

Sermon Transcript from August 28th, 2016
Alternative Response
Pastor Dave Lomas, Reality San Francisco

[Dave Lomas]: Please turn to Daniel 9. As you do, I'll invite Nkechi to come forward for tonight's Scripture reading.

[Nkechi Emeruwa]: Daniel 9:1: "In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—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.

"I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:

"Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

"Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you. The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you.

"Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing on us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come in us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins or giving attention to your truth. The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.

"Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

"Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, our 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. Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.'

"While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the Lord my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, 'Daniel, I have come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed.'"

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

[Dave Lomas]: There is no higher authority in the whole entire gathering of the church than when the Scripture is read. So, it was read. Let's pray.

Lord, as we turn to now sit under the authority of the Scriptures, I pray You give us grace, Lord, You'd give us attentive hearts that really are quick to respond to You. Give us that sort of interplay with You tonight to where You speak and then we move and

then You reveal and then we just say thank You and we're changed, God. That sort of thing to happen in our heart tonight. Do that now. By the power of Your Spirit, I just submit all of my capacities to You, God, and I ask, God, that You would encourage us to love and serve Christ tonight. In Jesus' name, amen.

This chapter in the book of Daniel is a pretty special one to me personally. It's a real special one in the book of Daniel. It's about Daniel's response to what he learned in exile. We're at the end of Daniel's life now. He's somewhere around, I don't know, 70 or 80 years old. What we're going to find out tonight and what we're going to see tonight is that Daniel has a different response to exile than what was being popularized in his time. We talked about exile last week. I want to commend last week's sermon to you to listen to. I don't really often say this, but I think it's important that we become a creative minority in San Francisco. We talked about that last week. And it begins to talk a little bit about where we're going in the next year. So, please listen to that.

Two main movements we began last week in Israel's history as it pertains to the land were promised land and exile. There were two ways that Israel lived in relation to the land. So, the first is "promised land." The promised land paradigm is when Israel was freed from bondage in Egypt, they were brought through the wilderness into the promised land. And when they moved into the promised land, they became a nation with a king and a kingdom and a palace and all this stuff. They were there and they were the moral majority and they were also the dominant culture in Israel.

So, that was the way they lived. Last week we said, "We do not live in the promised land. America is not the promised land." What happened to Israel after this was exile. We drew the parallel: we live in exile. They were brought into exile because they were unfaithful to God. The temple was torn down and the land was decimated and they were brought into Babylon. So, the question is: how do they live now? They have to live in a different sort of way. They're not the dominant culture. They're not the moral majority. They live in exile. How are they to live?

There was a few different responses to how they were to live. One of them was being popularized all around Babylon or all around through the exiles and we learn about this in Jeremiah 28. Not 29. You guys are familiar with Jeremiah 29. But, in Jeremiah 28. In Jeremiah 28, a prophet tells those who were carried away to Babylon, this is what a false prophet said to the people in Babylon. He said, "Hang out on the outskirts of Babylon live in the suburbs of Babylon and don't go into the city because in two years God will come back and destroy Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar."

So, the message was to them: "Hide. You will be the moral majority again. So, wait out in the suburbs until God makes you the moral majority."

Now, I don't know if you know this, but Christianity is not the moral majority in America. Christianity is not the dominant culture in America. And, as a result of this, Christians are not that welcome to share their views or thoughts or theology or their opinions. They're pushed, kind of, on the outside and not given any real credibility to be in the public square contributing to culture today.

Now, because you live in San Francisco and I live in San Francisco, we feel like this has always been the case. Like, "Of course we're not the moral majority. Of course Christianity is not the dominant culture."

We live in San Francisco. Christianity has not even been that. There was a blip on San Francisco's history where there was someone who was in office in San Francisco as a supervisor who represented family values and the Christian faith in politics, if you didn't know this. But, his name was Dan White and he shot Mayor Moscone and Harvey Milk, the first openly gay official elected to public office. So, Christianity has not really been a thing here. We're used to not being a moral majority in our city or a dominant culture in our city. But, a lot our country right now is reeling from the fact that Christianity is not the moral majority anymore and they don't know how to react.

