not knowing what God was going to do with what he had given them. And yet, I imagine that they praised him all the more once they saw what God was doing.

All right, number two. The second part of prayer that Daniel teaches us today, and maybe the hardest part, apologizing like you mean it. Ooh, this is hard.

Have you ever received an apology where you're like, you don't even try. I don't believe you at all. There's no way. You're just going through the motions, or maybe it's even a little sarcastic, like, I guess I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings.

You know, we actually have a rule in my marriage that we don't say if when we apologize. We decided early on that if somebody has expressed hurt, and it's someone's job to apologize in response, that saying, if I hurt your feelings, or if I did something wrong, actually feels like we weren't listening at all. And what we have found that if we just say, I'm sorry, or I'm sorry I did that, it moves us towards reconciliation much faster.

I looked up some interesting stats on apologies in America as I was working on this sermon, and one of them done last year said that up to 48% of American adults say that they only sometimes or rarely make sincere apologies to people in their lives. Half of us are either living much better lives than I am, or we have a serious problem as a culture around apologies.

Now I find that an indicator of this is also how our kids react when I talk about saying sorry to God. You see, one of the things that happens nearly every time is that our kids try to figure out from me how much God will forgive them. Is there a line at which God will be done being willing to forgive them? Like maybe God's good with five times, but that sixth time, definitely not. Or maybe God's gonna forgive them for calling their brother a name, but not for hitting him.

You see, they want to know, is there a line at which God's love is limited? And as I insist, the Bible tells us over and over again that if we ask for forgiveness, God is faithful to forgive us. They are skeptical. And I sometimes wonder if we are also skeptical as adults,

but we are just less honest than they are. And that we also sometimes wonder, is God willing to forgive me? Will God really love me even though I have done something wrong?

And yet all throughout scripture, we see this promise that God is faithful to forgive us when we say we are sorry to him. Now, Daniel believed this promise, and because of that, he went to God and sat cloth and ash and had fasted, all signs of true repentance during his time.

And I want you to remember that it had been nearly 70 years since they had left for the exile, and so nearly 70 years since the sins that had caused the exile. And so I imagine that there were some people around him that weren't thrilled he was bringing this all up again, some people who thought that that had nothing to do with them at all. But Daniel doesn't hold back.

He says, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and rebelled. There are no if statements here. Daniel knows that they have done wrong, and there is no point in pretending that is not what happened.

An interesting thing here too is that Daniel uses we statements. We have sinned, we have been wicked and rebelled. Daniel's not trying to move blame from him to somebody else. He is willing to repent and be sorry for the sins of his people, even if he was not the one or the only one who committed them. He knows that they as a people have strayed from who God was calling them to be, and that that is worthy of his repentance.

The final part of repentance that I want to emphasize is that repentance is meant to lead to change. We aren't supposed to keep doing the thing over and over again. I was talking with our kids last week about the prophet Amos, and we were talking about justice, and part of the lesson was talking about how as we move towards God's justice, a part of that is apologizing when we have done something unjust or unkind.

And I needed an example that would make sense to them of a time when maybe I would need to do that. And so I talked with them about how I work with Pastor Colin, who they all know. And I said, all right guys, imagine this, we're getting ready maybe for VBA, I'm tired, I'm cranky, I'm hangry. And let's say, I say something unkind to Colin.

They were flabbergasted. They were like, seriously, you would never do that. They have too much faith in me. But after laughing, I told them, you know what, Colin and I have worked together for a long time. And while we are great friends and we work great together, there have been many days where I have had to say to him, I am sorry and he has forgiven me. And in the same way, there have been many days where he has said to me, I am sorry and I have forgiven him.

I asked him what else should happen other than an apology, and one told me that I should apologize to Jesus for being mean to Colin. Another raised their hand and told me

that I should choose a better way to behave next time. They're right. We repent and we try to live differently with Jesus' help.

