What are the elements of a prayer of true confession? Why would someone like Daniel need to pray one? Confession is often the missing element in our prayers. In this session, we'll look at Daniel's prayer and glean four lessons for our own prayer life.

In 1872, Dwight L. Moody attended an early morning meeting in a hay mow (the place they store hay) in Ireland. At the meeting he heard a man quietly say,

"The world has yet to see what God can do with, and for, and through, and in, the man who is fully and wholly consecrated to God's will."

Years later, Moody was seated high up in Charles Spurgeon's tabernacle in London, and Spurgeon used those same words in his message. Moody bowed his head and prayed, "By the power of the Holy Spirit, I will be that man." God honored Moody with a ministry that has touched lives even to this day. In spite of his many human frailties, one thing marked Moody, according to this biography. He would very readily confess his shortcomings and would often make public apology or private confession when he reviewed the impact of his negative behavior.

This quality of humble confession has marked many people whom God has used, before and since Moody—especially those who have been used of God in prayer! Confession ought to be an important part of our lives as followers of Jesus. The New Testament word for confession means literally, "to say the same things." It is agreeing with God's evaluation; admitting to what He already thinks concerning our sin or the truth. Confession, however, is a practice we fail to exercise as often as we should. It is too easy to take sin in stride; to shrug it off with a quick reminder of God's forgiveness, to say in essence, "Oh Lord, I messed up. Thanks for your forgiveness." The word confession, however, means to admit fully to our guilt.

One of the reasons we don't confess our sins completely to God, is because a tremendous amount of pain is involved in true confession. It's painful to confess when we recognize our
responsibility to change that which we have told God we're doing. When we come to Him and say, "Lord, I have sinned...," implicit in the confession is that we won't try to hang onto that sin anymore.

Certainly it is not God's intention that we writhe under confession, nor remain guilty. Sincere confession of our sins, however, involves an admission of how God feels about our sin, followed by a separation from it.

One of the most striking illustrations of a confessional person is Daniel himself. In light of his seeming exemplary behavior, it is shocking to see this quality in him. On the surface, nothing in the book to indicates he was guilty of any misbehavior, yet Daniel openly confessed sin.

Fortunately for us, Daniel 9 gives us his extended prayer of confession. This prayer will give us deeper insights into Daniel's heart, as well as encourage us in this very practical area of our own lives. God has used my study of this passage on several occasions to bring about some badly needed correction in my life. I'm encouraged by the impact I've experienced, thanks to Daniel's example. Therefore, I believe the prayer he prays in Daniel 9 is worthy of study because of who prayed it, how he prayed it, and the answers he received.


1] In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes, who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom— 2] in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood...}

The year was 538 B.C. The Darius referred to here is Darius the Mede, found back in chapter 6, who was set up in power after Cyrus conquered Babylon. (He may be Cyrus, but called by another name.) Daniel came to Babylon in 605 B.C., so he had lived there about 68 years. He
was about 81-88 years old at this point.

Though he was now an old man, Daniel was still a reader of the Scriptures. Daniel 9:2 says that he was reading the book of Jeremiah when he came across something that really struck him. Jeremiah 25:1-11 helps us to pick out the sin, the consequences, and the length of the judgment period.

Jeremiah 25:1-11
1] The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. 2] The Jews had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They had feared other gods 3] and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord had driven out from before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had added, 4] and had forsaken the Lord and served the gods of the people of the land, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. 5] They had not listened to the voice of the Lord their God, teaching them concerning their statutes and the law of Israel. 6] The Lord had made a covenant with the fathers by his holy covenant when he brought them out of the land of Egypt, saying, "I am the Lord your God. 7] Keep all my commandments, and do what I command you, that you may be a people holy to me. 8] All the people of the earth are mine; you are to be my people. 9] I have made you a kingdom of priests, and you shall be my witnesses, says the Lord, to show among the nations what I am able to do for you." 10] But they turned and acted contrary to all that the Lord had commanded them, and they would not listen to the voice of the Lord. 11] The Lord was very angry with Israel, and he abhorred all that they had done. It was later that same year that Nebuchadnezzar did, in fact, show up at Jerusalem, and Daniel and his friends were dragged off to Babylon. After 23 years of Jeremiah's warning of impending judgment, it finally came. For the last 68 years of Daniel's life, he and his people had lived in exile. But now he noticed that the judgment was to last for 70 years. In other words, the appointed time was almost over! Hooray!

How did Daniel respond? Well, he didn't actually jump up and down and rejoice, nor did he start packing his bags. He did what his forefathers had continually failed to do!

