

## INTRODUCTION

Last week, I preached on the first chapter of Daniel, talked about “The Daniel Diet.” And it was a message about moral purity, especially for our teenagers to make the right choice. While Daniel’s friends were required to eat the king’s rich food and drink the wine, Daniel said, “No, I’m going to stay pure.”

It’s kind of interesting that in a message on moral purity the message most people heard was about how to lose ten pounds if you go on the Daniel Diet. I think half of Tyler is on the Daniel Diet this week. They have been asking me questions about it. There’s so many questions about it, “What am I supposed to eat?” so actually I have printed up a page that kind of gives some instructions about it. If you’re interested, you can get it out of my office from Arlene, or on our website.

But it is, as I say again, not a message about how to lose weight but a message about being courageous enough to be different. I want to say again how much I appreciate these teenagers up here on the front. Praise the Lord. I appreciate all of you who kind of have been displaced, because we really are challenging our teenagers to move forward, not only physically but move forward spiritually in our church.

Today we’re going to talk about dreams. Do you ever wake up in the morning after having dreamt all night and then you couldn’t remember what you dreamed about? Dreams are strange things. Experts tell us everybody dreams, some people just can’t remember their dreams. Out of eight hours sleep at night, on the average you’ll dream an hour-and-a-half to two hours of those eight hours.

This actually happened. On the morning of April 14, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln met with his cabinet at the White House in Washington, and the Civil War was raging toward an end. Abraham Lincoln said to his cabinet members, “I’ve been having a strange dream the last few nights.” He said, “In this dream, I picture a ship, and it is sailing towards some indefinite shore.” He said, “I keep having that dream. I don’t know what it means.” That very night he and Mrs. Lincoln were attending a show at Ford’s theater and John Wilkes Booth shot him in the back of the head, inflicting a mortal wound. The very next day, the ship that was the life of Abraham Lincoln reached the shore of eternity. That was a dream that had personal, national, and eternal significance.

Today we’re going to be looking at a dream a king had 2,600 years ago that also had personal, national, and eternal significance.

Daniel 2:1. “In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep.”

Let’s talk a little bit about Nebuchadnezzar. We’re going to be meeting him in the weeks to come also, but Nebuchadnezzar, who was this great Babylonian king, was one of the greatest world leaders of the time. In fact, he was the first world leader to conquer the entire civilized world, including what we would call today Italy, all the way around to Egypt. He built a beautiful city

called the ancient city of Babylon, which is today 40 miles from Baghdad in Iraq. He was one of the greatest world leaders of all time.

It's kind of interesting, you may be interested in this, Saddam Hussein in Iraq last declared himself to be the reincarnation of Nebuchadnezzar. Before the Gulf War a few years ago, Saddam Hussein claimed he would rebuild ancient Babylon and restore Babylon to a world power as it was back then, and that's probably one of the reasons he got in a fight with everybody else because he wanted to do that.

Dr. Sigmund Freud wrote the book *The Interpretation of Dreams* in which he says dreams are really repressed feelings of our fears, our worries, and our anxieties. Have you ever had a dream where you're frustrated, you're trying to do something and you just can't do it? Maybe some people have dreams they're back in school again and can't find the classroom or they're back in school and going to take a test and they haven't studied for it or some of them are try to go run for help and their legs are caught in thick mud or just frustrating dreams. Well, king Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. Sometimes God uses dreams. But you've got to be very careful, because dreams aren't the best messengers from God. In fact, the Bible warns us about that in Jeremiah 23:25, let me read it to you. Jeremiah 23:25, warning you about being careful about trying to always say dreams are from God. God says, "I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds?" Be careful, sometimes dreams are nothing more than the delusion of your own mind.

I like what pastor David Jeremiah wrote: "Does God still speak through dreams today? If we have dreams that we think are inspiration, chances are it's more likely indigestion." He writes, "We have the full revelation of God in the Bible, and there's a big period at the end of it. Because we have the Holy Spirit, because we have the scriptures, God's revelation, we don't really need dreams."