Some people are separating. They hide from culture. They withdraw from it; from progressives. They think that God will judge out country and we will get the power back soon enough. That's what they say. Some are fighting culture. They literally call it "culture wars." They dubbed it "culture wars" and they're fighting against culture. In the wake of this, a lot of us that are Christians are left confused, if not paralyzed, if not just even a little bit shamed of being a Christian. How do we interact with culture?

The reason why Daniel is a very relevant book to our post-Christian society is because

he teaches us an alternative response. Not one of hiding. Not one of just assimilating to make Christianity some sort of privatized spirituality. Not fighting, either. He teaches an alternative response. So, what is that alternative response? Well, it's based on Jeremiah 29. It's a letter that Daniel reads and responds to in chapter 9. I don't know if you got this when we were reading through Daniel, but Daniel picks up the Scriptures, he reads the Scriptures, he understands the Scriptures, and he responds to the Scriptures.

I cannot tell you how impactful Daniel 9 has been on my life as a follower of Jesus. The fact that Daniel reads the Bible, responds to the Bible, has an open heart towards God through the Bible. I mean, this is, guys, Daniel 9 is like my hope for you in The Year of Biblical Literacy. Not that you would check boxes everyday. Not that you would go through and go, "I tore through the Old Testament. I'm like 50 chapters behind, but I caught up today."

If you just read like two verses of Scripture and your heart was turned to God in prayer and response, it's a win. Like, my hope for you, our hope for you as the leaders of this church was that your heart would be opened to God through the Bible. There was a part that we wanted you to understand the Bible. We want you to understand. It says that Daniel understood from the Scriptures. So, there is a part of understanding. But the thing with Daniel is that he used the Bible as a prayer book. He read the Bible – and we can learn from this – and turned what he was reading into ways he was to respond to God.

So, he reads Jeremiah 29 and he responds to it. He reads how there's 70 years and he counts the years and he says, "It's about 70 years." He reads that you're supposed to pray for the peace of the city and so he prays for the peace of the city. He reads that God says, "I will give you a future and a hope," and he believes God and he prays into this. Daniel responds. There is intellect involved here because Daniel understood from the Scriptures. But, intellectual progress led him to his knees in worship and response. This is actually why we do most of our music and prayer and place probably the most emphasis on our Sunday gathering after the sermon.

So, if you're new to Reality, you might notice that we do a few songs up front and then we do some communal stuff and then we do a teaching. Then, typically – I mean, maybe you've been to church where after the teaching it's like, "Okay. God bless you guys. You can leave now."

But, we say the most important part of our Sunday gathering is right after the teaching. The climax of the Sunday gathering is not the sermon, but our response to who God is as revealed through the Scriptures and by the Spirit. So it's like our responding to God, that's the thing we put the most emphasis on in our gathering. We receive communion, a lot of us kneel in prayer, we pour out our hearts to God. We respond to God. I feel for you if you listen to the teaching and you're like, "Eh, whatever," and then leave and go get a burrito or something. Like, I feel bad because the point is to respond to God. To respond to God.

This, actually, keeps us from being connoisseurs of sermons, too. I mean, I think we've become, in the church, connoisseurs of sermons. And, to be honest, most of my sermons are not good at all. It's just the worship time afterwards is good. And you walk up and you don't really know what to say. You're like, "The sermon was good."

I know that it wasn't good. I know what happened was God did something in your heart during the second set of worship and then you could only like, what happened? Oh, the sermon. No, no, no. It was the Spirit of God and it takes a lot of pressure off me because I don't have to teach good sermons.

This is so important in the life of our church, guys. This is everything. Literally. Like, on our Sunday gathering, responding to God is everything. And Daniel, take our cue from him. I mean, he reads and then he responds. He says, "I understood from the Scriptures according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet," and then he says, "So I prayed. Then I prayed."

And he does. So, how do the Scriptures draw Daniel to respond? How are we to respond? There's a couple things that I'd like to share tonight on how Daniel responds to Jeremiah 29. The first is this: Daniel responds by burden and not by apathy. Daniel reads the Scriptures – and I want to reflect with you on the way he does this and I hope that the Spirit stirs our hearts tonight.

Daniel responds by burden. There's so much apathy in our lives. I think we kind of touched on this last week. I know this because there's a lot of apathy in my life and I do the Bible professionally, which is a dangerous thing, by the way. A very dangerous thing. But, we need to cultivate burden in our heart. Daniel doesn't respond in apathy. He's not like,

"Oh, well. It really sucks here in Babylon. It probably will continue to suck. Whatever."

