

Trusting God in Times of Political Upheaval

by Bayless Conley

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Let's pray once more.

Heavenly Father, I thank You for what You've put in my heart, and I pray that You would give each and every one of us ears to hear and hearts to understand. Lord, it's our intention to not just be hearers of Your Word, but to be doers, not just those who applaud the truth, but those who apply the truth. So, going into this, we say that is our intent. Lord, teach us so that we can do. Teach us so that we can participate. In everything, we pray that the name of Jesus would be elevated, magnified, and praised. Amen.

In my lifetime, our country has had 13 different presidents. I have lived through 13 different administrations. Some of those leaders were good. Some were not so good. Some kept us in wars where tens of thousands of our young men lost their lives, and they did it for political reasons. Some flip-flopped on their campaign promises the moment they got into office, thus betraying the people who voted for them. Some kept their promises and did all they could to lead with transparency and integrity. Some were involved in sex scandals. Some were arrogant. Some could lie with a straight face. Some were inept at their jobs. Others were very good at it. Some were manipulated by special interest groups and by big money. Others refused to be. Under the leadership of some, we experienced robust, healthy economies. Under the leadership of others, our economy suffered greatly. But one thing I will tell you is that through all of the 13 presidents that we've had during my lifetime, God has been faithful, dependable, trustworthy, and unchanging through every single administration.

We have a new president, obviously. Some are very encouraged and happy about what they see in the near future. Some people are uneasy. I want to tell you something. Whatever party or person has the reins of leadership, listen to me: it's wrong for you to put your trust in them. It's wrong for you to put your trust in a man. Our trust needs to be anchored in God alone. Now, we understand God uses people, and we put our vote of confidence in certain people and their promises. But ultimately, if your trust is not in God, you're going to be disappointed because even the best-intentioned people and the most gifted people fail. All human beings are fallible, frail, and limited. In fact, listen to what the Scripture has to say. It's pretty clear.
Psalm 118:8–9 NKJV,

⁸ It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. ⁹ It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes.

It's better. And the Scriptures actually get stronger. Psalm 146:3–6 NKJV,

³ Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. ⁴ His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish. ⁵ Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, ⁶ Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; Who keeps truth forever.

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Quite a contrast. He said, “Don't trust in man, don't trust in princes, but you can be happy if you have your trust in God.” Now, the next few verses actually sound a lot like campaign promises, interestingly enough, but they're not made by someone wanting to be elected to office. Listen to them. Verses 7–10 NKJV, talking about the Lord,

⁷ Who executes justice for the oppressed, Who gives food to the hungry. The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners. ⁸ The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raises those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. ⁹ The Lord watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down. ¹⁰ The Lord shall reign forever— your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Listen, those are not campaign promises made by a fallible, limited human being. They are promises made by the Lord God Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, the only one who has the power to ultimately fulfill them. He will fulfill them for those who trust in Him. He will bring His Word to pass. God's Word gets even stronger when it comes to where we place our trust. Jeremiah 17:5–8 NKJV, listen to this.

⁵ Thus says the Lord: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. ⁶ For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited. (Here's the contrast) ⁷ Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, and whose hope is the Lord. ⁸ For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but its leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit.”

Don't trust in men even if they're a prince, even if they have authority, even if they have wealth, or even if they have ability. Your place is mistrust if you put it in a human being. Ultimately, our trust needs to be in God. It's interesting. In the Scriptures, there is a man who lived through no less than 12 different administrations. Some of them were short. Some of those administrations were quite long. He lived through some good times but mostly through evil, horrendous times. Yet, no matter who was in power, this man flourished and remained stable because his trust was in God, not in a ruler, not in a political party, not in a prince, and not in a king. His trust was in God. His name is Daniel. Daniel was born during the reign of Josiah, who was Judah's last good king. Israel, in the north, has already gone into captivity in Assyria. We have the kingdom of Judah in the south. Josiah comes along, and the guy loves God. He does something about it. He cleansed the nation of idolatry and witchcraft. He stopped the murder of innocent children who were being regularly sacrificed to Molech. He reinstituted the Passover and brought peace and national prosperity to the land. Daniel was born under this administration and lived well into like his 16th or 17th year as a teenager. In this time of prosperity, when the nation was flourishing, where the people had great freedoms, and where the people revered God, Daniel experienced all of that. In fact, it sums up the reign of King Josiah this way. Second Kings 23:25 NKJV says,

²⁵ Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him.