In fact, dreams appear throughout the Old Testament. Joseph interpreted Pharaoh's dream and he interpreted the dream of the butler and the baker. And there are dreams all throughout Daniel but there really are no dreams from God in the New Testament except those surrounding the birth of Jesus, Joseph had a dream saying, "Take Mary as your wife." Then the wise men had a dream about fleeing because Herod the Great was going to try to kill all the boy babies—but after that, no dreams. Why? The Holy Spirit came and we have the scriptures. So be very, very careful how you try to read something into your dreams.

Daniel 2:2-4. "So the king summoned the magicians, the enchanters, the sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came and stood before the king, he said to them, 'I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.' Then the astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, 'Oh, king live forever. Tell your servants the dream and we will interpret it.'"

Who were these guys? They were the wise men. It says they were sorcerers, astrologers. These are guys who tried to read the future in the stars just as today there are astrologers who try to do that. Somebody said these were the highly educated advisors of the king but they used

questionable means. Somebody said it's like a cross between the lawyer and a fortune-teller. They were the advisors, the lawyers of the kings, but they used fortune telling.

Is anything different 2006 years later? You drive down the street and see a palm reader, you see fortune-tellers, you see people lying out tarot cards trying to read some supernatural message from using a Ouija board. All of that is extremely dangerous but also extremely fake and false and there's nothing to it.

They had a bunch of codebooks in the Babylonian culture used to decipher dreams. All the king had to do is say, "This is what I dreamed," they could get together, consult their books and say, "This is what it means."

Daniel 2:5. "The king replied to the astrologers, 'This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was *and* interpret it.'" In other words, I'm not going to tell you what the dream was. You're supposed to be so special, come on, you tell me what the dream was and interpret it. He said, "If you don't, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses will be turned into piles of rubble. But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So, tell me the dream and interpret it for me."

I think old Nebuchadnezzar was pretty shrewd. I think he had already begun to suspect these guys were phonies. He said, "I'm really going to put these guys to the test and see if they can really do something supernatural." Tell me what I dreamed and what it means. By the way, people who read horoscopes to try to find their future in the stars is just as futile and it's just as fake. I read recently of the fortune 500 companies over 200 of them have at one time or another consulted an astrologer about the best time to do business. Isn't that sad? We've all heard stories about how politicians in Washington have consulted an astrologer for the best time for things.

I love this true story. I love Barbara Bush. I think she's the greatest First Lady we've ever had. In 1984 an astrologer told Barbara Bush—now Barbara Bush wasn't asking, this was unsolicited—the astrologer told Barbara Bush she and George should never have gotten married, because they're both Geminis and Geminis don't get along. I heard Barbara Bush talk about that one time. She said, "We've just celebrated 50 years of marriage. Every time I have a bad day, I tell George that astrologer was right."

Have you ever noticed the advertising for psychic hotline? Come on now. 1-900-I AM A FOOL. If these folks are really psychic, why don't they call *you* and tell you what's going on in your life? They're fakes, they're frauds, just like these guys. There's nothing supernatural there.

Daniel 2:7-11. "Once more they replied, 'Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.' Then the king answered, 'I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me the dream, there is just one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me.' The astrologers answered the king, 'There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. What the king asks is

too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among men."

The Babylonian culture worshipped gods, small "g," plural, polytheism, but those gods were impersonal forces, they had no personal relationship with the people. Aren't you glad we have a personal God who knows us, who loves us, who wants to help us?

They said one thing that was correct: No MAN could do it. And the gods don't have anything to do with man. That was wrong because our God has everything to do with us. We're going to see that right here, in Verse 12. "This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered all the execution of all the wise men of Babylon." He said, "Let's kill all the lawyers and let's kill them tonight." "So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death." Daniel and his other teenage friends were part of this group of wise men. They had come up through the king's college. Daniel is still a teenager here, and he's only about 15 or 16.

Verse 14, "When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact." Folks, when we talk to people, we ought to strive to have wisdom and tact. You know what wisdom is? Wisdom is the ability to say the right thing. Tact is the ability to say it the right way.

Sometimes people are right and they have the right information, they're right and they're always right and they know they're right. Do you know anybody like that? You say, "I'm married to somebody like that." But tact is the ability to say the right thing in the right way. That's what Daniel had, verses 15-18. "He asked the king's officer, 'Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?' Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him. Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. He urged them to plead for mercy from God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon."

