Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Elements of True Prayer, Part 2
Scripture: Daniel 9:4-15
Code: 27-22

Take your Bible, if you will, with me and, as always at Grace Church, we look together at the Word of God. We're going to be looking at the 9th chapter of Daniel...Daniel chapter 9. That's the setting for our message tonight, as it was for the message last Lord's day evening. And, really, it's not so much a preaching as it is a teaching chapter. In fact, the whole book comes across that way in many places. Not so concerned to exhort you, to proclaim to you, as I am to just share with the things that flow from this marvelous text.

If we were to back up to chapter 6, a familiar chapter in the Book of Daniel where we find Daniel...in the lion's den. And if we were to go prior to the lion's den to see what really brought him there, we would find ourselves in verses 10 and 11. And there we read this, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being opened in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he did previously. Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God."

We find then in chapter 6 another one of the elements of Daniel's great spiritual strength. Daniel was committed to prayer...I'm sure you've heard many messages on prayer. Probably more than you care to hear. Probably wondering whether you have not got it all down so well that the rest of it is strictly unnecessary. Yet, it seems that no matter how many messages we hear or how many messages we deliver, there's always a convicting factor in another one, because we never really feel like we pray as we should...

When we study the Book of Daniel, again and again, chapter by chapter, we find unfolding in a very unassuming way the marvelous traits of the character of Daniel. And one of them has to be prayer. He understood that prayer was living in the presence of God, and nothing could change that. Not the threat of death, not the threat of the loss of reputation or place, nothing. Prayer was a vital link with God. He was kinda like Jacob, you know. When Jacob wrestled with the Lord, and it says in Genesis 32 that he would not let God go until God blessed him. He hung on till he knew the blessing of God.

Well, Daniel was that way. Daniel prevailed in prayer against the edict of the king. He prevailed in prayer in chapter 9 in the midst of what he saw as a crisis situation in the life of his beloved people and nation. And we see in chapter 9, the first 19 verses, the prayer of Daniel. It is the only prayer of Daniel really of any substance that we have, and it is a masterful one. And we see from verse 20

through 27, the answer. And the answer is so infinitely monumental that it'll take us weeks of study just to comprehend the answer, and we'll reserve that for a time in the future.

But, for now, I want us to see the prayer, because I want us to see the wonder of this marvelous intercessory prayer. As Daniel, the man of God, calls upon the God he loves and trusts. And as we said to you last time, this prayer, and as I say in unassuming way, becomes a model prayer for us. It isn't that Daniel offers it as that. It isn't that it becomes instructive for us in and of itself. It is that its very example becomes a model for our praying. And Daniel was living a life that was literally flowing in the vein of prayer, constantly.

D. L. Moody said, "Those who have left the deepest impression on this sin-cursed earth have been men and women of prayer." End quote. Robert Murray McShane, that great man of prayer, said, "A great part of my time is spent in getting my heart in tune for prayer, because prayer is the link that connects earth to heaven." Dr. Guthrie, an old saint of God who lived a century ago, said, "The first sign of true spiritual life is prayer, and it is also the means of maintaining spiritual life. Man can, as well, live physically without breathing as spiritually without praying."

Now, if it's true, as D. L. Moody says, that the people who have made the greatest impact on the earth would be people of prayer, then we would expect Daniel to be a man of prayer. And if prayer is as normal as breathing, we would expect, again, that Daniel's life would be a life that flows in prayer. And that is precisely the case. And as we look at the 9th chapter again, we're going to see the pattern of Daniel's praying as it becomes a model for our own intercessory prayer.

Now, I remind you that last time we noted the background. Look again at verse 1. I just wanna refresh your mind. "In the first year of Darius, the son Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, who made king over the realm of the Chaldeans, in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years concerning which the Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem." It is the first year of the Medo-Persian Empire. Babylon has fallen. Belshazzar's feast has already taken place. The Medes and the Persians have taken over. Cyrus is now the great world monarch. Perhaps Darius is nothing more than a title of honor that refers to Cyrus...