Finally, Daniel teaches us to pray boldly. We've seen boldness throughout the prayers of praise and repentance. We also see boldness in what Daniel is asking for here. Daniel is asking God to be true to his word and to bring them back home after 70 years in exile.

Later on in this passage, Daniel says this, Lord, listen, Lord, forgive, Lord, hear and act for your sake. My God, do not delay. For your city and your people bear your name. Daniel is calling on God, begging God to act, to do what he has promised to do. This is bold.

Daniel understands that they have disobeyed God, but he also understands that God is faithful to do what he has promised to do for them. And so we hear this honest prayer from Daniel in which we see his belief that God can handle his true hope for his people to be restored in relationship with God.

Bold prayers require bravery. They require trusting that God can handle our true hopes and dreams. They also require trusting that we will believe that God's answer is the right answer, even if it's not the one we want or on the timeline that we would have chosen.

Teaching the Book of Daniel is always an interesting mix of me, mixed for me, of both telling our kids that they can trust God to do incredible things, and also trying to dissuade them from going to Woodland Park Zoo and sticking their hand in the lion enclosure. Because we aren't called to do crazy things and hope that God will show up and do something with it. We're called to boldly trust God, boldly follow him, and believe that his plan is the best for us.

So what do we do? Having heard Daniel's encouragement for our prayers, I want to give you a couple of ideas that I think are practical that you could put into practice this very week. First, if you're already doing all of this, excellent, keep it up. If you need to add into your prayer life, though, the practice of praise in a hard season, repentance, or being bold, or all three, here are some ideas that I think could be helpful.

The first is having a time when you pray. This might be early in the day, on your lunch break, when you're kidnapped, after everyone else goes to sleep. I personally use alarms on my phone to remind me to spend time with God. I have one that goes off an hour after we put my daughter down for bed, because otherwise, I am going to forget to do it more days than not. And having a set time when you can pray and spend time with God can help deepen your relationship by investing in it.

Two, another method could be that you have a place where you pray, a certain room in a car when you go on a walk. I've seen people use sticky notes to remind themselves on the bathroom mirror on their car dash to pray when they are in that place. For me right now, a lot of my prayer time is in the car. That's where I'm often alone and it's quiet. And having that place has helped me to have a rhythm of prayer that I can rely on.

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For me, spending time in my car, praying often includes two things, though I think you could do them anywhere. And so one is praying through music. And this is a great way to connect with God. When we are choosing our worship playlists, though, I'd encourage you to look at them and think, is it diverse and how it encourages you to pray? Because much like prayers, songs have different purposes. Some are gratitude, thanksgiving, repentance, asking for things. And when I personally looked at my playlist and added some more things to it, I found that it deepened my prayer life.

The second thing that I do that I would encourage you to try is a podcast. I know there are lots of different scripture podcasts you can try. My personal favorite is *Pray As You Go*. It's a daily podcast, so I certainly don't make it to it every day. And it includes a couple of different things: some worship music, some scripture reading, some questions to consider and talk to God about, and then a prayer at the end. And it's quick. I can do it on my commute to work.

What I find is helpful about this particular podcast, though, is that it pulls scripture from all over the Bible. They use the lectionary schedule. And I find that this is helpful, so I am not just reading my personal favorite podcast, or my favorite verse, over and over again, but I am responding to the different parts of scripture that it pulls.

Now, there are a million different ways to pray. However you choose to do it, I encourage you to choose to do it, and to know that God wants to hear from us.

So God, we thank you for the story of Daniel, and how it teaches us to pray and trust in you. Would you awaken within us a desire to be in conversation with you? Give us a hunger for being in prayer with you, Lord. Help us to be open to the transformation you are offering us every time we draw near to you. In Jesus' name, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Do you find it easy or difficult to be honest in prayer? Why?
- When is it hardest to praise God?
- What prayer practices have influenced how you pray? Is there one you'd like to try?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.