What did they do? They prayed. That's what we're going to learn today, folks. When you face problems, pray. Verse 19. "During the night, the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven and said 'Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his.'" That sounds like something out of the Psalms, because when God answers Daniel's prayer, he just bursts forth in spontaneous exuberant praise. Praising is bragging on God to God. It is recounting the greatness of God. Verses 21-23, "He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; He knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king."

Before we go on. Daniel said, "My prayers have been answered." It had not yet been validated; it hadn't been proven his prayer had been answered. That wasn't going to happen until he stood before Nebuchadnezzar and said, "Nebuchadnezzar, here's the dream. Here's the interpretation.

Am I right?" In other words, he was acting on faith here when he was praising the Lord for the answer to prayer, because he only had the assurance the prayer was going to be answered. He hasn't seen evidence of it.

Verse 24. "Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, 'Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him.'" You know how we know Daniel was not a good political animal? Because good politicians always eliminate the opposition and they eliminate the competition. And this would have been a great opportunity for Daniel to say, "All right, kill everybody else except us." By the way, these are the ones that were going to cause him all kinds of trouble in the chapters to come. He demonstrated grace. Verse 25, "Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, 'I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means.'"

I want you to picture this: A teenager, standing before the most powerful man on earth. Verse 26, "The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), 'Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?'" Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about." But underline verse 28. I told you last week, this is the theme of the book of Daniel. Underline it, star it, and put it in the margins of your Bible, "Theme of the book." Here it is: "But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries." There it is. That's the theme. There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. "He has shown king Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay our bed are these..." Then he says, "As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries [God] showed you what is going to happen. As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind."

How humble Daniel is. By the way, he doesn't walk up to the king and bow down before the king and say, "Live forever, O king." He walks in there and stands before him and says, "I've got the answer to your problem." By the way folks, when you kneel before God in prayer, you can stand before any man. When you've been in the audience of the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, you're not intimidated by any other person. So Daniel goes in there and says, "King, I've got the answer for you."

I want you to jump over to the last part of the chapter to see Nebuchadnezzar's response in verse 46. After Daniel tells the dream and interprets it, "Then king Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. The king said to Daniel, 'Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.'" "In other words God is the one who got the credit and the honor for what Daniel did. That's a good story, isn't it? Strange dreams, when dreams come true.

## **1. LIFE LESSON: WE WILL OFTEN FACE IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS**

I want us to learn five lessons about our lives we can draw from this story. Here's life lesson number one is this. We will often face impossible demands. You and I will often face impossible demands, things utterly humanly impossible. That's what Daniel faced. That's what these wise men faced. The king said, "Tell me what I dreamed, tell me what it means." They said, "That's impossible." And it was.

What about you? Some of you right now are going through an impossible crisis. It relates to your marriage, it relates to your finances, it relates to your health, it relates to your friends, it relates to some problems you're going through, and it's totally impossible. You just need to know sometimes we do face impossible situations. Daniel did and we do. I want you to see what Jesus said in Mark 10:27. "Jesus looked at them and he said, 'With man this is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God.'" "Would you please read those last six words out loud with me everybody, starting with all things? Say it with me. *All things are possible with God.* Do you believe that? Folks, if you honestly believe that, every time you see the word impossible, you'll say, "That is an opportunity for God to do something in me and through me that is humanly impossible."

I told Mike in the first service, there's this little chorus that's been going through my mind the last few weeks as I prepared for this message. It goes like this: Nothing is impossible when you put your trust in God. Nothing is impossible when you're trusting in his word." In other words, that's a great song to remember. That's a great mantra to chant that nothing is impossible with God, keep trusting him.

I so strongly believe this that a number of years ago I cut the word "impossible" out of my dictionary. I told you before I cut the word "divorce" out of my dictionary just to say that for Cindy and I, it's just an absolute impossibility. We don't know what the word means. I also did that with the word "impossible" a number of years ago. I just cut the word "impossible" out. You know why? All things are possible with God. I cut the word "impossible" out. Somebody says, "What are the implications of that?" Well, I don't know, because on the other side of the page was the word implications so I don't know what that means either. I'll tell you what the implications are. With God you never face something impossible. There's always hope with God. That's the first thing we learn.