Daniel 9:3-4
3] So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. 4] I prayed to the LORD my God, and I was taken from my couch.
Confession: A Study of Daniel's Prayer —Daniel 9

Written by Bob Stone

Daniel gave his attention (literally, "set his face") to the Lord God to seek prayer and supplication (literally, "graces") with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes (the outward signs of internal humility before the Lord). As he prayed, he confessed. Daniel's response was to turn whole-heartedly to the Lord, to seek communication with Him in all humility, and to confess the wrongdoing his nation had been unwilling to admit to. It's helpful to read the whole prayer in one sitting, and then go back and draw some principles for our own times of prayer and confession.

Daniel 9:4-19

4] I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commandments...

8] O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. 9] The Lord our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him...

15] "Now, O 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,"

As we listen in on one who was intimate with God, there are four distinct lessons we should learn from his example. These principles ought to help our own prayer lives as we seek to communicate with our Lord.

Four Lessons We Should Learn From Daniel's Example

Start with who God is; recall His character.
Look at the beginning of Daniel's prayer in verse 4—"I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: 'O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands...""

He doesn't start by listing what he wants God to do for him, but by consciously, verbally articulating who God is; who He is talking with. In verse 4, Daniel calls Him "the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands..." These phrases describe God's faithfulness to His covenant with Israel. Man might be flaky, but God is faithful and consistent to maintain His word. He follows through on the things to which He has committed Himself. Daniel's years in Babylon had been evidence of this aspect of God's character. This quality, then, gave him confidence about the end of the judgment of Israel, and gave him good reason to praise "the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands."

Sprinkled through Daniel's prayer are other examples of recounting God's character. In verses 7 and 14, Daniel highlights God's righteousness—that He is just and fair and equitable in all He does.

7] "Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

14] The LORD did not hesitate to bring the disaster upon us, for the LORD our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him."

In other words, it is his consciousness of God's faithfulness, justice, compassion, and forgiveness that informs and shapes the rest of what he says/prays. He is thinking and praying in line with who God is, not in line with his opinions, struggles, or wants.

Is that how we pray? Do we start with who God is? Try it, you'll like it! As you begin a prayer time, spend some time meditating on the aspects of God's character you've noticed or appreciated recently. Or read through one of the Psalms, and let what you discover there shape your time in prayer. Try starting your prayer without asking for anything, just adoring and praising God. You may find it opening up new vistas in your time with Him! He is worthy of all praise. He is worthy of time spent doing nothing but appreciating the many facets of His perfect character; and not surprisingly, as we do this, we are changed in the process!
Some might say, "Does God need us to tell Him these things?" Certainly not! But God delights to hear us say them. We cannot praise God and be self-centered. We cannot praise God without relinquishing our preoccupation with ourselves. So, start with who God is; recall His character, and show concern for His testimony.

**Be specific in our confession of sin.**

So often, the extent of my confession is a quick, "Sorry, Lord," or maybe, "Forgive me for what I just did," but not often do I specifically articulate in full how I have sinned.

Daniel is different; he confesses that his nation has blown it in every way. In verse 5 he uses strong verbs of growing intensity that pretty much encompass the Hebrew vocabulary for "blowing it." "5] we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws." He basically admits that as a nation, they have all sinned against God in every possible way. Likewise, in general terms—"we have all sinned..."— (Rom. 3:23). No one is exempt!

But Daniel doesn't stop with this admission. He is very specific in confessing sins of omission and commission—what they did and didn't do. "We have not listened to your servants the prophets..." (v. 6); "All Israel has transgressed your law..." (v. 11); "... We have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth" (v. 13).

What a wonderful example. If our confession is going to have any impact on us, we must be specific when confessing our sins of omission and commission, too.

Notice also, when Daniel confesses the sins of his people, he includes himself as well. Again, from everything we know about Daniel, he was a very faithful and consistent child of God. Yet he is not afraid to ascribe these sins to himself, for Daniel knows his own heart. He does not try to falsely maintain his innocence before God. He confesses not on behalf of "those bad guys
over there." He says: "5] we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws."

The Old Testament prophets always identified themselves with the sins of their people. In the New Testament, especially in 1 Corinthians, we learn that as Christians we are one Body. When one member hurts, we all hurt. When one of us rejoices, we all rejoice. One author says, "...it's true that there was no sin recorded of Daniel... he was a very righteous, holy man. Compared to our holiness today, he was a cut above the average. Why would he confess his sin? The more devout a person is, the deeper his love for God and commitment to Christ, the greater will be his sense of sinfulness"—David Jeremiah, The Handwriting on the Wall, p. 180.

This may be a rather radical idea in our era of pointing fingers and condemning the sins of others, but I wonder what would happen if we pastors stood in the pulpit on Sunday when there was known sin in the church and prayed,

"O God, we have committed adultery.
O God, we have committed fornication.
O God, we have been dishonest.
We have stolen."