Because of Josiah, his heart, and because of the policies that he implemented, there was a time of respite where the coming judgment of God against Israel's national sin was delayed. But the next few kings after him were all wicked. None of them served God, and they brought

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the country to ruin. Throughout their reigns, the country was subjugated to foreign powers. The people were taxed into oblivion. They were constantly attacked by the surrounding nations. The previous years of blessing and prosperity were replaced by fear, death, and poverty. Nebuchadnezzar, from Babylon, came in and captured the nation, destroyed Jerusalem, tore the wall that surrounded Jerusalem down, burned all the homes to the ground, and took the population, in mass, as slaves into Babylon. Every artisan, every craftsman, every notable person was taken in slavery to far off Babylon. The only ones who were left in the nation of Judah were the poorest of the poor so that they could till the land and produce crops for Babylon. Daniel went through all of that. He was among the captives who were taken to Babylon. Yet even in Babylon, as part of the captivity, Daniel flourished. Under the brutal administration of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he flourished. Through the short, evil, murderous reigns of a couple of leaders after him, he flourished. Then, under Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Daniel still flourished, and his rule was marked by decadence, drunkenness, immorality, idolatry, the occult, arrogance, and open defiance of God. Then, the land of Babylon was conquered by Darius the Mede with more bloodshed, cruelty, and upheaval with a new administration. Then, Cyrus the Persian came into power, another leader with another administration. Listen to what the Scripture says in Daniel 6:28 NKJV,

²⁸ So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

If we took the time to read through the book of Daniel, and I would encourage you to do so because it's enlightening and it's fascinating, we would find that Daniel was promoted and flourished under Nebuchadnezzar's reign and under Belshazzar's reign as well. Daniel 1:21 NKJV sort of sums it all up. It says, "Thus Daniel continued." Everyone say, "Daniel continued."

²¹ Thus Daniel continued until the first year of King Cyrus.

Daniel continued while kings and governments were changed around him like so many stage props. He continued to live under the blessing of God and fulfill the purpose of God for his life regardless of who was in power and regardless of what was happening with the economies around him. God blessed him. How? How is it possible that something like this, something like that happened? Well, we have the book of Daniel to tell us how and to tell us why. I just want to share with you some key elements of Daniel's life that opened the door for God's blessing to rest on his life regardless of what political party was in power and regardless of what was happening in the economy or in the nation around him. Are you ready? Can I share a few things with you? Number one, Daniel had a no-compromise attitude when it came to serving and pleasing God. In fact, I have something to tell you. You need to write it down. Some of you probably need to get this tattooed somewhere. Whatever you compromise to keep, you will eventually lose. Whatever you compromise to keep, you will eventually lose. Daniel would not compromise. We read in Daniel 1 beginning in verse 6 NKJV. He has been enslaved in Babylon. It says,

⁶ Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷ To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego. ⁸ But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

All of their names, these new names that were given had to do with foreign gods. Belteshazzar literally means "the treasure of Bel," one of Babylon's gods. Daniel means, "God is my judge."

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But Daniel would not defile himself with the king's delicacies, meaning pork. It was one of the things that Daniel refused to eat because, in the law of Moses, it was forbidden. The other foods were things that were sacrificed to idols, and Daniel didn't want to defile himself. They may have changed Daniel's name, but they could not change his nature. He refused to bow to the gods of Babylon. If we're going to remain stable in unstable times, we must purpose in our hearts not to bow to the world or to the idols that the world erects and worships. Listen, you can remain relevant and current without compromising your walk. Truth be told, if there's no difference in your speech and actions from the world around you, it's because you're not different. There needs to be a difference between us and the world. Even in Egypt, the Bible says that God made a difference between His people and the people in the land of Egypt. There was light in the land of Goshen and darkness in the land of Egypt. God made a stark difference.

