

Women's Bible Study – Winter/Spring 2010  
**The Heart's Cry: A Look at Heartfelt Prayer**  
January 20, 2010  
*The Heart's Cry for Deliverance*  
Daniel 2: 14-23  
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Good morning/evening and welcome to Women's Bible Study. We are delighted that you are joining us for another semester. We are examining Heartfelt Prayers of the Bible. Specifically today/tonight we are studying the Heart's Cry for Deliverance. Our passage is from the Book of Daniel.

**Historical Context**

As you would expect, I plan to take a few minutes to provide some historical context to our passage. It is my heart's cry that you would not walk away from Bible Study viewing each lesson as separate and distinct; but that you would begin to place each into a lengthy unfolding story of God's interactions with people.

We will begin this morning/evening with the opening words of the book of Daniel. If you have your Bibles, please turn with me to Daniel Chapter 1, verse 1: **“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it”**. If you are familiar with Old Testament History you know that contained in that short sentence is an extensive story culminating in shock and great sorrow.

It would be like saying to our generation, “On September 11, 2001 the United States of America was attacked by terrorists.” Instantly your mind locates the images of those planes crashing into the Twin Towers, the Pentagon smoldering with the twisted metal remains of an airplane jammed into its west side, and a plane down in a field in Pennsylvania. You can almost replay the shocking words of the news reporters that day. You remember the feeling that things would never be the same. However, future generations without some background details will not be able to comprehend the impact of that day from that single sentence.

In the same way, we, the future generations, hearing the opening words of Daniel need some background and additional details to understand the gravity of what has happened. When we left our study of David a few weeks ago, the year was 970 B.C. and the kingdom of Israel from Dan to Beersheba was in good hands. (Map) David had just passed the crown to Solomon. The kingdom under his leadership and God's provision had grown in wealth and power. We might say it was a world super power of the day.

However, in Daniel 1:1, it is 605 B.C.; nearly four centuries have passed since the reigns of David and Solomon. After the death of Solomon, the Kingdom divided and became the northern Kingdom of Israel, and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the King of Assyria in 722 B.C. Both the northern and the southern kingdom suffered from mainly evil, ungodly leaders, but there were a few bright examples like: King Uzziah, King Hezekiah and King Josiah.

Actually, Daniel would grow up in the wake of King Josiah's reforms and the spiritual revival of the nation; but soon after the death of King Josiah things began to fall apart. God, through the prophets, had been warning the nation for years that their destruction was near, but they would not listen. (2Kings 17:7-20)

And in the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign, Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon attacked Judah and took away (verse Daniel 1:3) . . . some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans".

Daniel was one of those young men deported to a strange land, with strange customs and a strange language. They were selected to be thoroughly trained in the ways of the Babylonian culture and to serve in the king's palace. They were probably only adolescents. This would have been practically and politically advantageous to Babylon. For one thing, having the sons of the elite families would have encouraged the families to cooperate with the government and thus reduced resistance among the people. Additionally, if these young men were brainwashed into the culture they would pose no opposition to future administrations and would even be an asset to the government.

After the young men arrived in the palace they faced an immediate test. Would they defile themselves and eat the food from the King's table, which was prohibited by the Law and likely had been offered to idols or would they choose to stand firm and obey the commands of God? They chose to stand firm and obey God's laws. When the King questioned them he determined them ten times better than all the wise men in his kingdom. Now, we come to our main scripture passage: Daniel 2:

**<sup>1</sup> In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. <sup>2</sup> So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, <sup>3</sup> he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means."**

I love what commentator Chuck Swindoll says about this passage, "During the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon was the world's superpower. No empire was so vast or so beautiful. No army could defeat Babylon's soldiers. No king ruled with more splendor and power. Nebuchadnezzar had nothing to fear when he laid his head on his pillow . . . that is, until the King who never sleeps gave him a dream of things to come."<sup>1</sup> I love that. King Nebuchadnezzar has a problem. He has a recurring dream and it is very disturbing to him. He goes to the only place he knows for answers, his wise men.

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<sup>1</sup> Swindoll, Charles R. Daniel Volume 1: God's Man for the Moment. Insight for Living. 2008. Page 24.