## **2. LIFE LESSON: DIFFICULT SITUATIONS FORCE US TO RELY ON GOD ALONE**

Here's the second thing we learn: Difficult situations force us to rely on God alone. That's what happened to Daniel. King said, "Daniel, tell me what I dreamed." Impossible. Daniel had to run to God and to find strength from God.

I know I say this sometimes and it's one of my personal little soapboxes, so just excuse me while I climb back on it. But I am disturbed by some of the things we hear going around in the world today that people say are in the Bible that are just not in the Bible. For instance, somebody will say, "The Bible says cleanliness is next to godliness." Folks, that's not in the Bible. Nowhere. It's good to be clean, okay, but it's not in the Bible. The other one, I hear this all the time, somebody says, "The Bible says, 'God helps those who help themselves.'" Folks, that's not in the Bible either. In fact, just the opposite of that is true, that God helps the helpless.

But this is the one I want to refer to today. Sometimes people will say, "The Bible says God will never put more on you than you can bear." People say, "Well, praise God." Folks, that's not in the Bible either, did you know that? You won't find it anywhere. I'm here to tell you just the opposite of that is true. Listen, sometimes God will allow you to carry such a heavy burden until you come to the point you can't bear it. And instead of trying to do it yourself, you unload it on God and you trust God instead of trusting yourself. Because as long as you think you can handle that problem by yourself, as long as you think you can deal with that impossibility by yourself, you're not going to call upon God.

Probably one of the greatest lyrics in all of the history of gospel music is the one the choir sang while ago. It says, "For the chains that seem to bind us serve only to remind us that they drop powerless behind us when we praise Him." Folks, where do the chains come from in the first place? Sometimes we get in such desperate situations that we can't get out of and it's only when we depend utterly and totally on God that we find the victory.

I'm trying to tell sometimes you will face a situation so difficult you can't bear it. So you've got to trust God. That's in the scripture. Would you read what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1? See if this doesn't sound like somebody who had more than they could bear.

"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope, and he will continue to deliver us." When Daniel faced this impossibility, he didn't say, "Well, I can handle it. Just be tough, I can handle it." No, he went to God and depended on God just like we need to do.

### **3. LIFE LESSON: WHEN YOU NEED WISDOM, PRAY!**

Number three, when you need wisdom, pray. That's what Daniel did. They didn't come together and have a little staff meeting. "Say let's concoct some story that's feasible enough that Nebuchadnezzar will say, 'That's kind of what I dreamed about.'" "No, he said, 'Let's pray.'" He called his friends to pray with him. Folks, the best thing you can do when you face difficulty is to pray, not only that, but get folks praying with you like his three friends. In James 1:5, it says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him."

We're going to see Daniel was a man of purity, but he was a man of prayer, because we see him praying throughout the book of Daniel. If you could look into my own prayer life, you know what you would find? You'd find the one thing I pray for myself more than anything is for God to give me wisdom. More than even that, I pray for my wife and pray for my daughters that they would make wise choices and I have been praying for my future sons-in-law, their future husbands, for years. When I pray for myself, I pray God would give me wisdom. Because he says, "You need wisdom, ask for it." I know that in and of myself I do not have the talent, the ingenuity; I don't have the ability to serve as pastor of this church without the divine wisdom of

God. And so folks, if you say, "Well how can I pray for you, pastor?" You pray for God to give me wisdom, I'll pray for God to give you wisdom, we need to ask for God to give us wisdom.

When you're facing impossibility, the first thing you do is pray. Prayer shouldn't be your last resort. It always ought to be your first resort. You know what we do sometimes when we face a problem? We try to solve it, solve it, solve it, solve it, solve it and then when we can't solve it, we say, "I guess I'd better pray about it." That's absolutely opposite. When you face a problem, the first thing you do is pray then God gives you wisdom to know what to do about it.

### **Pray specifically**

First of all, he prayed specifically. He said, "God I need to know what this dream was." One of your problems is you may not be praying specifically enough. You're just kind of praying generally. That doesn't work.

