

Daniel teaches us that one of the principles of prayer is to confess our need early. True prayer acknowledges our limitations and our need for God. Daniel prayed for God’s mercy. He knew he did not have the power to undo the king’s decree or avoid its consequences. So, Daniel’s prayer was a confession that he needed a power greater than his own.

By reaching toward God, we confess our inability to change our world by our own strength or by our own resources. By their very nature our prayers concede that we cannot provide what we most need. But by praying we also affirm our conviction that God can help. With prayer we acknowledge our dependence on God’s grace and our trust in God’s heart of love. We push ourselves out of the way so that God’s ways can be revealed.

Crises are often the means God uses to get our prayer lives back on track and to remind us that we must seek God always. Our prayers are be a poignant reminder that God can make a difference in our lives. Daniel indicated how important he believed it was to seek God at all times by making prayer his first priority when the king’s command created their crisis.

Praise. In the midst of his crisis, Daniel offered personal praise to God. Sure, it’s easy to think that when God told Daniel what the king’s dream was, the crisis was over, and then he praises God. But even as he received the dream, Daniel suddenly faced a second, equally threatening crisis *because* he knew what the king’s dream meant.

Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of an enormous statue (2:31-33), with a head made of gold, chest and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet of iron and clay. In the dream a rock, not cut by human hands, struck the statue and pulverized it (2:34-35).

Daniel interpreted the dream for the king, but the news wasn’t good. Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom would be divided, and be replaced by one kingdom after another. Nebuchadnezzar’s golden rule would be succeeded by the Medo-Persians (silver), then the Greeks (bronze), and then the Romans (iron and clay). In later chapters (7 and 8), Daniel would give more detail, but the immediate truth is embarrassingly clear: Babylon will fall and be scattered like chaff on the wind (2:35, 44).

Put yourself in Daniel’s sandals. There is already a death sentence hanging over his head; now he delivers devastating news to the king. Far from solving Daniel’s problems, God’s revelation of the king’s dream actually places the prophet in greater danger. It could not have been easy for Daniel to offer God praise in light of this revelation.

Despite the danger, Daniel could still praise God because of *God’s present grace*. God revealed the king’s dream to Daniel and gave him insight to interpret it. The consequences of that revelation had yet to be revealed, but Daniel praised God for the good he could see, despite the grace not yet fully revealed.

Despite the danger, Daniel could still praise God because of *God’s Past Goodness*. Daniel remembered God’s goodness to him in the past: how God had spared his life when Israel fell, how God had raised him up to power in Babylon’s court. Daniel praised God for this past goodness.

Despite the danger, Daniel could still praise God because of *God’s Future Plan*. Daniel praised God for the good which the king’s dream revealed. The “rock” which crushed the statue is Jesus Christ, the rock that endures forever. Through Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, God showed Daniel the ultimate triumph of Christ on earth.

This revelation did not get rid of the present crisis. Daniel and his people were still in slavery. God’s temple was still in ruins. God’s prophet was still in jeopardy. Still, God displayed God’s long term plan to Daniel, and assured him that all things were working toward a grand triumph.

Likewise, God’s goodness displays itself in our past, present, and future. Our lives are filled with reasons to praise God for the good news we can see despite the grace not yet fully revealed. The very act of praising God produces the courage to face a crisis. Praise equips us to face our foes. Praise focuses our minds on God’s greatness, and lessens our fears.

Praise is not a cure-all, of course; but the bottom never falls out of God’s plan for us. What Daniel saw as future is, at least in part, already an element of our past. The rock, Jesus Christ, came and conquered sin and death at Calvary, assuring us that he ultimately rules the greatest powers of this world. More of Christ’s rule will cover the earth as the time unfolds, but Christ’s kingdom is already here and its progress has already begun.

Proclamation. When the bottom fell out for Daniel he offered God prayer, praise and proclamation. Daniel was so conscious of God at work that he could not help but proclaim God as the source of revelation. Even when the young prophet was not yet sure what the king’s response would be, God could not be kept from Daniel’s lips (2:28). As a result, God could not be kept from Nebuchadnezzar’s mind. When Daniel finished interpreting the dream, Nebuchadnezzar not only paid homage to Daniel, he also honored Daniel’s God.

There is an important lesson for us here. So often we neglect the proclamation of God to those around us because we fear the testimony of our convictions will place us at some disadvantage. Daniel's life makes it clear that God chooses to work most powerfully when God's name is most evident. We rob ourselves of God's power when we let circumstances steal God's name from our lips. There is never a better time to proclaim God than when the risk seems great, because God assumes control of those causes fought in God's name. The powers of the world cannot stand when God is clearly, courageously, and solely proclaimed. By our witness others see God better and God can affect their lives.

When we point others' eyes to God, we also see God more clearly. When we learn enough of God to express God before others, we begin to know God well enough to entrust God with our lives. The heart that overflows with knowledge and love of God is never overwhelmed by the circumstances that are already in God's hands. Proclamation to others establishes in us the truths that strengthen our own hearts.

Prayer, praise and proclamation are all spiritual responses to crisis that shift attention from our abilities to God's. These responses humble us by making us realize we are ultimately dependent on God's influence rather than our own initiative. We confess our weakness by prayer, praise and proclamation so God's strength will meet no barrier of pride in us.

God spared Daniel, but God did not spare God's own Son. May God help us all never lose sight of that great gift so that when the bottom seems to fall out of our lives we know what to do, whom to trust, and whom to proclaim. When our focus is on the cross rather than our crisis, our hearts will lead us to the one who purchased our lives with his own and is coming again to take us to his home. We will pray to the God who always loves us. We will praise the God who alone will save us. We will proclaim the God who gave a Son for us. Even when the bottom falls out, prayer, praise and proclamation will grant us peace for today and confidence for tomorrow.

Source: Bryan Chapell, *The Gospel According to Daniel: A Christ-Centered Approach*, Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2014. Pgs. 27-48.

When the Bottom Falls Out

Baptism of the Lord Sunday

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Daniel 2:1-6, 17-23

What do you do when the bottom falls out? If it's a full grocery sack, you shed a few tears and get out the mop. But what do you do when the bottom falls out of your life – your career, your family's security, your health? What do you do when things go horribly wrong? Though we don't like to think about it, we all know the unthinkable can happen. Christians are not insulated from life's crises; the bottom can fall out for us, too (John 17:15).

The bottom fell out of Daniel's life. The king had a dream. The dream troubled the king; in fact, it scared him. So he called in his wise men to find out what the dream meant; but the king would not tell the wise men his dream – he wanted them to be able to describe and interpret the dream. Of course, they could not tell the king his dream, let alone interpret it. In his frustration, the king ordered all of the wise men of the kingdom killed – and that included Daniel. The bottom had fallen out.

In Daniel's response to this collapse of his circumstances, we learn what faithfulness to God looks like when the bottom falls out. Simply put: Daniel offered God prayer, praise, and proclamation.

Prayer. Daniel had alternatives to prayer that would seem more practical and productive. Daniel had wisdom: surely he could figure out some solution. Daniel had power: surely he could finagle some more time, call in a few favors, twist a few arms, and work the angles. Daniel had all the same options we have in a crisis, but he turned to his God. Daniel chose prayer as his first response.