**4Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, "O king, live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it."**

Aramaic was the common language of the day and Daniel 2:4 through chapter 7 is written in Aramaic. The wise men agree to interpret the dream for him; it is after all, part of their job. However, the King doesn't seem to have much confidence in their abilities. He devises a test because he doesn't just want an interpretation to his dream, he needs the correct interpretation.

**5 The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. 6 But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me."**

So that is the great test, they must not only interpret the dream for the king, but they must supernaturally determine the content of the dream. If they cannot meet the test, he will have them hacked to pieces and their houses turned to rubble. That is quite a threat, by an obviously upset monarch. He also offers a reward of gifts and great honor if they meet his demands. I imagine the wise men are struck with panic at this point, but they calmly feign deafness and

**7 Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it." (The king is not that gullible and is now getting angry). Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: 8If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me."**

**10 The astrologers answered the king, "There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. 11 What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men."**

Wow, that is an incredible statement, uttered by men totally unacquainted with the God of the Bible. The king has made a demand and they are powerless to meet it and he has set up the test in such a way that they cannot trick him.

**12 This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. 13 So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.**

Can't you just feel the desperation by the King? He has to have the interpretation of this disturbing dream. He is completely exasperated with the wise men and sends an executioner to kill all of them. Apparently, he has determined if they can't come through in this situation they are not worth having in the kingdom. Although Daniel has only been in Babylon a short time, a few years, and although he and his friends are likely still in training, the executioner seeks them out for destruction with the others.

**<sup>14</sup> When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. <sup>15</sup> He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel.**

Daniel spoke with wisdom and tact. In a horrifying situation where his very life is threatened, he is able to speak with wisdom and tact. And in response to what must have been an amazing testimony Daniel had with his fellow workers, the commander answers Daniel. In fact, he explains the matter to him.

**<sup>16</sup> At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.** Isn't it interesting that somehow the King is not angered by Daniel's request? He was furious when he perceived that his other wise men were stalling for time. But he grants Daniel's request. Apparently, the slaughter is halted for the time being.

**<sup>17</sup> Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.** You might know them as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; but those were their Babylonian names. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were their Hebrew names resplendent with reference to God. So Daniel goes to his three friends and

**<sup>18</sup> He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.**

**<sup>19</sup> During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision.**

## **How to Pray Like Daniel**

It is hard to know where to stop in our reading because it is all so fascinating, but we are going to at least pause here and reflect on what we can learn about Daniel and prayer. We are impressed with Daniel. We admire his relationship with God. We want to pray with the confidence that Daniel prays and truthfully we would like results like Daniel. So how can we pray like Daniel?

## **Prepare Like Daniel**

We can begin by preparing like Daniel. Now, I admit that this point is based primarily on what Pastor Steer would call sanctified imagination, but I still think it's a worthy point. Even at a young age Daniel had prepared by knowing God's word. From these first few chapters we learn that he was familiar with God's law and the practice of prayer.

There obviously must have been some godly influences in his life like a mother, a father, a grandmother, a grandfather, or someone in his extended family or community who taught him the things of God. Certainly God can use any means he likes to draw men to himself, but the Bible is full of examples of Godly parents and grandparents, and family members who instruct young children in the foundations of the faith. This is a constant reminder to those of us who are mothers, grandmothers, and general influencers of children to be diligent in teaching children the things of God.

We do not know the hardships they may face in life and we do well to train them from their earliest days to love the Lord, to read His word, and to communicate with Him through prayer. All of our children will face some level of hardship in their lives. At a minimum they will either go off to college, to a work place, to the military, to the mission field, or to an adventure in another country. They will encounter different lands (even if it is just the state next door), different customs (even if just learning the organizational culture of their workplace), and different languages (some foreign, some crude, some totally opposed to God).

They may encounter severe hardships like Daniel. However, no matter what degree of hardship they face, the most important question is: Will they be able to stand firm? Have we given our best effort in helping them build a firm foundation? Regardless of the Godly foundation others may or may not have laid in our own lives, all of us in this room are now adults. It is now our responsibility to either lay that foundation in our own lives or to build solidly on the foundation we have been given.