### **Pray persistently**

The second word is "persistently." He prayed and kept on praying. Obviously, he got on his knees and he said, "God, I'm not going to get up off my knees until you either give me the dream or they come in here and cut my head off. I'm going to keep on praying until you answer me." There's an old song that says, "Just keep on praying until the light breaks through. Just keep on praying, He'll answer you." God keeps his promises. His word is true. Just keep on praying until the light breaks through. Your problem may be that you stop praying too soon. Pray specifically. Pray persistently.

## **4. PRAYING IN FAITH ALWAYS PRODUCES PRAISE**

Here's the fourth life lesson. Praying in faith always produces praise. That's what Daniel did. He prayed and when God gave him assurance of the answer, he started praising the Lord.

Sometimes our prayers are nothing more than a shopping list we lay before the Lord. "Lord, this is what I need: I need this, I need this, I also need that and this and this and that." And sometimes we don't even stop and thank him when he answers the prayers. Listen to me. The best time to thank God for the answers to your prayers are right after you ask him. Don't wait until you have the visible evidence of answered prayer. Go ahead and thank him in advance. You know why? That's faith. And the Bible says if you don't pray in faith, you won't receive anything. Here we find Daniel saying, "God tell me what this dream was." He had an impression, and then he starts praising the Lord. "Lord, thank you for answering this prayer," *before* it was even proven that was the answer. Did you learn that? You need to praise the Lord.

Praise without prayer is presumption. But prayer without praise is ingratitude. Folks, I'm here to tell you, God always answers prayer. He always answers prayer. It may be yes, it may be no, it may be wait, but he always answers prayer. Now when you face a problem, are you going to pray about it or are you going to worry about it? Because if you pray about it, you can't worry about it. If you worry about it, you can't pray about it.

The Bible says in Philippians 4 from *The Message* paraphrase. "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It is wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life."

An African missionary, named Dr. Helen Roseveare, tells a true story about one day a young lady in that village gave birth to a child prematurely and the mother died in childbirth and the child was premature. They needed to keep the baby warm but didn't have an incubator and even the hot water bottle they had was so torn up it wouldn't work. So Dr. Roseveare gathered some of the children in that little village together and said, "Boys and girls, we need to pray, we need to ask God to give us a hot water bottle or this little baby is going to die." And so they began to pray. There was one girl who prayed this prayer: "Dear God, please send a hot water bottle today. Tomorrow will be too late, because by then, the baby will be dead. Dear Lord, please send a dolly for the baby's sister, so she won't be so lonely." Amen.

Dr. Roseveare said that afternoon, THAT afternoon, a parcel arrived from England that a group of Christian women had put together five months earlier and when they opened that parcel on the very top was a hot water bottle. Dr. Roseveare said she took the hot water bottle and was preparing to use it on that child and the little girl who had prayed that specific prayer was digging through that parcel, digging, just throwing items out. Somebody said, "What are you looking for?" "The doll, the doll, I know there's a doll in here." There at the bottom was a little rag doll that somebody had put in.

## **5. WHATEVER YOU FACE—REMEMBER THERE IS A GOD IN HEAVEN AND HE IS ABLE**

Number five: Whatever you face, whatever you face, remember—here's the theme—there is a God in heaven and he is able. Whatever impossibility or difficulty you face, remember the theme of this book is: There is a God in heaven and he is able to, to do what? To do whatever you need. He is able to deliver you.

I like the way Paul said it in Ephesians 3. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever, amen."

Folks, if I could just bring one thing in your heart and mind today it would be this: Whatever you face, there's a God in heaven, and when you say I am unable, he says, but I AM able.

## OUTLINE

### Life Lessons:

#### 1. WE WILL OFTEN FACE IMPOSSIBLE DEMANDS

Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." *Mark 10:27*

#### 2. DIFFICULT SITUATIONS FORCE US TO RELY ON GOD ALONE

We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us. *2 Corinthians 1:8-10*

#### 3. WHEN YOU NEED WISDOM-PRAY!

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. *James 1:5*

#### 4. PRAYING IN FAITH ALWAYS PRODUCES PRAISE

Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life. *Philippians 4:6-7 The Message*

#### 5. WHATEVER YOU FACE, REMEMBER THERE IS A GOD IN HEAVEN, AND HE IS ABLE...

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. *Ephesians 3:20-21*



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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes