

## 13. The Battle in Prayer and the Bible

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In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. -- Daniel 9:2,3

On the Schaeffers way back to Europe, their two-year-old son, Franky, had a polio attack. While Edith was in the hospital praying about his experimental treatments, the Lord reminded her that she could apply the Bible's general promises to specific situations in prayer. As she prayed, the Holy Spirit prompted her to pray according to Proverbs 21:1--"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." The Holy Spirit told her that she should pray for the doctor in the context of this verse. God could make a doctor's decisions as easily as He could a king's. And it did not matter whether the doctor or the king were believers or unbelievers. In the Old Testament, God often accomplished great things through pagan rulers--with no credit to them and often without their knowledge--and He does the same today. At the last minute, when the doctor came and looked at Franky, he decided not to do the treatment. This answer describes how God teaches us to pray in the context of His predictions and promises in the Bible.

We need to pray for God's will to be done in the context of the Bible's predictions and promises just as much as Daniel prayed for Jeremiah's prophecy to be fulfilled after the seventy year captivity was completed. God uses the Bible to teach us the things He wants us to pray about. And in Daniel's case, as he read the Old Testament that was still being formed, the Holy Spirit pointed out that God had completed Judah's punishment as foretold by Jeremiah. So Daniel prayed, pleaded, and fasted in deep humility for God to work upon their captives' minds and wills to free His people. Daniel also prayed that God would use him in the leadership position in which He had placed him, and show Him what to do to fulfill God's prophetic Word. Daniel saw his place of authority in the kingdom as a part of God's providential care in that specific time to free His people. So Daniel sought the Lord's guidance and was willing to accept any responsibility that God wanted him to fulfill.

If we will ask God to reveal His Biblical promises to us while showing us His providential work taking place around us, He will give us great encouragement in prayer and we will receive God's guidance on how to pray. We can pray and plead for God to complete His work in the context of His promises and predictions, believing that He is always faithful to keep His word. By enlightening our minds through His written Word and visible work in our midst, God increases our faith, encourages us to pray, and deepens our fellowship with Him.

As we read the Bible, praying for God to speak to us through His Word, sometimes He makes a verse, promise, or prediction stand out on the page as though it were highlighted or underlined to guide us in our prayers. We may read a verse, parable, or historical incident, and the Holy Spirit may speak to our hearts something like: "This Word is for you personally. This Word is my reply to your concern. This verse shows you what to pray and do. Keep on praying. If you want Me to fill this need, you will need to fast. Fasting will draw us closer and enable you to hear me more clearly." Edith's Bible is a diary of dated prayers in the context of the verses she has read.

God expects us to fill our minds with His Word and read the Bible daily so He can speak to us each day. As we pray, sometimes God will remind us of a verse from the Bible that we read long ago. The verse will come into our minds completely unexpectedly, so we will know that the Holy Spirit has given us that verse to encourage us to pray and expect an answer according to that particular promise of God. In Edith's case, the Holy Spirit reminded her directly of a verse that she had learned many years before so she could apply a prayer principle. God told her to pray for Franky's treatment in the context of that verse describing how God can work upon all people in places of responsibility. We too can use that verse as we pray in similar situations. We must make an effort to receive God's teaching on prayer. If we are unwilling to spend the time or make the effort to read God's Word with the attitude that we will obey whatever understanding He gives us as we read, then the times when God speaks to us in the context of His Word as we pray will be rare.

When Satan tempted Jesus to sin in the wilderness, Jesus replied correctly with the Scriptures, because Jesus knew the Old Testament. Because He prayed long and often, He recognized the Holy Spirit's help in applying God's Word rightly in that situation. When Satan tried to twist God's Word, Jesus knew the context of the Scriptures so well that with the Holy Spirit's help He defeated the devil at every point. Jesus prepared himself for thirty years, committed himself publicly to serving God when John baptized Him, and allowed himself to be led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to defeat the devil. Jesus' wholehearted commitment and preparation enabled Him to turn back Satan's attack and receive the ministrations of God's angels after Satan fled from His presence (see Matthew 3,4).

If God required Daniel to pray in the context of His Word, and if God required Jesus to pray, study His Word, and prepare himself to serve Him, we tempt God if we think we can do less and receive God's blessings in their fullness. God will always be gracious to His children, but we open the door for God to do so much more when we decide to follow Jesus no matter what the cost in time or hard thinking in a thorough study of His Word.

God loves us so much that He will sometimes bless us in unexpected ways even though we have not learned much about prayer or His promises in the Bible. God often helps us because He loves us and wants to meet our needs. However, we need to seek Him more for who He is, and learn the principles He has established for prevailing prayer so we can bless others as well as ourselves through prayer. God gave us His Word to read, think about, and use in the context of prayer, and if we are not growing spiritually the reason may be our failure to use all the means of grace that God has provided. A disruptive, inattentive student in a classroom will learn a few things, but the dedicated, hardworking student will be prepared for life. We cannot expect to learn the deep things of God and all that He has for us if we are like disruptive and inattentive students throughout the day. Disciplining ourselves with set times for Bible reading and prayer, beginning each day in God's Word, developing the habit of putting God and His will first, and looking to see His visible work each day will help us overcome the bad habits of poor or new students in God's school of prayer. Prayer

Dear Father, fill me with your love and help me love you so much that I will long to spend time with you. Show me the importance of much prayer and Bible study. Keep me from being selfish and self-centered, so these things will not be a burden to me but the desire of my heart. Help me to recognize your work around me, in my home, church, neighborhood, and world, so I can pray specifically and not just in generalities. Truly you are worthy to receive all glory and honor. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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