I remember a couple who came to church. Interesting how they came. A gal in our church had become acquainted with this wife. She didn't know her well, but God gave the gal from our church a word of knowledge about her. She told her one day. I think they worked together. She says, "I'm going to tell you something. God told me something about you." And she said, "Really?" She sort of smirked. She says, "Yes. God told me that you and your husband are into wife-swapping. You're feeling really guilty about it, but you don't know how to stop." She just went on and told her what she was feeling and about her emotions. It absolutely stunned this woman because it was all true. Then, she said, "You need to come with me to my church." So, she came, and she got saved. Well, her husband wasn't happy. So, he actually called me and wanted to come talk to me. So, I talked to him. He was very skeptical but ended up coming to a service, and he got saved. Then, the main couple who they were swapping partners with called and said, "Hey, let's get together." And they said, "Look, we don't do that anymore." They said, "What do you mean don't do that anymore?" Says, "We're Christians now. God's changed our life. We love Jesus, and we're not into that anymore. You need to come to our church." And so, the other couple came to church, and they got saved, both of them. The guy actually had a terrible problem with drug addiction for years, and his main suppliers were some of his coworkers. He had a really good job and made a lot of money. But he told me, he said, "Pastor, I spend half of my paycheck every month on drugs, half of what I make. And my pushers are guys at work."

So, he gets saved, and he's not engaging in the filthy sexual language, which was just everything. That's all they talked about every day. Everybody thought that was weird. But then, the guy came to him and said, "Hey, it's about time for you to refill your prescription." He said, "I don't need any more drugs." He said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "My wife and I went to a church, and we got saved. They prayed with us, and Jesus has set me free from drugs. I don't need drugs anymore." And the guy said, "Yeah, we'll see how long that lasts." They started having a betting pool with all the guys at work to see how long he would last. And he would report to me, he says, "I went in today, and I told them, 'Hey, five days.' That's the first thing I'd say as I came in. 'It's been two weeks, four weeks.'" I still remember him saying, "Hey, pastor, I went in today and said, 'Hey, it's been 81 days.'" He said, "And they just shook their heads and said, 'We don't understand, but we know you're different. And this, whatever it is, is real.'" Christ should make a difference in our lives. We don't have to compromise. The Scripture says this in 2 Corinthians 6:16–18 NKJV,

¹⁶ And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." ¹⁷ Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.

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¹⁸ I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego also had this non-compromising attitude. And their names, as well, had to do with the foreign gods. They declared submission to and ownership by these pagan gods. The King sets up this idol and said, “Everybody, you have to bow down and worship it, or we’re going to throw you in a fiery furnace.” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego would not bow down. They’re not just going to lose their newly appointed positions. They’ll possibly lose their lives. The King said, “Hey, do you not get this? I’m going to kill you. You’re going to get thrown in the fire.” They said, “King, we don’t care. We’re not going to bow down. And by the way, God can rescue us if you throw us into your fiery furnace. But either way, you need to know we’re not going to serve the gods of Babylon. We will not bow down to your idol.” And, of course, we know the story. They threw them in, and there was a fourth man in the fiery furnace that rescued them. The King of Babylon saw the fourth man walking around in the fire. And when the children of Israel came out, there wasn’t even the smell of smoke on them. Not a hair on them was singed. If you refuse to bow, God will see that you don’t burn. He can and will take care of you.

The famous German sculptor Dannecker had done a number of Greek goddesses and some fairly sensual pieces that he became famous for. Then, he decided that he was going to sculpt the face of Christ. I think he had to start over three times and just junk the whole thing. Finally, after eight years, he finished the sculpture of the face of Christ. And it said that when people saw it for the first time, they would burst into tears and weep. Napoleon heard about his work and said to him, “Come to Paris and make a statue of Venus that we can put in the Louvre.” Dannecker basically said, “After gazing into the face of Christ for so long, how could I possibly give my attention to a heathen goddess?” That’s kind of the story, isn’t it? After gazing into the face of Christ and sitting at His table, you realize all the world has to offer you, my friend, is scraps and cheap imitations. Daniel wouldn’t compromise. Secondly, Daniel knew the power of prayer.

The other officials, the Babylonian officials became quite jealous of Daniel. They couldn’t find any way to accuse him. So, they came up with an idea, and they went to King Darius and said, “Hey, you’re such a great king. We think to honor you, we should make a law that if anyone asks any favor or request of any god and not you, for this amount of time, they should be thrown into a den of lions.” You know the story. The King, this appealed to his pride. He says, “Yeah, let’s do that.” He signs it into law. Then, we read this in Daniel 6:10–11 NKJV. “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home, went into his closet where no one could see him, and he prayed in secret.” No.