I learned as a young pastor that we are never right when we get into an "I/you" relationship with our congregation. There is a difference between sharing in the teaching of the Word of God and being preached at. The preacher who preaches at you says, "If you don't watch out, this is what is going to happen to you. You'd better get your life straightened out; if you don't, you're headed for a fall."

In the biblical style, the pastor doesn't set himself apart from the temptations and sins of the congregation. He should be saying: "There's nothing you are capable of doing that I am incapable of doing. We are in this together, and not one of us can sin without it affecting the other." When we see as Daniel did and have a sense of corporate guilt before God, we will have the holiness within the church that God desires. We must identify, therefore, with the sins of our church community by remembering to pray the collective "we," and not the "you."
This honest confessional should not be a one-time event. We must be consistently honest with God. If we lie to someone, we should tell God. If we yell at the kids, we should tell God. If we harbor bitterness toward a friend, we should tell God and the friend! Remember, it won't be news to Him—He doesn't need our prayers to keep Himself informed—but it will greatly benefit us!

- It will help us stay in a realistic place spiritually. (It cuts down on hypocrisy and pride.)
- It will also remind us of how far short we fall in relation to God's desires and holiness.
- It will also keep our conscience clear—1 Pet. 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:18-19; 2 Cor. 1:12; Prov. 28:13; Ps. 32:1-2. (It's a wonderful thing to have a clear conscience!)

Know fully what we deserve for our sin

When I don't articulate sin, but just cruise along asking for forgiveness when necessary but not consciously thinking through my sin, it's tempting to begin thinking that this walking-with-God stuff is pretty easy. I can think, "I'm doing really well; in fact, God must be pretty impressed by my performance. Maybe I even deserve some rewards for 'good behavior'!"

But when I think carefully about my sin, I am not tempted to stray in those directions. In fact, constantly being aware of my sin causes me to realize that if I really got what I deserved, it would be hell itself. God owes me nothing, and I fully deserve every single consequence of sin I have to experience.

Look at some of the consequences Daniel mentions: "we... are covered with shame because we have sinned against You... All Israel has transgressed...and turned away...Therefore the curses and sworn judgments...have been poured out on us... all this disaster has come upon us..."

When we confess our sins (specifically), we are helped to rightly see the connections between
our actions and real consequences—Rom. 6:23. We recognize that what we really deserve is the fullness of God's wrath, so we come to appreciate tremendously and be grateful for God's grace.

That's the idea behind the word "grace." It means something that is done without cause or for no reason. Aren't you glad that's how God deals with us? He doesn't give to us according to what we merit; He gives to us in accordance with His immeasurable love! Isn't that good news?

It's hard to take life and its fullness for granted when we're conscious that all we deserve is death and barrenness. That's why confession is so important. It ends up leading us to a place of continual joy and refreshment and thanksgiving in the Lord! That's why I love a communion service. When I stop to remember that I do not get the wrath I deserve, because He willingly took my sin, suffered the consequences for it, and now makes His resources available to me, I am overwhelmed with praise for His grace!

Daniel ends his prayer by imploring God to work. Look at all he asks, and notice the little phrases that tell the basis for his asking for these things:

- verse 16—"in keeping with your righteous acts"
- verse 17—"For your sake"
- verse 18—"but because of your great mercy"
- verse 19—"because your city and your people bear your name"

Because Daniel went through the process we've observed, by the time he got around to asking for anything, he was asking not on the basis of what he wanted or deserved, but in line with God's character and known desires. He prayed for healing and restoration, not so much because of the people involved, but because God's name and reputation were at stake. It was "for His name's sake" that Daniel requested action.

In New Testament lingo, this is what it means to pray "in Jesus' name." It doesn't mean to tack these three words onto the end of every prayer. It means to pray as He would; to pray in line with who He is and what He desires. If I pray and ask God to make me rich and famous, then in a sense I am wasting my time, because He isn't interested in that. But if I pray for a greater love for those who don't know Christ, I can have utter confidence that He will answer my prayer, because "He is not willing that any should perish but that all would come to repentance"—2 Pet. 3:9.

What was the motivation and purpose behind Daniel's prayer? He certainly wasn't praying just because he wanted to leave captivity. Going back to Jerusalem meant a lot of hard work to restore the city, the walls, and the temple. Returning to ruin wasn't his motivation! His driving motivation was for God to restore His people to their city, their sanctuary, and their culture.

The whole character of his prayer is wrapped up in verse 16. "16] O 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 fathers have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us."

Daniel went to God and said in essence, "God, everybody is talking about us as Your people. They are saying that You have forgotten us. So God, for Your own glory and honor, for the sake of Your worth, I beg of You, restore us to the place of honor we once knew."
Confession: A Study of Daniel's Prayer —Daniel 9

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

With Daniel's example in mind, let's ask ourselves how we pray. Are some of our prayers so self-centered, we have no/little time to be God-centered? What would happen to us if we got caught up in the fact that we carry God's reputation into the community wherever we go? What would happen if we followed Daniel's example, and became jealous for God's reputation and for His testimony? What difference would it make in the way we live and the manner in which we pray? The answer is obvious!