To prepare like Daniel will take an investment of your time and effort, consistently. I decided to get a jump on some new year's resolutions this year, so back in October I signed up for some free lifestyle coaching phone sessions from the Mayo Clinic. My goal was to address the 15-20 pounds I had picked up in the last few years. My coach, a very nice lady, whom once I mentioned that I taught a Bible Study, seemed very well acquainted with Bible Studies in this community, and immediately asked me if I knew our own Lorie Dahlstrom.

Anyway, she suggested I work on some process goals that I thought would be easily accomplished based on my current lifestyle like: logging 20,000 steps daily on my pedometer, walking with a friend three times a week, and keeping a food journal. Now, I knew how to do all of those things and I had the infrastructure to do them and in fact I was doing many of them; but I noticed when she encouraged me to be accountable and actually log daily and weekly my numbers in doing this healthy behaviors, I realized I wasn't doing them consistently. Now, I meant to do them, I hoped to do them, but when the children needed something, or there were volunteer demands, or other responsibilities, I wasn't meeting those goals at all. Some goals that I thought I was doing seven days a week, I was actually only accomplishing two days a week.

Since, my coach knew that I taught Bible Study here, she said, "What you learn about yourself in this arena of your life will influence you in all areas even spiritually". I have thought about that a lot, I encourage you to think about it as well as you prepare like Daniel. We all know that to prepare we need to read our Bibles daily, pray, attend worship at our local church, serve, and build relationships among other believers through small groups or other accountability structures; but I encourage you as you plan to prepare like Daniel, to devise some methods to assess whether you are consistent in these important preparation areas. If you are not consistent you won't really make a lot of progress. If you are consistent then I encourage you to increase your intensity and set some higher goals. All of these things will prepare you to pray like Daniel.

### **Ponder Like Daniel**

Another way to help us pray like Daniel is for us to ponder like Daniel. We must ponder the Character and Word of God. By ponder I mean to think about, study, meditate upon, examine,

memorize-- anything that helps you to really think about the character and word of God. This is one of those intensity steps beyond just reading the Bible daily.

It strikes me as very interesting that when Daniel approaches God to pray for deliverance that he and his companions might be spared from execution, he purposes to seek mercy from the God of Heaven. He knew that mercy was part of the character of God. He would have known that from his understanding of the scriptures available to him at that time. God had been showing mercy to his people for centuries.

How much more revealed mercy we have to ponder. We have the whole Bible, page after page of mercy. We can pray like Daniel because we also know God to be merciful. We can ask for deliverance. We can seek his mercy for those we love who are critically ill, who are in desperate circumstances. He is a God of mercy. Does that mean that he answers every prayer in the way we ask? No. God sometimes tells us to wait or He tells us no.

At that point we must also look to another of God's character traits that Daniel also knew and pondered, the Sovereignty of God. God is sovereign in everything. We learn that from chapter 1 verse 2 of Daniel. "And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, . . . God had given the King and the land of Judah over to Nebuchadnezzar, he didn't just take it. God was sovereign when he interrupted Nebuchadnezzar's sleep. He was sovereign when he revealed the dream and its interpretation to Daniel. He was sovereign as that interpretation unfolded exactly as God said it would in the kingdoms of the world over the next several hundred years. God is sovereign when he explains clearly to us in the Bible how the end of time will come about.

Daniel reminds us of God's sovereignty in his prayer of praise:

**Then Daniel praised the God of heaven<sup>20</sup> and said: "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his.<sup>21</sup> He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.<sup>22</sup> He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.<sup>23</sup> I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king."**

Daniel was calm in his circumstances because he could trust in the mercy and sovereignty of God. If we want to pray like Daniel we have to ponder the character and word of God.

## **Persevere Like Daniel**

Next, if we want to pray like Daniel, we have to persevere like Daniel. Daniel was in a very difficult situation. He was away from family and in a totally foreign environment; however, he perseveres. He functioned in that place that God had allowed. He looked around to see where God was operating and he chose to join with him.