But it is the Medo-Persian day. Darius or Cyrus sits on the throne. He is not only the king of Persia, but he has been granted status as the seed of the Medes in order that he may be approve by both those peoples who come together in this empire. And he absorbs not only the Persians and the Medes, but the realm of the Chaldeans, which is the Babylonians. And so he brings together a world empire larger than Babylon, greater than Babylon in power and might.

And it is...it is in his first year that Daniel finds himself reading the books. As I mentioned last time, there's no doubt in my mind but that the Jewish people, the people of Judah, who were in exile, had

managed to take with them into exile some of the writings of the Old Testament. Obviously, they had the Book of Jeremiah, which was written and destroyed and then rewritten again as Jeremiah tells us. But among the books that they had, which they read from in their exile, were the words of Jeremiah and, as Daniel was reading in verse 2 from Jeremiah, he came across the prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem would only last for about seventy years. And that struck Daniel as a very significant reality, because he knew that he had been in captivity for nearly seventy years by now. The best educated guess might be that he'd been there at least sixty-seven years.

He was a man beyond eighty years of age, and he knew that when God made a prophesy, God's prophecies came to pass. And so he knew that Jeremiah said it would be seventy years. And when he read that in Jeremiah and knew that, at least in his case, sixty-seven had already gone by, he knew the time was imminent. You might think, at that point, as we said last time, that Daniel wouldn't have anything to pray about. He'd just sorta throw it on the sovereignty of God and say, "All right, God, You're gonna do it in seventy years, then do it," and leave it at that.

But Daniel knew that somehow fitting into the sovereignty of God is the choice of man. It's like salvation. The Bible says that God has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world. The Bible tells us that we are elect according to His foreknowledge and predestined to be redeemed. The Bible tells us that God knows them that are His. The Bible tells us that God said, "I have much people in that city that I want you to reach," affirming that He knew who they were. In other words, God has chosen us. And, yet, our salvation is also dependent on the fact that we make a choice, isn't it?

Daniel knew that God's sovereignty would come to pass, but not without the response of human choice. And so in view of God's sovereignty, knowing that there must be a human acceptance, a writing of the heart for God to end the chastening, he begins to pray. Not unlike the Apostle John in the Book of Revelation who, hearing the Word of God, "Behold, I come quickly...he says...even so, come Lord Jesus." He lines his prayers up with what he knows God will do. And I guess you might say that that's the character of every single amen in the Bible. For amen means so let it be. And when we say to God, "Bring it to pass. Let it be," we are simply affirming that God's will will be done and realizing that man must line his heart with God to know the fullness of that accomplished purpose.

Prayer, then, is necessary, even though God is sovereign and absolute and will do His will. And, by the way, there have been times when God extended things. And there have been times when God's shortened things. And so in connection with His sovereignty, we cannot box Him in. He may shorten things. He may lengthen things. And so Daniel sets about to pray, knowing that somehow the rightness of the human heart has to fit into the sovereign act of God...

So does Daniel pray. And as he prays, we find eight elements of true intercessory prayer emerging, flowing out of this marvelous prayer. And as I say, they are not explicitly taught. They are implicitly found. They are not the purpose of the prayer, and yet they become, for us, a very good purpose, because it helps us to see what is included in proper intercessory prayer. Now, frankly, folks...we have two basic problems when it comes to prayer. Number one, we don't do it enough. True? And so the Bible, again and again and again, says continue in prayer. Pray without ceasing.

The second thing is we don't know what to pray for. And that's why Romans 8 says, "Though we do not know what to pray for, because of the infirmity of the flesh, the spirit makes utterance for us." In other words, we have problems. We don't pray enough, and we don't know what to pray for. And so, as we examine this pattern of praying, it'll give us something of a vision of one man's fervency, and the character of one man's intercession.

Now lemme review the three points out of the eight that we looked at last week, and I'm gonna do this very briefly, 'cause I wanna cover the other five. True intercessory prayer is generated by the Word of God. We go to God primarily as a response to His Word acting on our hearts. And I shared with you that I know this from my own personal experience. That the times of my most faithful prayer are the times that I am receiving the Word of God. In fact, week by week, as I sit and study the Word of God, I find it impossible for that to be a one-way street. I am not able to hear God speak without responding back to Him in prayer. And it becomes a conversation.