¹⁰ Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. ¹¹ Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

Daniel was a man of deep, consistent prayer. Somebody says, “I don’t know how to pray.” It’s not that hard. Talk to God. Talk to God. If you’re afraid, if you’re worried, tell Him. Ask Him to help you. If you have needs, tell Him about your needs, and then ask Him to help you. If you’re happy about something, share it with Him. Talk to Him about it. Share your joys with Him. If you don’t know what to do, tell Him and ask Him to guide you and ask Him to give you wisdom. If you’re mad at Him, tell Him. He knows anyway. If you think He’s been unfair, tell Him. He knows

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anyway. God loves an honest heart. But then, after you talk to God, here's what you do. You get quiet, and you listen for Him to talk to you. Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit comes, He will speak. He'll show you things to come. He'll take the things that belong to the Father and the Son, and He'll reveal them to you. It's normal to have God speaking to your heart. And the more quiet time you spend, the more you'll become familiar with His voice. Listen, God knows the secret language of your heart that no other human being knows. He speaks it fluently. When you get quiet, turn your mobile phone off. You will not die. Turn your devices off and wait. Pray. Daniel prayed. The third thing about Daniel is he had faith in God. He's thrown into the den of hungry lions because of praying. When he was taken out of the lion's den, God sent His angel and shut the mouths of the lion. When they pulled him out, this is what we read. Daniel 6:21–23 NKJV,

²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! ²² My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you." ²³ Now the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God.

Other translations say because he had faith in his God or because he trusted in his God. Beloved, you can trust in God. To have faith in Him is simply to take Him at His Word and act like it's so. There's no such thing as divorcing faith from actions. If you believe something, you'll act a certain way. Faith demands action. Faith is simply taking God at His Word and acting upon it. Do it. He'll deliver you from your lion's den. First Peter 5:8–9a NKJV,

⁸ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. ⁹ Resist him, steadfast in the faith.

Be they lions of lack that are threatening to devour your finances. Be they lions of illness that are threatening to devour your health. Be they lions of strife that are threatening to destroy your happy home. Whatever it might be, resist him steadfast in the faith. My friend, faith comes by hearing, hearing by the Word of God. Resist him with the Word. The Scripture in Ephesians 6 says we don't wrestle with flesh and blood but against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, et cetera, et cetera. It talks about standing against the strategies of the devil. One of the things in there is this. It says that in taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, in the Greek language, in the New Testament, there are two words, two basic words that are used for our English word, word, W-O-R-D. One is logos. It basically means "the collective writings of God." Just the Word of God. But then there's another word that's much more rare and it's the Greek word, rhema. Rhema literally means "the spoken word." It is the Word of God when it is spoken aloud. And that's the word used there in Ephesians 6. Taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God spoken aloud. You need to put the Word in your heart and then fit it on your lips, and it becomes a sword. It becomes an offensive weapon in your life. Think about Christ. He's in the garden of Gethsemane. Or not garden of Gethsemane.

He's in the wilderness, being tempted by the devil. Satan comes. "Hey, if You're really the Son of God..." And it's interesting because the last thing that God said when Jesus was baptized, a voice from heaven, "This is My beloved Son in whom I'm well pleased." Jesus goes into the wilderness. The first thing the devil does is challenge what God said. That's always what the devil does. Whatever God promises you, the devil comes and says, "If." "If You're the Son of God, command these stones to be made bread." What did Jesus do? "It

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is written: man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." Jesus put Scripture in His mouth. What was that? That was the sword of the Spirit. In all of the temptations that came His way, Jesus answered aloud by putting the Word of God in His mouth.

Listen, if you will have a love affair with your Bible, get it in your heart, and then let it be fixed on your lips; it will change your life. It will change your world. There's power in the Word of God. You can trust it. I read a story sometime back. The parks commission was told that they had to have a whole bunch of trees along this highway removed because they were going to widen the highway. It was a major job. So, somebody gets the contract, and they come to this one section. The foreman notices there is a robin's nest there with a mama robin sitting in it. And just this sort of unusual bit of compassion comes over him. It was very unlike him. He told his crew, "Leave that tree alone. We'll come back to it later." Everybody thought it was kind of weird, but they did. They came back to it later, and now, there's a bunch of little hatchlings in there. Mama robin is feeding the little birds. The foreman, again, so out of character, says, "Let's save that tree till last." The workers thought that was strange, but they did. Finally, when they came back, the babies had grown, and they were all gone. The nest is empty. He says, "Okay, take the tree down." One of the workers went up to get the nest. He said that at the bottom of the nest, something caught his eye. It was a little card or a piece of paper that had been woven into the nest by the mother robin. He pulled it out, cleaned the mud off of it, and it was a Sunday school card. These were the only words on the card. "We trust in the Lord our God." My friend, you are more valuable to God than a bird. He will protect you if you put your trust in Him.

The fourth thing that we find about Daniel, and this is important. He knew that, ultimately, God rules in the kingdom of men. He interpreted a couple of dreams for Nebuchadnezzar. In the second one, when Nebuchadnezzar told him the dream, Daniel said, "Lord, I hope that the interpretation of this dream comes on somebody else and not on you." He said, "Here's my advice to you. You need to break off your sins. Quit living wickedly and give honor to God." But Nebuchadnezzar wouldn't listen to it. The dream's interpretation was this. "Because of your pride, because of your sin, you're going to lose your mind for seven years. You're going to live like a wild beast. They'll drive you out in the wilderness, and you're going to live like a wild beast for seven years until you know that God rules in the kingdom of men, and He gives it to whomever He will." The King didn't repent. In fact, he's overlooking Babylon at the hanging gardens of Babylon, one of the wonders of the ancient world. He's thinking, "Look at everything I've done. I'm the number one ruler in the world." At that moment, a watcher, an angel, spoke, and he lost his mind. He found out that God does rule in the kingdom of men.

Previously, God had shown Daniel that there would be a number of coming empires that would come on the scene, and then they would disappear. Ultimately, God would set up His kingdom in this world, and it would be an everlasting kingdom. Daniel knew that God had a plan, and he believed it would be fulfilled regardless of what happened. God still has a plan, my friend, and it will be fulfilled. It will be fulfilled. Now, I'm not advocating a *que sera sera* type of attitude. I think believers ought to vote, they ought to pray, and we ought to get out and do everything that we're led to do civically to get godly leaders in positions of authority in our communities and in our nation. But I'm telling you, regardless of who happens to be in power, regardless of what party has the majority, I will not fear because, in the end, God is going to have His way. His plans cannot be thwarted. I'll give you another one. Some people are going to love this one. Some people are not going to love it so much. Number five, Daniel remained stable in unstable times because he was faithful and had an excellent spirit. He was faithful, and he had an excellent spirit. Daniel 6:3–4 NKJV,

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³ Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. ⁴ So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.

The book of Proverbs says, "A faithful man shall abound with blessings." God rewards faithfulness, and it's not based on the economy. It's not based on the government. It's not based on the friends that we know. The possessor of heaven and earth knows how to take care of His faithful children. He took care of Daniel, and just like Daniel, God can take care of us regardless of who is in power. Through 12 administrations, Daniel was blessed, served God, and fulfilled his purpose in life, and his needs were met. It didn't matter what was happening around him. God can do the same to us. We all understand Daniel was faithful in spiritual matters, in prayer, in the service to God, and in devotion. But when the Scriptures talk about the faithfulness of Daniel, it was talking about his faithfulness to men. It was in connection with his job in the kingdom of Babylon. We tend to segment and compartmentalize our lives with the spiritual, and then there's the natural. "I have my church life, and then, I have my regular life." God doesn't see it all that way. It's just our life. He doesn't make a dividing line between sacred and secular. God is just as interested in us being faithful outside of these four walls as He is interested in us being faithful among our own company within these walls.

God accentuated Daniel's faithfulness of work, which for us, as with him, had to do with and has to do with us keeping our word, discharging our duties in a timely and competent manner, keeping confidential things confidential, being loyal, and being honest. This brings us to the related point, sort of the other side of the coin. Daniel had a spirit of excellence. He had an excellent spirit. That literally talks about his manner of life and about his attitude. The word excellent comes from the word excel and, as we find it here. It literally means to go above and beyond, to do a superior job, and to do more than is necessary. Daniel excelled in everything that he did. It was the manner of his life. He would not settle for mediocrity in anything. He went beyond the status quo, and he did a superior job in everything he did. Some Christians, by contrast, are quite mediocre. They're mediocre workers, not because they have to be, but because they choose to be. They're clock watchers when it comes to their job. Only doing enough to get by. Friend, we ought to have an excellent spirit. I think lazy people should be fired. I do. You're robbing the people who you work for. They pay you for eight hours or however many hours it is and you spend an extra half an hour for lunch, you show up late, you leave early, you're scrolling through social media and doing all sorts of stuff on your boss's time he's paying for you. You should be fired. That's not excellence. That's not God's way. That doesn't represent Christ.