We have to do that as well. There are a lot of places in which we interact with others: families, workplaces, schools, sporting events, shops, and hospitals just to mention a few. Sometimes those places can be frustrating, difficult, and even heartbreaking. Sometimes we may feel like we are the ones in exile. In abusive situations we obviously must make a change to protect our safety. However, in other types of situations we must persevere. We can waste a lot of time being so unhappy in our circumstances that we fail to see God is there with us. “2 Chronicles 16:9 says, **For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. . .**

Persevere where God has placed you, pray in those circumstances. Gather close friends to pray with you. They can support you and encourage you to keep praying and to trust God in the answers He provides. Also, when more people are involved in praying, the greater the audience to glorify God. So if you don't have a few friends to pray with you, set that as one of your goals for the year. I think all of you are in small groups; you should have at least a few friends there that will pray with you and for you. Inventory the resources for prayer God has already provided for you. If you want to pray like Daniel you have got to persevere like Daniel.

### **Practice like Daniel**

Finally, if we want to pray like Daniel, we have to practice like Daniel. Daniel was a man of prayer. Even in these young years we see him approaching God with fervent prayer. At the first available option he engages in prayer. He doesn't gather the wise men of the kingdom and devise a strategy, he doesn't succumb to worry; but he prays. He must have had plenty of practice. He knows how to pray. He is comfortable praying. He has confidence that God will answer.

The book of Daniel records many examples of Daniel's prayers, in fact the book spans decades of his life and actually tracks him into his eighties. Remember it was his habit of consistent prayer that landed him in the Den of Lions as a very elderly man. Daniel 6:10 says, **“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed (*this was a law that made it illegal to pray to anyone except the king*), he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.** Daniel practiced prayer until it was an absolute habit that nothing, not even the threat of death could change or alter.

If we want to pray like Daniel, we must practice. As we practice we get better at it. We learn to approach God in the variety of our circumstances. He answers; we learn that a no answer is still an answer. No good parent provides everything a child wants. As we practice prayer our wills move to align with the will of God. As we practice prayer our reaction to our circumstances changes. As we practice prayer our reaction to others changes.

A few cautions to manage our expectations about our practice of prayer. Just because we become more practiced in prayer does not mean that God owes it to us to give us what we want. Daniel didn't get the answer he wanted because he was a good prayer, but because God was merciful and sovereign He chose to use Daniel in his great plan to reveal future events to the King of Babylon and to every generation that would read this interpretation through the ages.

Just because Daniel was practiced in the discipline of prayer does not mean that as we become practiced God will speak to us in visions and dreams. He can of course; it is one of the ways he has spoken to people through the ages. We hear reports from missionaries of God speaking in dreams and visions to people in very dark countries calling them to faith and salvation. However, God has provided us with a collection of his revelations in the Bible. We have access to much more complete information through the Bible than Daniel or others in Dark places in the world. We should not be guilty of demanding extra signs, but diligent in obeying the revealed word that we clearly have. We should remember as well that if God does speak to someone through dreams or visions those will never contradict the word of God.

When we strengthen our preparation, ponder the character and word of God, persevere, and practice our prayer life will be strengthened. We will have the confidence to pray like Daniel.

### **The Rest of the Story**

The sequential part of me just can't bear to leave the story at the cliff hanger point. So let's finish reading. I will read partly from the actual verses and will summarize others because we are about out of time. Beginning in Verse 24:

**<sup>24</sup> Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him." <sup>25</sup> Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means." <sup>26</sup> The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"**

**<sup>27</sup> Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, <sup>28</sup> but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:**

**<sup>29</sup> "As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. <sup>30</sup> As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.**

**<sup>31</sup> "You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. <sup>32</sup> The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, <sup>33</sup> its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. <sup>34</sup> While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. <sup>35</sup> Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.**

That was the dream and now Daniel provides the interpretation. The statue represents the kingdoms of the world. Nebuchadnezzar is the golden head. He goes on to describe details about the kingdoms of the world symbolized by the other parts of the statue and if you remember your ancient history you will realize Daniel is describing the kingdom of Babylon, followed by the Kingdom of Medo-Persia, followed by the kingdom of Greece, and last the kingdom is likely Rome. Some version of Rome not yet obvious by history is perhaps symbolized by this bit about the feet and toes of iron and clay. Commentators think perhaps this kingdom or morphing of Rome is still to come. The Rock is Christ and his kingdom will be the final and lasting one.

**<sup>46</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. <sup>47</sup> The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."**

Once again an earthly ruler is forced to acknowledge that God is the God of Gods and the Lord of Kings and worthy of all worship and honor. And the prayers of Daniel were a part of the whole drama.