And Daniel's prayer was like that. Verse 2 says, "I, Daniel, understood by the books." And then in verse 3, "And I set my face unto the Lord God to seek by prayer." The praying grew out of the understanding of the Word of God. Now, if you study the Bible, you find that over and over again the Bible says, "Watch unto prayer. Watch unto prayer." Jesus said it repeatedly. Peter says it. "Watch unto prayer." And what they're talking about there, basically, is look at what's happening. Perceive what's going on. Keep your eyes open. Be specific about what you're praying.

Now listen to me. The only way you can watch and know what to pray for is when you know what the Word of God says about what you're seeing, see. You must perceive the world and its events. The church and its events. The people of Israel and their events. You must be able to see what's going on in the light of the Word of God, or you do not understand God's purposes in history, and you cannot pray intelligently. And so we watch, not only the scene around us, but we watch the Word of God to determine how carefully and properly we are to pray.

In Nehemiah chapter 1...Nehemiah says in verse 11, "O, Lord, I beseech Thee. Let now Thine ear be attentive to the prayer of Thy servant and of the prayer of Thy servants who delight to fear Thy name. And prosper, I pray Thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king's cupbearer." What was he praying about? What was he praying about? He got word that the city of Jerusalem was in ruins. So what?...Why did that make him pray? Because he knew

that the city of Jerusalem was God's beloved city, and what he saw was filtered through the knowledge of the Word of God, and it brought him to his knees...We will never be able to understand what's going on unless we understand it in the context of the Word of God. And as we see the Word of God, as...as did Daniel, who saw the scene around him, the captivity, the chastening, the time of Judah being in Babylon and now under the Medo-Persian domination. A time when they were subjugated under paganism. He could only analyze what was going on and where it was going when the Word of God opened to him and he saw that it was to be seventy years, and that sprung him into prayer.

So the better we understand God's Word, the better we are able to understand the scene, and the more our prayers are gonna conform with what God has in mind. Intercessory prayer, then, beloved, is generated by God's Word. People of the book are people of prayer. Apart from the Word of God, our prayers will find their way into shallow and meaningless verbiage.

Secondly, intercessory prayer is not only generated by God's Word, it is grounded in God's will. And he knows this in verse 2, and he says that Jeremiah says seventy years, and "I say to You, Lord...in verse 3...that's what I'm gonna pray about." And down in verse 19, he says, "Lord, hearken and do it, and defer not." In other words, "God, do what Jeremiah says You're gonna do. Do Your will." As we saw last time, that is essentially the heart of all prayer. "If we ask anything...says 1 John 5...according to His will, we know He hears us, and we have the petitions we ask of Him." His will...His will. The disciples' prayer says, "Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy...what?...will be done." Prayer is not to change the mind of God, for God already desires the best. Did you know that? Did you know that God desires the very best for you? You don't wanna change His mind about that, do you?

Prayer is to line you up with His will, which is already the best. You say, "What if I don't know His will?" Well, that's where Romans 8:26 comes. What a promise. What does it say? Well, there's three verses there you oughta understand, because they all go together. This is what they say. "Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmity; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought." Boy, is that the truth. You know what God's will is in every situation? I don't. I mean if I studied the Word of God, I know what it is in some cases. I know God's will is that people be saved. I know God's will is that they be set apart under the Spirit of God, filled with His Spirit, Ephesians 5:17-18. I know God's will is that you abstain from all sexual immorality, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 3. I know God's will is we be submissive to the powers that be that ordained of God. I know God's will is that in everything you give thanks, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. I know God's will is that you suffer for well-doing and not evil-doing. I know a lotta things that are God's will. But I don't always know.

