**February 14, 2021**

**Maintaining Focus on God**

**Today’s Point:** Fasting and confession keep us rightly focused on Christ.

How do you tune out distractions when you really need to focus?

* listen to music
* go for a walk
* get alone somewhere in the house
* turn off the phone and leave it in another room
* work in the garden, kitchen, garage
* go for a drive

In today’s world, we have many distractions. We need time when we can focus on spiritual things. Listen for how Daniel approaches God.

Daniel 9:1-4 (NIV) In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom-- 2 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. 3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands,

Daniel was around 80 years old. He had faithfully studied the scriptures, and he was motivated to spend time in prayer and petition. He understood them to be the message from Jehovah God. His study revealed that the exile from Jerusalem would soon be over. God’s people would soon have the opportunity to return and re-establish the nation of Israel.

Daniel dressed in sackcloth, sat in ashes, abstained from eating and he prayed to God.

He began his prayer with praise and adoration of God. He was in awe of God’s power and authority. When we go to God in prayer, we believe Him to be a loving God who hears our prayers. He honors what He promises. We ask for forgiveness of the sins we have committed naming them one by one.

Fasting was practiced more in Biblical times than perhaps we do today. It is a time to give up something, which may not always be food, in order to spend a dedicated time with God. You want to be with God to perhaps pray for something in your life or perhaps someone else or something that is on your mind. You show that you are hungrier for God than for food or other activities in your life. It might mean giving up watching TV, or spending time on Facebook or some other social media. It may mean giving up hobbies or sports. Your time could be spent on Bible reading, seeking out scriptures that help you, praying, meditation or journaling. It should be time of spiritual renewal.

Focus on God’s Forgiveness - Listen for the need of confession.

Daniel 9:5-7 (NIV) we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. 7 "Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame--the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

Daniel prayed a prayer to God to confess his sins and the sins of all of Israel.

What are the six sins that Daniel spoke about?

1. Sinned: missed the mark
2. Done Wrong: Intentionally distorting the truth
3. Acted wickedly: Wicked, will continue to sin
4. Rebelled: Risen in revolt against God
5. Turned away: Turned their backs on God
6. Not listened: Refused to listen to God and to God’s prophets

Daniel said, “You Lord are righteous – you act justly.” Daniel was honest with God. God knows our sins, but we need to confess them; we need to name them. We need to be honest with God, and we need to be spiritual cleansed. Only when we confess our sin can we come to a right relationship with God. It is a declaration that you are depending totally on God’s forgiveness and not your own good efforts

3.3 Focus on the God Who Answers - Listen for Daniel’s appeal for God to hear his prayer.

Daniel 9:17-19 (NIV) "Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, O Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. 18 Give ear, O God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. 19 O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."

As Daniel closed his prayer, what various appeals did he make to the Lord?

* hear our prayers and petitions
* look with favor on the need to rebuild the temple
* listen to us, look at us
* Jerusalem is *Your city* … it has *Your* *name* on it
* it is dishonoring to you
* forgive us, for your sake
* don’t delay

What are the reasons why God should hear and answer Daniel’s prayer?

* because of God's mercy
* for *God's* sake, because your city, your people bear your Name
* please intervene for the honor of your Name
* when You make things right, everyone will know You did it
* nations will know that Jehovah God has acted in a powerful way
* people will be in awe of your power, your love, your authority

“Mercy” means that someone does *not* receive what they *do* deserve. It is God's mercy that we are not punished for our sins. We deserve destruction for our sinfulness, but God withholds it. The Bible tells us that God is merciful – full of mercy. Based on Jesus’ death and resurrection, we will not receive the punishment we deserve … Jesus took it upon Himself. Because Jesus took on our sins, we have every reason to believe that God wants to hear and answer our prayers.

Application

* Spend time confessing any sin you have not previously brought to God.
* Confession is “agreeing with God” that your actions were sinful.
* Don’t make excuses, confess—and thank Him for His forgiveness.