We ought to have an excellent spirit, and we need to be faithful when it comes to work. You ought to be the hardest worker on your job. You ought to have the best attitude and go beyond what is required in everything you do. You ought to be the first one to show up, the last one to leave, have a great attitude, and make wherever you work prosper. You ought to speak well of them. The Scripture says, "Whatever you do, you need to work as unto the Lord." If I'm preparing a document, I should prepare it as if Christ were going to read it. If I'm selling shoes, I ought to sell them as if Christ was going to be wearing them. If I'm teaching a class, I ought to teach it as if Christ was sitting in that classroom. Whatever I do, I should do it as unto the Lord. I should do it with excellence. If I'm cleaning a house, I should clean that house as if Jesus was going to sleep in the bed and as if He was going to live there. We ought to have an excellent spirit, and because of that, Daniel prospered. If we'll have that kind of a spirit, that kind of an attitude, that kind of an outlook, chances are if rough times come, if economic hard times come,

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you're going to be the one who still has a job. They'll pass right over all of the lazy excuse makers to get to you because people find out pretty quickly what kind of a worker and what kind of employee you are. Oh, I'm about to say something I'd regret. I'm going to just. All right, got to go on. I know some people saying, "Say it! Say it!" I'll let your imagination run wild. Number six, Daniel studied and he obeyed the Word of God. He was a student of the Word, and he acted upon it. This is so important. In Daniel 9, this is during the reign of Darius the Mede, verse 2–3 NKJV, it says,

² In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of the Lord through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. ³ Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

He was studying the scrolls of Jeremiah, and he realized that God had said through Jeremiah, "My people are going to go into captivity in Babylon for 70 years." So, he reads that. The first thing he did was pray and he was all in, in his prayer, sackcloth, ashes, and fasting. It wasn't a half-hearted prayer. Why? Well, let's read what Daniel read. These are the very words that Daniel read in far off Babylon after 70 years of exile had passed. Jeremiah 29:10–14 NKJV. Daniel read it. We're reading it.

¹⁰ For thus says the Lord: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. ¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back from your captivity; I will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you to the place from which I cause you to be carried away captive.

It was a promise with a condition. Most of God's promises have conditions. They do not automatically come to pass. You have to take hold of them by faith. The Bible says in Hebrews 11, regarding some of the heroes and heroines of faith, "By faith they received the promises." So, Daniel's reading the scroll of Jeremiah, and he says, "What? 70 years. It's been 70 years." But God says, "You have to seek Me with all of your heart. Then, I'll come, and then, I'll bring you back to this land." So, what does Daniel do? He immediately acts on the Word of God. He immediately begins to pray. Ashes, sackcloth, repentance, and if we had the time, we would read Daniel's prayer. He got on his face, and he prayed, and he interceded for the nation and sought God's face. God fulfilled His promise and brought them back to the land of Israel because Daniel studied and acted on the Word of God. Jesus said, "Whoever hears these sayings of Mine and does them, I'll show you who he's like. He's like a guy who built his house on a rock, and when the rain came, the floods rose, and the wind blew, the house wasn't moved because it was founded on a rock." That's the picture of stability. The picture of permanency, of strength. Let any winds of political adversity blow. The economy may go up. The economy may go down. If we will hear and put God's Word into practice, we will remain stable in unstable times. God is still a God who responds to faith and rewards faithfulness.

I want to tell you that if you don't know Him, you can. The good news of the gospel is that when we couldn't reach up to God, He reached down to us. The whole world had sinned, and God being a God of holiness, there's no way that He can be joined to mankind who's become sinful

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and violated His righteous nature. God is not just holy. He's also a God of love. Because of His holiness, He could not overlook our sins. But because of His love, He would not overlook us. He sent His own Son, born of a virgin, who lived a sinless life. He showed the masses what God was truly like and that He wasn't aloof, wasn't distant, and wasn't occasionally glancing at this world He created through some cold clinical eye. But He was near. Jesus called Him Father. No one had ever heard language like that. He said, "Your heavenly Father knows what you need. Not a sparrow falls to the ground except your heavenly Father sees it. You're of more value than many sparrows to God." Jesus said that He's counted the hairs on your head. People had never heard anything like that. "What kind of a God is this that He calls Him Father? He says that He cares for us." Then, Jesus was taken by jealous hands, put through a mock trial, and He was crucified.