But when I don't know, and I don't know how to pray, the Spirit makes intercession for me in a language which cannot be uttered. This is not utterable groanings. This is not ecstatic speech. This is unutterable. This is a divine communion between the Spirit of God and the Father. And the Father,

who searches the hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because he makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. When I don't know the will of God, the Spirit does. And in my behalf, the prayers ascend. Isn't that tremendous?...

And that's the reason we know that all things work together for what? Good. Not just random, but because the Spirit of God is interceding for us where we have no knowledge of His will. In my life, I want one thing in my prayers. One thing and one thing alone, and that is I want God to do His will because He loves me and His will is best. That puts God in His rightful place. Prayer is generated by the Word of God and grounded in the will of God.

Thirdly, it is characterized by fervency. Verse 3, "I set my face unto the Lord God...and I told you that the idea of setting his face was resoluteness, commitment, intensity...to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes." Now, fasting and sackcloth and ashes went along with deep, heartfelt prayer. There were many things that the Bible says accompanied fervency. If you study your Bible, you'll find the following things. Sackcloth, sitting in ashes and putting them on the head, as in Job chapter 2. Shaving the head, Job 1. Smiting the breast, Luke 18. Crying for Samuel 1 and many other places. Throwing dust on the head, tearing garments, fasting, sighing, groaning, loud crying, sweating blood, agonizing. A breaking heart, a pouring out of one's heart, rending of the heart, making oaths, making sacrifices. Many things in the Bible are indicated as those things that accompany fervency in the heart in prayer.

And so we see Daniel in that fervent, fervent praying. He's really committed to it. He's really pouring out his heart. Like Hannah, who in pouring her heart out, would not eat, because there was no taste for food. As in Esther chapter 4. I think it's in verse 16. "Go gather all of the Jews...who are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me...says Esther...and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. I also and my maidens will fast likewise, and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law, and if I perish, I perish." Fervent prayer. We find it in Luke chapter 11. Again, in the wonderful story that our Lord tells in Luke 11 verses 5-10, just reminding you briefly of it. "And he said unto them, 'Which of you shall have a friend who shall go unto him at midnight and say, 'Friend, lend me three loaves. And a friend of mine in his journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him,' and he, from within, shall answer and say, 'Trouble me not. The door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed.'" That's how they kept warm. "'I cannot rise and give thee.' I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because his importunity or his constant knocking, he will rise and give him as much as he needs. And I say to you, ask and it shall be given. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you."

In other words, God responds to fervency. Jonah, you'll remember in the 3rd chapter, the fervency of the prayer in that place. And so Daniel prays with intensity. Prayer cannot be just a passing thing. It's...it's a setting of the heart towards something...

Brooks said, years ago, "As a painted fire is no fire, a dead man is no man, so cold prayer is no prayer. In a painted fire, there is no heat. In a dead man, there is no life. In a cold prayer, there is no omnipotency, no devotion, and no blessing. Cold prayers are as arrows without heads, swords without edges, birds without wings. They pierce not. They cut not. They fly not up to heaven. Cold prayers do always freeze before they get to heaven. O, that Christians would chide themselves out of their cold prayers, and chide themselves into a better and warmer frame of spirit when they make their supplications to the Lord."

And Jeremy Taylor added, "Easiness of desire is a great enemy to the success of a good man's prayer. It must be an intense, zealous, busy, operative prayer. For consider what a huge indecency it is that a man should speak to God for a thing that he values not. Our prayers upbraid our spirits when we beg tamely for those things for which we ought to die. Things which are more precious than imperial scepters. Richer than the spoils of the sea are the treasures of the Indian Hills." End quote.

And so Daniel prayed fervently. Now, fourth and then on to our eighth...mark of true intercessory prayer. It is generated by the Word of God. It is grounded in the will of God. It is characterized by fervency. Number four, it is realized in self-denial. It is realized in self-denial. Verse 4, "And I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession." Now, stop right there. The heart of all true prayer, mark this, people, the heart of all true prayer is an initial awareness that you don't even belong there to begin with. You see? I mean you don't even belong in the presence of God. You don't have one thing in and of yourself to commend you to Him.

