

Bible Studies for Life: February 14

Maintaining Focus on God • Daniel 9:1-7, 17-19

By Bobby McKay



McKay

I have a birthday coming up in a few weeks and it seems my eyesight got the message early. Lord willing, I will turn 43 years old. I did not want to believe others when they told me things would change after I turned 40. One text message I received on my 40th birthday read, "Happy Birthday, it all goes downhill from now on."

Here lately, my vision is showing some mileage and I am past due for an exam. I am not the type of person who has anxiety when it comes to doctors or a medical environment, but there is one thing I have experienced in the past at the optometrist that makes my skin crawl.

The terrible event I am referring to is when they use a small puff of air to blow into your eye. The only thing worse than that short blast of air is the anticipation beforehand that it is about to happen. You blink too soon. They have to repeat the test.

A friend of mine who is an optometrist does not employ the eye-blowing method. The quandary is, she is 200 miles away but for me, it's worth the drive not to have that medieval

maneuver inflicted on me. Of course, I'm being a bit dramatic but I do have a choice to make. It comes down to the question of how much I value my vision and focus.

In times of great trouble or persecution, people are often compelled to focus everywhere, on everybody, and on everything but their own need for God. Many times, God will use the difficulties surrounding us to shepherd us closer to Him.

Daniel was in such a situation. Even though in this context Daniel and the people were in exile and captivity, he was not anxious. How could he have an assurance and calm about him amid the worst of situations? The answer is in his belief in what God had promised. Daniel's current circumstances did not affect his future outcome.

Daniel knew both God and His Word were trustworthy. Daniel recalled the words of the prophet Jeremiah and understood the captivity was close to concluding (Jeremiah 29:10). While others may have used this knowledge to celebrate or become stagnant, Daniel did the opposite. He used this information to turn to God through fasting and prayer.

The spiritual discipline of fasting is not solely about the absence of a meal. On a larger scale, it is about our inward and outward focal points. I'm convinced of two things about fasting: it should be practiced, and it should be private. I'm skeptical of those who write books or share sermons about their fasting experience. Jesus tells us when we fast, keep it to ourselves.

Daniel wanted God to do a spiritual work in him of cleansing and forgiving. Through the preservation of Scripture, we can look over the shoulder of the author and read specifically what sins Daniel was confessing (Daniel 9:5-7): missing the mark, intentionally distorting the truth, wickedness, rebellion, turning their backs on God, and refusing to listen to God's word and His messengers.

You will not find any excuses in Daniel's confession. When we sin and approach a holy God through prayer, no excuses will suffice in our situation. Partial confession is problematic. When I fail to be completely honest with the Father and place all my sins at His feet, I am still coddling sin in my life and seeking to please the flesh rather than Him.

As Daniel concluded his prayer (Daniel 9:17-19), he pled with God to hear his requests and intervene supernaturally. How many times in our prayers do we ask God to do something for the betterment of others? Daniel was asking God to restore His people and bring a great movement of confession and spiritual renewal. It matters little who stands behind your pulpit on Sunday morning or who sits in the Oval Office if the church is not willing to confess our sins, repent, and call on the Lord for help and mercy.

Well, I still have an appointment to make with the optometrist. It may or may not include the "air-puff of persecution," but it will only last a moment. The same can be said of the troubles you and I are facing. Temporary discomfort can serve to help us with our future focus. Shift your concentration. Confess, repent, and be forgiven today.

McKay is pastor of Pleasant Grove Church, Brookhaven.