The innocent Son of God hung upon that cross. The sky turned dark, and He suddenly cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" For at that moment, the Father turned His back on His Son. They had enjoyed unbroken fellowship since eternity past. God laid the sin of the world on Jesus. The penalty, the judgment, and the wrath of God against our sins fell on Jesus. He died under the weight of our sins. After three days and three nights, the claims of God's eternal justice were satisfied, and Jesus was raised from the dead. The Bible says if you'll believe that and if you'll invite Him into your life as your Lord, if you'll submit your heart to Him, God brings you into a relationship that the Scriptures call salvation. It's not about mindless ceremonies. It's not about empty rituals. It's not about some endless list of stuff you're no longer allowed to do. It's about walking and talking with your Creator. Every one of you, every one of us, internally senses and sensed that something was missing.

All of my life, since I was little, I was looking for God, but didn't know it. My mother said, "When you were four years old, I thought you were going to become a priest because you'd ask me questions about God, and I didn't have answers for them." I got involved in a lifestyle of substance abuse and alcoholism for many years. But really, one of the roots of that was I was looking for the truth. It was out of frustration, and I ended up in a street mission after a little 12-year-old boy told me about Jesus. I'd never heard the gospel before. I didn't know He was alive. And that night in that street mission, all those years ago, I gave my life to Jesus. People put their hands on me and prayed for me. I didn't hardly know what they were doing, and from that day to this day, I've never had another illegal drug in my body. Not one. Not one. Maybe you can relate to a story like mine.

I always say this. My wife, Janet, is here, in the front row. We've been married for 40 or 42 years? 42 years. We're not far away, so okay. We're almost at 43, then, aren't we? Yeah. I guess I'll have to do something special. She's very different than me. Our paths are totally different. She's a farm girl from the Midwest. This woman has never smoked a cigarette in her life. Sheesh. I smoked my first cigarette at like 10. She's just different. She was like the teacher's pet. She was the student we all hated growing up. But one day, she came to the realization that she was just as lost as somebody like me, and she needed a Savior.

No matter how bad you've been or how good you've tried to be, we cannot merit this gift of salvation. It's only by God's grace. And it's for whosoever. "Whosoever will let Him come and take of the waters of life freely," Jesus said in the book of Revelation. I want to lead you in a simple prayer. Whether you're out on the plaza, whether you're sitting in a pub in Belfast right now, whether you are in Myanmar, whether you are in Afghanistan, or wherever you might be. I might be speaking Arabic right now. I might be speaking Hindi. Maybe I'm speaking French. This is going to be translated into lots of different languages. But you know God is talking to your heart.

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I want to lead you in a simple prayer for those who are here. That's all I can do, however. I can give you the words to a prayer. They'll mean nothing if you just say them, but if you tie your heart around them and you get sincere and speak them to God, it'll change you. One of my dear friends was a heroin addict. Somebody put him on a plane to Teen Challenge. I think it was back in New York. He's sitting in the back. He didn't even know why he was there. He's been on heroin for years. He's the only new guy there. He said that the leader of the thing, they had this Bible study, says, "Okay, there's one person here who needs to accept Christ, and we'll get dinner afterward." He said that the guys next to him were hitting him in the ribs. They said, "Come on. Get up there. We're hungry."

He's the only one. He's the only new guy. The guy went on for like 10 minutes. There's one guy here. And the guys next to him are getting kind of violent with him. Stepping on his feet. Punching him, saying, "Come on. Go up there. We're hungry." So, finally, he went up. He went up just because the guys were harassing him. But he said between getting out of his seat and coming up to the front and kneeling down, he said, "Bayless, I got serious. In 20 steps, I got serious. I asked Christ into my life." He became a missionary. He and his wife are both missionaries who changed the world. You can get serious in a second. If it helps you, bow your head and close your eyes. But only if you want to. I think it's helpful sometimes. Speak these words to God. Say,

Oh God, I come to You. I believe. I believe Jesus is Your Son. That He came to this world, and He died on the cross to pay for my sins. Jesus, thank You for loving me and for not leaving me out. I put my trust in You. For I believe You've been raised from the dead. Right now, the best way I know how, I die to my rights of independent living. I call You, Lord. All I am and all I have, I put in Your hands, Jesus. From this moment forward, I will follow You. Amen. Amen.

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