And so where does he begin? With that recognition. "I made my confession." "Why'd you do that, Daniel?" "Because I knew that I didn't belong in His presence, and especially if I were to drag some sin there." Contrast that with the prayer of the Pharisee in Luke 18, who says, "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men...Why I fast and I give tithes," and so forth and so forth. And God didn't even hear that prayer in terms of an answer, a response, because it was self-righteous, self-seeking, self-confident. And so Daniel begins with a recognition that he doesn't belong there. I suppose Daniel, perhaps in his heart, brought up all kinds of things. I'm sure he searched his whole life and found everything that stood between himself and God. Positive wickedness, deafness to the divine voice, disobedience to clear and plain commands, contempt of the sovereign lordship of God. All of these things brought Daniel to the point of humility. And, beloved, I tell you, humility is the only vantage point from which true prayer issues. The only one...

When Abraham tarried before God in Genesis chapter 18, he said this, "Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes. I don't even belong there." Isaiah saw God high and lifted up in chapter 6, and he said, "Woe is me, for I am undone."...The Apostle Paul recognized the same truth about himself. He had no right to be in God's presence. He was the chief of sinners. John saw the same thing, and when he saw the beauty of the revealed Christ, he fell

in humility. And Daniel understands this. Daniel understands that he doesn't belong in the presence of God. And so before he can intercede for anybody else, he's gotta make sure he's gotten himself in perspective.

If there's impotence in your prayer life, maybe it's because there's not self-denial there. And self-denial encompasses this, people. It encompasses you setting your will aside for God's will, right? And if you're in there trying to badger God into what you want for yourself, that's not self-denial...A prayer I've often prayed...goes like this. "Oh, God, I know that I often do Thy work without Thy power and sin by my dead, heartless, blind service, my lack of inward light, love and delight, my mind and heart and tongue moving without Thy help. I see sin in my heart in seeking the approbation of others. This is my vileness. To make men's opinions my rule. Whereas, I should see what good I have done and give Thee glory. Consider what sin I have committed and mourn for that. It is my deceit to preach and pray and to stir up others' spiritual affections in order to beget commendations. Whereas, my rule should be daily to consider myself more vile than any man in my own eyes."

I don't really think anybody can ever minister to anybody else in prayer or preaching or anything else until they take the path of self-denial, because you have to fight ego anyway. You might as well get rid of it at the beginning...And Daniel knew that, and so he dealt with that matter. He pleaded with God for a deeper repentance, a horror of sin, a dreading even of its approach. He wanted God to see him and purify him.

One of the Puritan writers wonderfully put it this way. "Plow deep in me, great Lord, heavenly Husbandman, that my being may be a tilled field. The roots of grace spreading far and wide until Thou alone art seen in me. Thy beauty golden like summer's harvest. Thy fruitfulness as the plenty of autumn."...

True intercession is generated by the Word of God, grounded in the will of God, characterized by fervency, and realized in self-denial. And, fifth, true intercessory prayer is identified with God's people. It's identified with God's people. You'll notice that he says, "I prayed unto the Lord my God...verse 4...and made my confession." He starts with himself, but he doesn't stop there. Watch. Verse 5, we're gonna move quickly. "We have sinned," verse 5. Verse 6, "Neither have we hearkened." Verse 7, "Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces." Verse 8, "O, Lord, to us belongeth confusion." Verse 10, "Neither have we obeyed." Verse 11, "Yea, all Israel has transgressed, and Thy curse is poured us, and because...at the end of the verse...we have sinned against Him." Verse 12, "He spake against us, our judged that judged us." And verse 13, us, our, and we. Verse 14, us, we. Verse 15, we, "And we have done wickedly." Verse 16, "Our sin, our fathers, a reproach to all that are about us."

Now, listen, true intercessory prayer identifies the one praying with the people being prayed for. It's a tremendous thing...Paul had it when he said, "Praying always for all saints." And then he added in

Ephesians 6:19, "And pray most of all for me."...The focus of our prayers, beloved, is to be on others after we've taken care of setting our self aside. You go into prayer, and you realize, first of all, you don't even belong there. But the Word of God has called you there. And you seek the will of God. And you set your own will aside, and then you pour out your heart on behalf of others. And Daniel sees himself bound up with others also. It was true of those in Israel that they saw themselves as a part of the total entity. And I believe that's true in the body of Christ, don't you?

I think it's very clear that, when you study 1 Corinthians chapter 12, you find that we're all one body, aren't we? And when one member hurts, the whole body suffers. And when one rejoices, the whole body rejoices. I have to be identified in the sins of the church. I have to encompass myself in that. First Samuel 12:23 puts it to us simply. "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to...what?...pray for You." And I learned a long time ago that the focal point of my prayer life is not me. I start recognizing God's will. I get me out of the picture, and I start praying for you. See?

And there are, in Christianity today around this country and the world, Christians who are missing the boat in prayer, because all they've got in prayer is I, me, mine...And they're not embracing the needs of God's people...Paul always prayed for others, and we embody the whole picture. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts. Lead us not into temptation. There's a sense in which we encompass one another, that prayer is not a...a private, personal exercise for us to get God's goodies, see. But that's what many, many people think it is. And it isn't.

Galatians 6:2 says we're "to bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." And what is the law of Christ? The law of Christ is a new commandment, "I give unto you that you love another."...In Philippians 1, Paul says, "I'm always praying for you." In Colossians 1, he says, "I'm always praying for you." In Philemon 4 and 5, "I'm praying for you." And then he recalls in 2 Corinthians 1:11, "You also helping together by prayer for us." That it was mutual. I pray for you. You pray for me. Then neither of us gets selfish, right? That's the way the body functions. We should learn that, learn it well.

We are to pray for those in authority over us. Pray for leaders. Pray for those in need. And Daniel saw his people, and he gathered his people in his arms. But you know what's something wonderful about Daniel? He included himself in their sins. He included himself in their shortcomings. He included himself in their foibles and their failures and their follies. He encompassed himself in his prayers. It was we, and it was us, not them. I mean he didn't stand apart as if he were self-righteous. A self-righteous man would repudiate such an identification with chastened sinners. And you could say, "Well, Daniel had every right to stand up and say, 'Boy, am I ever glad that I'm not a part of that bunch. I mean I've been really true for over 80 years. I've been hanging in here in the palace and doing my thing, and I'm...remember me? I'm the guy with all the visions. I'm the guy that shut the mouths of the lion. I'm the guy that overcame Nebuchadnezzar.'" And so forth. He could get pretty high and mighty. And there are people who are so self-righteous, they won't identify with

the sins of others, but not Daniel. He embraced them, because they were his people, and he knew he was a sinner, too, and he knew he had failed, too. And he wasn't ashamed to identify himself with their needs.

Daniel sees it as all the Jews, the solidarity of the people of God. And we are to see it in the church, the body of Christ, as well...So...Daniel passionately interceded for his people. I see this with Paul in Romans 9 where Paul says that he prays so much for the salvation of Israel, that in their being saved, he can almost wish that he himself would lose his salvation if that were necessary to get them saved. So concerned is he about others. What a marvelous and thrilling example.

The secret of intercession. You wanna know it in one word? That in your prayers, you say we...we, not I. So that your prayer, watch this, is not so selfish as to be directed toward you, no matter how it affects anybody else. But that you're really praying on behalf of what is best for the whole body of Christ. We.

Prayer, then, is generated by the Word of God, grounded in the will of God, characterized by fervency, realized in self-denial, identified with God's people. Number six, strengthened in confession. Strengthened in confession. Now, we've already seen that Daniel had personally denied himself in expressing his confession. And if you look at verse 20, he says, "And while I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel." See? There's that identification again. He says, "Now, when I was praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people." It's so wonderful that he didn't just become a critic of the church and say, "Boy, I'm the only righteous one. I'm the only guy out here doing it right and just damn everybody else in the church and drag 'em all before God to be chastened and judged." No, he knew that he was a sinner, too...

And so this whole prayer is really confession. This is an absolute. When God is at work in a life, and I want you to listen to what I say, when God is at work in a life, repentance and confession becomes the norm...the norm. In fact, listen, the more devout your soul is, the deeper your love for God, the higher your standard of holiness, the truer your commitment to Christ, the greater will be your sense of sinfulness. Now, if you think that as you mature as a Christian you'll get less and less sensitive to sin, it's just the opposite. The more you mature as a Christian, the more sensitive you become to sin. The closer you get to God, the more heinous it becomes. By the time David had matured and committed the terrible sin that he committed and poured out his heart in Psalm 32 and 51, it was so evident that sin literally destroyed him. It just crushed him, because he knew so much, and he had walked with God, and he was a man after God's own heart. And then when he committed that awful sin with Bathsheba and her husband, Uriah, it just tore him to ribbons, and he poured out that marvelous Psalm 51, when he said, "Oh, wash me that I might be clean. Purge me." He hated it.

And Ezra, in front of the people in chapter 9 and chapter 10 of Ezra sees the same thing as the people commit themselves to God, as they hear the voice of God and they draw nigh to God. The

first they are is overwhelmed with their sin, and they tore out their confession. We find it in the 9th chapter of Nehemiah. The Word of God comes in chapter 8. And as they draw near to God, and as they find themselves in the presence of God, they are overwhelmed with their sinfulness.

Paul had this. In Romans chapter 7, when Paul really understood the law of God, and when he understood what the law of God was saying and what the standards of God really were, it was then that he said, "I saw myself, and sin revived, and I died. It slew me."...Confession is the daily part of the life of a godly man and a godly woman. And it was a part of Daniel's prayers. The confession of his sins and the sins of those people who were all around him.

In Jeremiah chapter 3, chapter 8, chapter 14, and in the first chapter of Lamentations, which is written by Jeremiah, in all of those four places, Jeremiah cries out in confession to God as he senses the imminence of coming judgment. As God is about to move, as God is about to interject His presence in the human stream, Jeremiah, in sensing the presence of God, starts wanting his heart washed. The nearer you get to God, the dirtier you feel. And the classic, as I mentioned earlier, is Isaiah 6, when he said, "I saw the Lord high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple, and the angels were there, you know, and Holy, Holy, Holy, and the seraphim and all. Oh, woe is me...he said." So intercession is strengthened in confession.

A farmer went with his son to a wheat field. He wanted to see if it was ready for the harvest. "See, father," said the boy, "see how straight the stems hold up their heads? The ones that hold their heads up so straight, they must be the...the best ones. Those that are bent over and hung down, they can't be good for much." The farmer plucked a stalk of each kind and said, "Look, foolish child, the reason they stand so straight is because the grain is so small. The bent ones are the good ones. The straight ones are well nigh useless."

And so it is in God's world. It is those who are bent and broken who are useful, because they confess. Now lemme just read through this, because we don't need to spend time on every verse. It's repetitive. Verse 5, "We have sinned and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy ordinances." And there he says four things, really. "We have sinned." That's one word. It means to miss the mark, to wander from the path. "We have committed iniquity." That means to distort or to act perversely. "We have done wickedly." That means to do something wrong that you know is wrong, premeditated evil. "And we have rebelled to defy authority." He's...He gives you four different terms for sin in the Hebrew. To miss the mark, to distort, to do known wrong, and to defy authority. And he says, "We were guilty of every way you cut it. We have departed from Your precepts and from Your ordinances. And when we departed, we didn't come back."

Verse 6, "We have not hearkened to Your servants your prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and all the people of the land." We didn't listen to Your

spokesman, either. We went our way unheeding the call. "O, Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion." Now go down to verse 8. We'll come back to that verse. "O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face." What is that? It means shame of face, better way to translate it. They were shamefaced. Their hearts were filled with shame, and it showed on their face. They were ashamed of themselves. We say that to our children. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself...doing that?"