Listen to this quote regarding student revival:

"Despite generational differences, some adult leaders think they have much to learn from the vulnerability of students. For future generations to continue the present eagerness for openness and accountability, Fish hopes many Christian leaders are willing to say, "I'm weak. I need help. I want you to pray for me.""

Robert Coleman, director of the Institute of Evangelism at the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, Illinois, acknowledges that it may be easier for the younger generation to shed their masks. "Older people have developed more of an ability to cover insecurities and feelings of inadequacy. We've been hurt enough not to be so open," he says. "But we need to stop protecting our reputations at the expense of the Lord's reputation and be fools for Christ"—"Campus Revivals Spread Across the Country," by Helen Lee, Christianity Today, 1995.

In review:

1. Spend time meditating on God's perfect character! Become caught up with who He is, for He is so richly deserving of our praise.
2. Call sin sin in your life, and tell God about it! Learn to come to Him in complete honesty and humility.
3. Recognize what your shortcomings deserve from Him, i.e., death! And grow in your awe of and thanksgiving for His grace.
4. Come to grips with the fact that "you are not your own; you have been bought with a price." Therefore, become jealous for God's reputation and for His testimony.

My prayer is that Daniel's prayer would stimulate us and move us to new levels of confession with our heavenly Father who loves us.
Our Father, You are indeed worthy of all our praise and honor. You are sovereignly in charge of human affairs; You set the limits upon evil and the nations. You are indeed sovereign in all things. You set the limits upon evil and the nations. You are a God to be feared and praised. You are Lord. You are powerful. You are mighty. You are mighty in salvation and redemption. You are the God of all comfort and consolation. You are the God of all justice and righteousness. You are the God of all love and mercy. You are the God of all wisdom and knowledge. You are the God of all strength and power. You are the God of all beauty and glory. You are the God of all goodness and kindness. You are the God of all truth and faithfulness. You are the God of all salvation and deliverance. You are the God of all help and protection. You are the God of all answers to prayer. You are the God of all things. Amen!

Prayer Guide
Focus: Confession
Daniel 9:1-19

1. Start with who God is; recall His character—9:4,7,9.
   - His majesty—Ps. 96:1,6; Is. 24:14
   - His glory—Ps. 138:5; Ez. 3:12
   - His excellency—Ps. 148:13; Ex. 15:7
   - His greatness—Ps. 145:3.
   - His holiness—Ex. 15:11; Is. 6:3
   - His wisdom—Dan. 2:20; Ps. 104:24
   - His power—Ps. 21:13
   - His goodness—Ps. 107:8; 118:1.
   - His mercy—Ps. 89:1; 118:1; 136:1
   - His lovingkindness and truth—Is. 25:1; Ps. 63:3
   - His salvation—Ps. 18:46; Is. 35:10; 61:10; Lk. 1:68-69
   - His wonderful works—Ps. 26:6-7; 150:2; Is. 25:1
   - His comfort—Ps. 23:4; 119:76; 86:17
   - His justice—Ps. 101:1; I John 1:9
   - His counsel—Ps. 16:7; Jer. 32:19
   - His pardon of sins—Ps. 103:1-3
   - His healing—Ps. 103:3
   - His constant preservation—Ps. 71:6-8; 116:6
   - His deliverance—Ps. 40:1-3; 124:6
   - His protection—Ps. 28:7; 59:17
   - His answers to prayer—Ps. 28:6-7; 118:21
Meditate on God's character; adore and praise Him. He is worthy of time spent doing nothing but appreciating the many facets of who He is.

- Be Specific in your confession of sin—Dan. 9:5,6,11,13. Definition of confession: to say the same thing—to admit to what God already thinks.
  - In general terms, "(we) all have sinned..."—verse 5 (Rom. 3:23).
  - Be very specific when confessing sins of omission and commission—vv. 6,11,13.
  - Identify with the sins of your church community, too..."we."
  - We must be consistently honest with God. Why? For our sakes!
  - It helps us to stay in a realistic place spiritually
  - It reminds us how far short we have fallen with regard to God's desires for us
  - Our conscience is clear—1 Pet. 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:18-19; 2 Cor. 1:12; Proverbs 28:13b; Ps. 32:1-2.

- Know fully what you deserve for your sins—Dan. 9:8,11,13. When we confess, we connect our actions with real consequences, and thus we appreciate God's grace even more—Rom. 6:23.
  - Ask God to work, not because you deserve anything, but because of who He is and what He is committed to—Dan. 9:16-19. Become jealous for God's reputation, testimony, character, and known desires.