He's stirred. Daniel's heart is broken by the state of his people and what they have done to God. He mourns the loss of what they had. Like, Israel had the God-given right and call to be a light to the nations and Daniel mourns that they're not. Daniel mourns that the people of God are not a light in the world. And he receives the judgment of God as being good. Like, "You were right in judging us. You were right in sending us to Babylon, because we were lame. We were so broken. We were so far off from You. We were not Your people. We broke Your commands. We were not a light to the world. God, yes. You were right."

And he mourns. I mean, I love the way he prays. Who prays like that? Daniel speaks to God like this. He says, "We're sorry, God." I mean, who? What? If there were just one of us that was like, "God, we're sorry. I'm sorry. We're sorry that we've made Christianity into some political power in our nation or some voting segment. We're sorry that we've trivialized the message of Jesus down to saying some simple prayer to be in our out of heaven. We're sorry that we've been silent. We're sorry we've been consumed by apathy and trivial pursuits. We're sorry and we mourn the loss of the voice of Christ and the hands of Christ and the feet of Christ in our city. We're sorry that we're so lame. We're lame, God. We're lame and we're sad about it."

Daniel mourned. Then he cried out to God. We typically get angry and then we rant on Facebook and then we turn on Netflix and then go to sleep. It's like in that order. Instead of cultivating a burden in our heart. Like, we see something and it stirs our heart and then we should, whatever it is, if you see something, whether it's on social media or you hear about it, I would encourage you to stop. Just stop, turn everything off and then cultivate that burden in your heart through prayer. Like, "God, I'm just feeling really stirred right now and I want to pray into whatever I'm feeling. Like, I am mad at the state of the homelessness in our city and I'm sad and my heart breaks. God, act. God, heal. God, do something. You have to see these people. God, give me eyes. Give me creative ways to solve this. Give me something to say, God. Give me a way to act here."

Or, if you see something halfway across the world, stop and pray. Let there be a burden for whatever God starts to stir in your heart. This is what Daniel does. Because, this is what we're meant for, guys. I mean, we're not meant to be slaves to our companies that work forever hours just to get home and try to unwind and go to sleep and wake up to do it all over again. You were created for more than that. May God stir a burden in our hearts for this. I mean, I believe that there's a lot of, there are some, really thin people here. And I'm not talking about what you weigh. I'm talking about your souls. Our souls are thin. Your soul is thin. You can't talk about anything real or deep because you haven't gone there with God. You have no weight to your soul. Like, when someone starts talking about something deep you're like, "Uh, let's talk about something else. I don't really want to talk about it."

Like, you can't go there in your own heart because you haven't been there with God. Lauryn Hill – I've been on a huge Lauryn Hill kick this week – said at a concert once, almost like an apology. She was doing a concert and then she was speaking in between songs and she was offering almost an apology because her lyrics were so heavy with confession and repentance and God and spirituality and truth. And she said this:

"Fantasy is what people want, but reality is what people need. And I just retired from the fantasy part."

Come on. That is incredible. She's like, "Listen, we go around wanting fantasy. But, what we really need is reality. The reason why these songs are so heavy and so deep is because I've just retired from the fantasy part of life. I'm living in reality now."

When we do that, when we press in, there's a lot of pain there. There's a lot of things that we, as followers of God, do not do and you're going to feel the weight of that. You're going to see some really lame things done in the name of Jesus and you're going to be burdened for that. And you need to lean into that. A lot of us live this apathetic fantasy and it keeps our souls thin. We need weight. We need weight to our souls that grows from a burden for God's world and I don't want you to misdirect that.

Don't misdirect your compassion to think that God's world is somewhere out there. God's world might just be the person right next to you that you just need to cultivate a burden for the person next to you. You need to cultivate a burden for your neighbor. We need to slow down. We need to slow down and cultivate a burden and an anguish for the state of our own souls and the state of Jesus' Church. And, if we did this, I really believe that God would begin to show us the incredible things He wishes to do through us. Like, the insane things He

wants to do through us. If we would just turn off screens and be present with the brokenness; with the humanity that's all around us. That we take it in. Like, we've numbed ourselves. We're numb.

I think Twitter is turning into a new smoke break where we just, "Ah," and we just go there and, without thinking, we're just scrolling through stuff. It's numbing us. That stuff has its place. All that stuff has its place. Your job has its place. All the stuff that you work towards has its place. But, we take these things and we elevate them to statuses that they were never meant to be and it numbs us to reality. It keeps us from seeing compassion or applying compassions or burden around us. We need to cultivate burden.

We need to feel about the world what God feels about the world, and this has to be – and I have to make this point. If you could write anything down, write this down: this must be cultivated. Write down: I must cultivate this. I have to cultivate this. This will not happen, a burden in your heart for the things of God will not happen on the go as you multitask the three other things you have going on that very minute. It needs undivided attention. It needs silence. It needs vision. It needs biblical language. You might need to stir up by reading the Psalms and let that stir you into something.

Most of all, it needs for us to care. I need to care. You need to start caring. Like, we need to care about these things. It takes cultivation; it takes caring. Do you care? Do I care for God to move? I mean, Daniel cared. God was the only hope and Daniel knew this. God, You are our only hope. I'm not happy enough just paying my bills and having a good internet connection. Like, most of us are like, "Hey. If my bills are kind of paid and I have a good internet connection, I'm good."

Like, we can't be satisfied with that kind of stuff. We can't be. We're like, "No. I need to cultivate in my heart a burden for the things of God."

I think we often forget that we're in exile and we're supposed to live differently. We're supposed to live in a different response. We have to feel the pain that goes on around us. And Daniel's prayers are directed to God to act, because He's the only one that can do something. God is the only one who can truly do something. So, look at the way Daniel prays. It's a bit daring. I love it. I want to pray like this. Sometimes I don't have the guts to pray like this. Or, actually, I should say I don't have the relationship with God to pray like this. Daniel speaks to God like he really, really knows God.

Listen to what he says: **"Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes."**

Now, if I walked up to you and said, "Dude, open your eyes," you'd go, "Whoa. You don't know me that well."

He tells God to open His eyes. Like, "God, Your eyes. You have to open them. You have to see what's going on here. God, open your eyes."

If I was standing next to Daniel I'd be like, "Ooo. I'm going to stand back, because that angel is coming, but I think he's coming to thump you."

"Open Your eyes. Are You kidding me? Do You see what's going on in Babylon? Do You see the state of Your people? Do You see that state of Your temple? We are Your people, that's Your temple. Do something. You have to do something."

So, he leans on God.

"And see the desolation of the city that bears your Name."

"Your name is in ruins, God. It's Your name that's in ruins."

Okay, this is where Daniel kinds of backs up. He's like, "Listen. I'm only saying this, not because I'm righteous. I'm just saying. I'm going to let that out there. I'm not saying this because I'm righteous," even though Daniel has no recorded sin in the Bible. Like, the Bible's pretty honest, right? I mean, everyone's sin is recorded in the Bible. Everyone's. Like, "I didn't really want that in there. It's in there. Alright?"

Except for Daniel. Like, there's no recorded sin of Daniel in the Bible. He says, "I'm not

asking you this because I'm righteous. We're not righteous. But, because of Your great mercy."

And he appeals to God's mercy. He has no leg to stand on. He's like, "Listen. Everything that is said about us is true. We were in covenant together and we broke the covenant. So, God, the only thing we have to go on here is Your mercy."

I don't want to live a life and I don't want to get used to a life where I don't expect God to show up. I don't want to live that life. I don't want to live a life where I can call it in and I can go, "I have my day scheduled God and I can actually get through this day without You. But, if You wanted to show up, that would be cool."

I don't want that relationship with God. I want a relationship with God like, "God, if You don't show up, I'm operating without a net here. I'm done. I'm done. You need to act, God. You need to move."

At the very beginning of Daniel's life as a teenager – we learned this a few weeks ago – when he gets into Babylon he's assigned a portion from the king's table, really good wine, really good meat so he could become really strong. And Daniel decides to be a vegan and says, "I'm going to be a vegan and get stronger." And this isn't like modern veganism where there's protein shakes made out of plant stuff. Like, there was no Vitamix then. So, that's not what he's talking about.

He's like, "I need to get stronger than the people who are eating meat and I need to live off leeks."

And, every single day, three times a day, every single time Daniel ate, he had to rely on God. "God, as I eat this vegan meal, I need You to make me stronger than those guys. I can't do this without You."

Like, he placed himself in a place where he was completely dependent on God. And the older I get – and I feel like I'm getting really old – I'm realizing that I can't make things happen. See, when I was younger, I thought I had way more control than I actually did. I don't have as much control as I think I do and I really need God to show up and do what I cannot do. I can't make repentance happen. I can't drum up zeal for God in our church or in other people. I want to. I want to be that guy that can get into a room and just say four words and everybody's like, "God! The Lord!"

I'm not that guy at all. Not at all. Like, I do an altar call and people get unsaved. I have no idea how that works. It's horrible. I'm just not that guy. And I want to be able to drum up zeal for God. I want to be able to bring about – and I just can't do it. I just don't have that thing. I can make people feel guilty. I'm really good at that. I can create an atmosphere that feels like God is here, but I can't make God show up. So, when we pray I'm like, "God, You need to show up. This is not joke, God. You need to show up."

And I want to live in that way. I want to live in that way as a church. "God, when we gather, I want to invite You."

We have pre-service prayer before every gathering. Show up early to church. I mean, I know that's a really strange concept. Like, you put your time in and that's it. But, show up early and pray and like, "God, please come and meet us. Please come and move in our gathering."

Pray for the church. Pray for churches as we prayed for beginning of the gathering. Only God can do this. Only God can change hearts and change minds and give us a burden and zeal and hope. The only thing that we can do is petition God. I can pray, I can grab on to heaven and try to shake it down, which is, I think, the mental picture I get when I think of what Daniel's praying here. He grabs on to heaven and he tries to shake it down. With reverence, though. He says, "I'm not doing this because I'm righteous."

He's asking, seeking, knocking, he's pounding for God to act and He's appealing to God's mercy. He's like, "Don't be distant, God. I know why You were distant. We sinned. I get it. We were wrong and You were right to be distant from us. But, don't be distant. You need to act. You need to come closer. We're not as interested in getting back to the land as getting back to You. Get us back to You, God."

Which brings us to our next point. Daniel responds by confession, not complacency. Daniel could've been pretty complacent. Here's why: Daniel could have had the self-righteous complacency. He had no recorded sin of himself in the Bible. It wasn't his fault he was in Babylon. He was a teenager when he was taken. It was the sins of his great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great grandfathers and onward. That was why they were in Babylon. So, Daniel could've just been bummed going, "I didn't even do anything to deserve to

be here."

He didn't do that though. He wasn't complacent. He actually confessed. Notice Daniel didn't lament and get mad on the state of Babylon. He wasn't mad at Babylon. He laments at the state of God's people, and there's a big difference. He didn't go on a rant about how bad Babylon is, because Babylon is Babylon and Babylon does what Babylon does. It always has and it always will. So, he doesn't blame Babylon for being Babylon.

In Revelation, Babylon comes up again as a city. At the end of your Bibles there's a book called Revelation and it talks about Babylon. Now, here's the thing: Babylon wasn't a thing during that time. Babylon wasn't even a city. The superpower was Rome. And why does John the revelator, the guy who writes the book of Revelation, call Rome Babylon? The reason why he does that is because John is saying Babylon is just the spirit of any empire; any superpower. Babylon is Rome, Babylon is Greece, Babylon is England, Babylon is America.

Daniel doesn't rant about Babylon. He doesn't lament over the state of Babylon. He doesn't get mad that Babylon is Babylon. He laments at the state of the people of God in Babylon. We have to be careful when we rant about America. America is America. It's Babylon, and Babylon does what Babylon does. If you're going to rant about anything, if you're going to get mad about anything that draws you into lament and prayer, it should be over the state of the people of God. That you'd be burdened for God's Church. That you'd be burdened that we are not a light to the world the way that we should be in word and deed; in life and generosity; in holiness. We should lament for that. Not, "Oh my gosh. I can't believe America. America. Babylon." Babylon is going to do what Babylon does. We should lament over the state of the church.

So, Daniel says it like this. He says, **"Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws."**

See, it's not enough to lament at the state of the godlessness in our city, we have to lament over the state of the godlessness in our own souls, in our own church. So, we lament over our own godlessness. Look at what Daniel says.

He says, **"Great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments."**

Okay. The way that this is phrased is really important. God makes a covenant with Israel. Liken it to a marriage covenant. And, in a marriage, if you've ever been to a wedding, they both exchange vows. I've never ever done a wedding where one person makes a vow and the other person goes, "That's great. Thank you for that."

That's never happened. I've never been to one that way. I don't even know if that's a binding marriage, to be honest. So, this is what Daniel's saying. He's saying, "We have a covenant with You, and that covenant is mutual. You make a promise to us and we actually make a promise to You. And You keep Your covenant with love to those who love You as well and keep Your commandments."

So, there's actually stipulations to this covenant. "There's things that You said You would do and there's things that we said we would do." And it's mutual and it's binding. And what Daniel says here is that, "God, You are a God of love and we are in covenant with You. And the terms of that covenant, we know full well. The terms of that covenant are to love You and to keep Your ways. But, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled. We have turned away from Your commands and laws."

What Daniel is saying is, "We broke the terms of the covenant. We kept breaking it over and over again. Generation after generation. We deserve a divorce. We deserve a divorce. We kept breaking Your covenant over and over again and I confess that You were right in what You did when You sent us to Babylon. We really messed up. We get it."

And Daniel knows that the only hope he has, the only way for recovery in this relationship between God and Israel is to come to God in repentance. And repentance involves full acknowledgement of past transgressions. It's not like, "God, we'll do better next year."

It says, "God, this is what we've done wrong."

Some of us think repentance just means trying to change your behavior moving forward. It's some of that, but it starts with confession. All of this is relational language, because Daniel is using relational language because they're in a covenant with God. Daniel is saying, "We are a cheating spouse and we know what we've done. We've done wrong and the only hope that we have is Your mercy. So, would You remember? Would You remember how You vowed Yourself to us and how You loved us and that You're a God that loves us? Would You remember and have mercy? Because, we were saved by mercy in the first place. We didn't do anything to deserve to be married to You. We actually, on our wedding night, we cheated on You with a golden calf. We cheated on You and You still took us. So, I'm asking You, God, have mercy again. We know You've had it before. Have it again. Not because we're righteous, but because You're merciful. Because You're relentless in Your mercy. Because You keep pursuing us over and over and over again, God, according to Your mercy."

And God acts. God is so kind to say, "Yes. I receive that," and He sends Daniel a messenger; an angel. It says that the angel Gabriel showed up while he was still in prayer. This has got to be pretty cool. I think I met an angel once. It was not during prayer. Actually, no. I take that back. It was during prayer. But, I didn't know it was an angel. But, Daniel obviously knew it was an angel. And he looks up and Gabriel's there and Gabriel's like, "Hey."

And Daniel's like, "Wow. I prayed and I asked for God to move and it feels like God has given me revelation."

Now, notice the cycle of relationship that Daniel has with God. So, Jeremiah's Scripture is read. Daniel responds to it. Daniel essentially reads the Scriptures. And then he responds to God's initiative in speaking to Jeremiah and he responds to that. And then he pours out his heart to God. And then God responds and gives Daniel revelation. Do you see this interchange that happens?

The Scriptures. Daniel reads; responds. God gives revelation. This back and forth is what it means to be in relationship with God. This happens, guys. This, I pray, happens even tonight as we respond to God. And then God sends an angel; a revelation from God. And I believe this can happen. I believe that God can give us revelation. I believe that we can press into God and God can surprise us. God can surprise us. God can show up and give us – it's like a moment in God's presence answers a lifetime of questions. It's like, you can have a trillion questions and God just shows up and you're like, "I'm good. I'm convinced."

That can happen. I mean, that can honestly happen. Now, some of you guys are going, "Oh my gosh. Stupid Christians."

No. Daniel understood. Daniel's a pretty smart guy. But, we need transcendent revelation. You know this to be true. You want this to be true. I know you want it to be true. This happens; this can happen. Now, God does surprise us and God does show up. But, there's a way to posture ourselves to receive God's surprise. Let me tell you what I mean by that.

In Jeremiah 29:11 – you might know this verse. This is a very popular Bible verse. Jeremiah 29:11. Remember, Daniel read Jeremiah 29. So, he would've read this part. It says this. God's speaking: **"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you,"** – someone say "amen" – **"plans to give you a hope and a future."**

Okay. So, we read that and we're like, "Yes. Yes, Lord."

"I know the plans I have for you."

"You do?"

"Plans to prosper you."

"Mmm. That's good."

"Not to harm you."

"There we go."



"Plans to give you a future and a hope."

This is what I'm talking about. This is like memory verse. This is everything. This is what everyone memorizes. But, there's another sentence. There is another sentence after this sentence. The sentence is: "Then you will call on me..."

Do you see that? "Then you will call on me." God says, "I know. I have plans for you. I know what I'm doing with you. I know how I'm going to prosper you."

And you're like, "Yes."

And God says, "Yes. And then you will call on me and you will come to me and you will pray to me and I will listen to you and you will seek me. And, guess what? You will find me when you seek after me with all of your heart."

What was Daniel doing in Daniel 9? Seeking after God with all of his heart. He's like, "God has plans. God has revelation. And guess where that's found? In the heart of God. Guess where I'm going? I'm going to the heart of God. I'm going to press into God. I'm going to pray. I'm going to orient."

This is like a posture of God speaking of God surprising him and God revealing Himself to us. "Then you will call on me." And Daniel is tenacious about his time with God. Tenacious about it. We learned this last week. He prayed every single day for three times a day his whole life even when it was illegal. Now, you're saying, "Oh my gosh. How legalistic. What a boring, humdrum way to relate with God. Three times a day. Boop. Your timer goes off or a push notification. You have to go pray? That's so rigid. No, no. I'm way more Spirit-led than that."

Okay. Alright. That's awesome. Well, I'm glad that's working out for you. Daniel postured himself three times a day. Tenacious about that. And, inside of these times is when God revealed Himself to Daniel. This was like a standing appointment with God. This was like a time where he stepped into and orients his heart to God and God spoke to him.

Look what it says in Daniel 9:21: **"While I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me swift in flight..."** – that's awesome – **"...about the time of the evening sacrifice."**

Very odd thing to note the time. It was right around the time of the evening sacrifice. Now, if you are a Bible nerd you're like, "Wait, evening sacrifice? I thought you said the temple was destroyed? There is no temple. How is there an evening sacrifice?"

There wasn't an evening sacrifice. There was no temple. Daniel kept the evening sacrifice in his heart. Like, even though the temple was torn down, he knew evening sacrifice should be going off right now. I'm going to orient my heart to God."

Every single day for his entire life. Guys, it paid off. This is the only way he survived in Babylon. It was the only way he survived in running Babylon was time. Like, tenaciously orienting his heart to God. His heart was like set to a clock to be oriented, his mind and his heart, towards God in prayer. This is what I hope for us. I hope that we move forward in times and we're going, "I'm going to be tenacious with spending time with God and orienting my mind and my heart towards God. I'm going to wake up for something greater than I typically wake up for. I'm going to wake up to hear and respond to God. And, right around the middle of my day, I'm going to check in with God and examine my heart before God and turn my mind. And, at the end of the day, I'm going to check in with God and I'm going to examine where I saw God move today and where I saw God work today and I'm going to open my heart to God and give Him my day and turn my mind to Him and meditate on Him as I start to wind down in my day."

Like, "I'm going to do this three times a day." And then, all of a sudden, it's just going to be like fodder for burden for the things of God and a hunger for God and it's going to be stoked. And then years of this, years of this, years of this. You walk around with this tranquility of heart and mind. If you've ever met someone like this that is with God all the time and you're like, "I just want to be around you and I want to learn. It's like when I'm with you I feel like I'm with God."

We can be those type of people. It takes a lot of nurturing. It takes a lot of cultivation. I believe Daniel was like that. Let me close with this story and I'll be done.

My friend, John Tyson, was here a few weeks ago opening up our series in Daniel. He's a pastor in New York City. He opened up our series when I was in London. On Monday, after he taught here, we didn't have a night gathering that Sunday. On Monday, after he taught here, I texted him and said I would love any feedback that he has about our community. Any helpful critique. John is someone that I've known since the first year or year and a half of the church. It's been so helpful as he's in New York City and planted a church years before we did and I've just learned so much from him.

