

We were Made for Intimacy with God Daniel 6:1-12, 23

All of us gathered here this morning have something in common. And this very important something does not have any bearing what-so-ever on whether we are male or female, young or old, married or unmarried, have children, or where it is that we are on our personal journey of faith and belief. The very important something that we all have in common is this: You and I were created and brought into this world having been made for personal intimacy with God. Beginning in Genesis (1:27), the first book of the Bible, in the Garden of Eden when God created mankind in his own image, male and female he created them, from Adam and Eve throughout the history of the world right up to today, things have never changed, for our Creator, our Maker, our God still longs to commune with each and every one of us. To walk and talk with us throughout our lives, maybe even stop along the way to catch our breath and commune with one another. Whoever we are and where ever we are on our life's journey and in our relationship with him, God's desire remains exactly the same for each one of us- that we would draw closer, nearer to him so that he might draw closer to us in an even closer and more intimate relationship. (James 4:8a). So there it is- that's what you and I were made for – intimacy with God!

And what is the number one way that we can have such intimacy and grow in our personal relationship with God? Let's examine how to meet with God and grow in intimacy with him through the spiritual discipline of prayer as a way to be intimate with God.

Christianity is not the only religion to pray. Hindu's pray and meditate as do Buddhist's. Muslims set aside five times a day to pray and of course Jews typically set aside three times a day to meet with God with Jewish Law outlining the duty to pray three times daily: in the morning, in the afternoon and at nightfall in the evening.

In Judaism they say that the custom of praying three times a day was originally introduced by their Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Abraham introduced prayer in the morning, Isaac—in the afternoon, and Jacob added one at night. During the first one thousand years, or so, since the time of Moses, there was no set order of prayer. Each individual was duty-bound to pray to God every day, but the form of prayer and how many times a day to pray - was left to the individual.

The Psalmist King David a couple of centuries after Moses had obviously adopted a time of regular prayer and fellowship to seek God and grow in intimacy when he wrote Psalm 55:16-18.

This is all the assurance that he and we need that as we seek to draw near to God, to meet with God, that we are definitely heard by God. When King David calls upon God he knows that He hears him because the Lord saves him which is all the encouragement he needs to keep on pounding on God's door, as though to speak, even with his self-righteous prayer morning, noon and night confident that in seeking God that God will not only hear but intervene and lift him up so that he will not be harmed by what is going on around him. David speaks of the battle waged which includes the tensions in which he is living, in which all mankind must live. 500 years later the same battles and tensions remain in the time of Daniel. From our reading today under severe duress, he "got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God just as he always did".

The truth is Daniel would rather spend a night with the lions than miss a day seeking and having an intimate meeting with God in prayer! We, on the other hand, can often struggle to, or even neglect to pray at all. Daniel's very jealous fellow administrators who did not want him to be head of them all over the kingdom of Persia had to come up with a plan to prevent this from happening. So they conspired and lied to King Darius when they said that "all" the royal administrators supported the proposed decree when they knew that Daniel was unaware of the proposal. So, King Darius signs the decree with the regulation of the 30-Day 'No one shall pray but to your Majesty' prayer law intact. Daniel when he hears what's happened straight away went home. Now Daniel had two choices and each had a price tag on it. He could:

1. Cease to pray. He definitely was not going to pray to Darius which is why I haven't included it as an option. But to choose to cease to pray altogether would cost him his time of meeting in intimate fellowship with His God. So;
- Option 2. He could Continue to pray, not to Darius, but according to his customary time of prayer to "his God" that he had developed much earlier in life which would cost him his life!

And we know what he chose for at home in his upper room he prayed with an open heart and "open windows" in his special place and time which he set aside to communicate and have intimacy with God.

Daniel purposely opened the windows as he always did and got down on his knees in a position of humility humbling himself before God and giving thanks to God, praising God in the midst of this trying circumstance once again seeking God to receive mercy, to know and experience the intimate presence of God, which is a very good reason to keep praying! It is like when we are in love with someone, the usual desire is to grow in intimacy with them. We are willing to spend hours with them without interruption.

We just like being in their presence. In the same way, God needs to be first in our lives. If we are in a loving relationship with God, we will desire that intimate, personal communication that is available to us. We will enjoy talking to Him, and perhaps even more, we will enjoy listening.

A good illustration of this is marriage. Now God insists that marriage be a lifetime commitment. When we get married, we make vows. We make vows that obligate us to persevere. If God didn't design it that way, we would be unlikely to stick it out, weather the storms and persevere through the pain. Now for one reason or another, marriages don't always work out and couples separate and divorce. But, when as couples you are able to persevere, you learn to forgive, learn to repent, learn to serve instead of being served, and learn to bear with one another's weakness. Sometimes, you go through a lot of difficult, painful, and unpleasant stuff. But you do it in order to get to the really good stuff. Couples that persevere with a heart's desire to continue to grow in intimacy in their relationship generally do, but, there is often a cost associated with it in order to continually grow in your love and have a great marriage.

Is it easy? Of course not! Is it worth it? Absolutely!

And this is why we like Daniel should persevere and pursue God in prayer. We persevere so we can experience the really good stuff. This is exactly what Daniel did. Daniel chose love and the continued desire of intimacy over life. He chose his love for God over his own life.

So let me encourage you today first of all to 'Talk to God'.

[I don't know where you are at but] Sometimes, we think prayer is only for the "holy" people like Daniel. Do you know what I mean? It seems it is for those that lower their voices and talk in beautiful and poetic phrases. But I don't want you to worry about that (and I am not trying to offend anyone here. We can set aside the formalities, and just talk to God. Even walk and talk with God as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. It is meant to be that simple a conversation.

It is meant to be that simple, so you can keep praying no matter what. So I encourage you to keep praying even when you are somewhat discouraged, even devastated.

Keep praying when it seems that your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling and God isn't listening. Keep praying when you feel your faith is weak. Keep praying when you want to toss it all in and give up. Keep praying when it seems that it is hopeless. Don't stop!

Apparently in prayer, Daniel was aware of the peace from the heavenly realm, and not just the threat of this world. Prayer ultimately is the communication of our relationship with God, and not just merely relying on Him. Just like true communication between parents and child, it's not just asking, but sharing and praising, and playing and rebuking. It is about growing in intimacy with him. It's the spiritual discipline of the practice of spending time with God which allows us to grow in our relationship with God. We will know God more. We will have the heavenly perspective more often to shed light on our earthly situation.

We were made for intimacy with God! Good and continued communication always helps a relationship to grow. You will grow up from just being children of God to a friendship with the Lord so that you can trust Him more. You will have unshakeable peace like Daniel had: worshipping and giving thanks when everything else seems to crumble around him. You will experience God's undeniable intimacy and intervention in your life, which is reserved for people who trust in Him just like the end of this chapter: "The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God" [Daniel 6:23]

To finish... For someone who is not quite sure about God and Christian belief I would like to suggest this to you as a way of you putting into practice what I've been saying today so that you can honestly and transparently be made not to feel that you're not a hypocrite because of what you personally believe. Here is how you might deal with this 'meeting with God intimacy thing'... Somewhere, sometime you could attempt to speak either aloud or just in your mind something along the lines of these words...

“God, if you are really there, and I don’t know that you are, please come to me, meet me, reveal yourself to me in a way that ‘I’ can know that it could only be ‘You’?” And if you think that you have more to say to God, then say it or if you want to wrap up what might be your first attempt to meet with God to encounter God’s intimacy then you can officially sign off with,

“Well God I’ve said my piece, now I leave the rest up to you...”

In this way you have made an open and honest, mindful and heartfelt attempt to draw near to God.

And I want to say to you, God will answer and in His own way, in a way that you will know that it’s God- God will draw near to you!

How can I state this? How can I say this with such confident assurance? Because it is a promise written in God’s Word that has been fulfilled since the Garden of Eden, throughout the history of mankind, including my own life coming from my own heart and mind that once believed and said, “there is no God!” through the process of salvation to meet with God and grow in intimacy in our relationship....

Which is just what we were all made for – intimacy with God!