"We were ashamed of ourselves. I mean we used to be somebody. Our land was a glorious land. Our people was a great people. We were proud, and now we are outcasts. We are wanderers. We are refugees." The north was gone into captivity under Assyria, never to return. The south had been carried away. The others had fled to Egypt when Gedaliah was...was assassinated in Jeremiah. Tells us about that. "And we're... we're all scattered, and we're ashamed. Our treacherous sins have sent us away, and our faces are covered with shame. Our kings are shamed. Our princes, our fathers, because we've sinned against Thee." Well, it just keeps coming confession.

Verse 10, again he says, "And in our sin, we didn't respond. Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God to walk in His laws, which He has set before us by His servants the prophets." Again, he says the same thing. "And we don't listen to the prophets, either. We don't heed. We don't hear." And he sums it up. He says, "All Israel...verse 11...has transgressed Thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey Thy voice; therefore, the curse if poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, because we have sinned against Him."

Now, God gave them curses. Deuteronomy 28:15 tells us that. God gave them curses. "You disobey, you're gonna get it." And God keeps His Word. He keeps His positive Word and His negative Word. And the shame and the judgment came, because God said it would if they didn't obey. And they didn't obey, and it came. And I want you to note in verse 11 that one of the truest elements of confession, and mark this down somewhere, one of the truest elements of confession, it is always in true confession is that when God chastens you for sin, you accept the responsibility for that chastening and never blame God. There are people who wanna blame God. Just like Adam. He said, "The woman You gave me. I didn't asked to be married. I woke up one morning. I was married. You gave me this woman." "Why did you sin?" "The woman You gave me. You did this. I didn't even know what a woman was. Then I woke up, and I was married...Now You're gonna hold me accountable for this sin? The woman You gave me." Passed the buck to God.

In the Book of Revelation chapter 6 says, "The holocaust breaks lose in the Tribulation, and the people blaspheme the God of heaven." "We don't deserve this." People say, "How can there be a God in the world? Why if there's a God, why is there all this disaster?...If there is a God, boy, he must be some kind of a crummy ogre." You see, they're not willing to accept the fact that there are evil consequences in the world, because the world is filled with evil deeds done by evil men who bring those consequences on themselves...

One of the truest elements of confession is that, "Therefore, the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, because we have sinned. It's our fault. We admit it."

And verse 12 says, "He confirmed His Words, which He spoke against us and against our fathers that judged us, by bringing on us a great evil; for under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem." Nothing has ever happened in human history to match this. As disastrous as the captivity of the people of Judah and Israel. And he says, "Nothing like this has ever happened, but it has happened just the way God said it would." He wrote it in his book this way. "He said, 'If you don't obey, you're gonna get it.' And we didn't obey, and we got it, and we don't blame God."

Verse 13, "As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this evil is come upon us." He keeps going back, says, "This is what it said in the book. This is what it said in the Law of Moses. God already told us this. We had fair warning." Listen, when you sin and things go bad in your life, don't blame God. It's you. It's you. God doesn't accept that responsibility. Don't curse God. Don't question God. Sin brings its just reward.

"It is written in the Law of Moses...verse 13...all this evil is come upon us. Yet made we not our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Thy truth." Now listen to that. He says, "Even when the pain came, we still didn't get it straight. We didn't confess. We didn't seek forgiveness. We didn't turn repent. Therefore, hath the Lord watched upon the evil and brought it upon us, for the Lord our God is righteous in all His works which He doeth, for we obeyed not his voice."

Do you see at the end of verse 14? "The Lord our God is righteous in all His works which He doeth." Now, beloved, I can't emphasize enough, that is the truest element of true confession. That all negative circumstances that you receive, all of those chastenings that come from sin are received as things deserved for sinfulness. Oh, what a mature perspective that is...

I'm gonna say more about this, but not tonight. I just wanna close by reading verse 15. "And now, O Lord our God, who hath brought Thy people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and hast gotten Thee renown as at this day - we have sinned, we have done wickedly."

And he sums it up. Listen, beloved, true intercessory prayer is generated by God's Word, grounded in God's will, characterized by fervency, realized in self-denial, identified with God's people, and strengthened in confession.

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