I'm like, "Is there any critique that you have that you've been with us?"

He sent me a voice note, which is great because he has an Australian accent so it sounded amazing. Everything felt like it had more weight to it. I'm like, "Oh my gosh. He says 'water' differently than me and it feels right."

He sent me a voice note and, in it, he said some great things about the church. But, he's like, "Here's the main thing," and he issued this really prophetic encouragement, if not even a warning. But, I think it was a really good encouragement. He said, "After seven years of a fairly successful ministry in a hard place like San Francisco or New York City, you can grow a bit complacent and you can call it in on Sundays with worship and teaching and worship again. You just go, 'Okay. Two songs. Three songs. Teaching. Four songs. Start them here. End them here. Do these things.' You can just start to call it in."

He says, "But, there's more. There's more than that."

And then he said something really profound that I want to leave with you as we end. He said, "Christians in places like San Francisco and New York City lived repressed lives because they have these deep pains in their hearts and burdens for their neighbors, but they can't express them anywhere. They work for bosses who their job is their God and they don't call us into the office and say, 'How's your soul,' and then we pour out our souls to them and then they lead us in prayer and they say, 'Go take a walk for an hour and talk to God about that.'

"That does not happen. What do we do when our hearts get stirred in the middle of a meeting? We have to just stuff it down and move on with our day. We have these deep pains in our hearts and burdens for our neighbors that we can't express anywhere. And if you're working in this city and are in front of a computer all day or in 100 meetings all day, where do you let your deep hungers and longings and pains and burdens out? Where does that go?"

Some of us take it out the same way others do in our city; through sex, drugs, drinking and entertainment. But you know, if you've done that, that doesn't even begin to scratch that itch. That doesn't even begin to scratch that itch.

He said, "There's something about the Sunday gathering in that space not to call it in. There's something about naming and identifying the stuff we feel in our hearts and bringing that before God. Like, for real."

Like saying, "God, do You hear my burdens? Here's what I went through at work this week. Here's the things that are breaking my heart. Here's the things that are making me so angry right now. Here are the things that have me so excited I don't even know what to do with. Here are the stirrings that You have. God, would You give me revelation? Would You speak to me? Would You heal me?"

And we need a place, a safe place, to do real business with God. And that's what this space is for. I don't want to call in Sundays. I don't want to just say, "Hey, we have the thing and everyone knows what to do. Everyone get in line. Do the thing."

I don't want that. I don't want that for me. I don't want that for our community. I want this to be a space where we're open to God. Where this is not a time to be cordial and try to hold it together or to be calculated to go, "Okay. If I cry, I have to cry a little bit. If I go up to pray I have to confess just a little bit of sin, not the whole thing. I have to be really calculated in what I do."

This is not the time for that. This is a time where we can be honest. We can be honest before each other and before God. This is a safe place. No one's going to judge you. If they do, they need to remove the plank out of their own eye before they try to take the speck out of yours. Like, this is a place to do real business with God. And we want God to

move and we want God to act and we want God to hear and we want God to open His eyes and go, "God, look down on us. We're hungry people that want You to manifest Yourself; to show Yourself. And then bring all the things that Your Kingdom brings. Bring salvation and bring healing. I mean, bring deliverance from demonic oppression. Bring these things. Bring healing for my depression. Bring these things, God. Bring what Your Kingdom brings when You come."

That's what we hope. Let's pray.

So, Lord, we pray that this would happen now as we turn to You in response. As we receive communion, we thank You for the body and the blood of Christ that when we go, "God, remember Your covenant." It says in 1 John that when we confess our sins You are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness because of the new covenant. Thank You for the new covenant. Thank You for Jesus. Thank You, Jesus. Thank You that in You we have life and freedom and that we can actually confess our sins to You and You can forgive us.

We can confess the gap in our lives between where we are right now and the vision we that have for our lives and we know we're not even close to that. But, we confess that, God. I confess that. I want way more for myself, for my wife, for this church than it is and I confess that gap and I pray that You would begin, by Your Spirit, to bridge that gap. That You would make us hungry for the things that burden Your heart. That You'd wake us up from our apathy, from all the trivial things and the trivial pursuits that we get involved in.

Help us to live for more than that. Spur us as we pour out our hearts to You now. In Jesus' name, amen.