How to Experience God's Mercy:

Improve Your Prayer Life by Confessing Your Sins

We return to Daniel Chapter Nine, where we've been discussing practical insights into prayer. If you're eager to learn how to pray, spending time with someone with a strong prayer life and consistently seeing results from their prayers is beneficial. Do you have someone like that in your life? When you're facing a pressing need, and it feels like you need a direct line to heaven, there's that one person you know who can reach God on your behalf.

Daniel provides valuable lessons on prayer because he knew how to pray effectively and connect with heaven. Let's briefly review some of the key points we've discussed:

Prayer is a response to the Word of God, as mentioned in verse two of chapter nine. While our primary focus today is on verses five through 15, it's essential to remember that Daniel's understanding of God's Word, particularly through Jeremiah, guided his prayers.

To pray correctly, effectively, and with official intention:

1. Engage with the Word of God actively. More than that, let the Word become a part of you. You must make it practical and functional in your life. The Word needs to come alive within us.

2. Dedicate your undivided attention to God. In verse three, we see that Daniel set his face towards the Lord God to make a request. External distractions must be dealt with before God can have your complete focus. Entering into prayer involves shutting out the world, entering your prayer closet, closing the door, and being alone with God. God desires to communicate with you, aiming His words directly at your heart. Every time you open your Bible, you're engaging in a conversation with the Lord.

3. Infuse your prayers with fervency. The second part of verse three talks about prayer and supplications with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. God doesn't answer cold, lifeless, weak prayers. As the Puritan preacher Thomas Brooks once said, "Cold prayers are arrows without heads, swords

without edges, birds without wings. They pierce not, they cut not, they fly not up to heaven."

4. Start prayer by acknowledging the greatness of God. Verse four reads, "O Lord, great and awesome God." Every time you pray, reflect on the One you're addressing. He is the Almighty God, the Creator of all things. According to Daniel, God's greatness is demonstrated through His faithfulness to keep His covenant, extend His love, and fulfill His promises. Don't you want to talk to someone like that?
5. Strengthen your prayers through confession. In verse four, Daniel prayed to the Lord, confessing his sins. In the 21st century, our view of confession has become somewhat shallow. We've reduced it to a mere "I'm sorry," offering a superficial apology to God when we mess up. Then, we leave the prayer room and continue life as usual, with no real change. However, confession goes beyond getting something off your chest; it's about coming clean before God and being honest and open about your sins. Offering a shallow confession, wrapped in a quick prayer, is a sign of an unrepentant heart unwilling to pay the price for deep cleansing.

Daniel's Example of Confession of Sins

God desires to purify our hearts. It's often easy to pray for a change in our circumstances, but what about a transformation in our character? Have you recently prayed, "Lord, change me"? Allowing God to change us might lead to a shift in how we perceive both our circumstances and other people.

Daniel serves as a prime example; he began his prayer with self-examination, saying, "I made confession," but he didn't stop there. He also identified with God's people. As you continue through this prayer, which spans the entire chapter, you'll notice Daniel's pattern of confession:

1. In verse five, he acknowledges, "Look, we have sinned."
2. In verse six, he recognizes, "Neither have we heeded."
3. In verses seven and eight, he accepts, "To us, shame of face."
4. In verse 11, he laments, "All Israel has transgressed your law."

Throughout the prayer, Daniel uses inclusive pronouns like "us" and "all." He understands that everyone, like sheep, has gone astray. Daniel avoids self-righteousness when dealing with sin; he places himself in the same category. When God works in someone's life, repentance and confession become the norm. The closer we draw to God, the more sensitive we become to sin.

Sin isn't just about breaking God's law; it's a matter of breaking God's heart. To truly grasp its impact on God, reflect on the cross. It was the price God was willing to pay to set us free and cleanse us. Sin shattered Christ, and He offered Himself for us.

Confession is Calling Sin What it is

Firstly, confession is simply acknowledging sin for what it is, without sugarcoating, spin, or political correctness. Sometimes, even in the church, we find ourselves compromising biblical truths and failing to call sin what it truly is. God's desire isn't anger towards people; He longs to address our sins and make us right. He wants us to enter the abundant life He provided through His sacrifice.

Daniel employs four different words to describe sin in verse number five of our text:

1. "We have sinned" - indicating missing the mark.
2. "Committed iniquity" - going beyond missing the mark to rearranging it.
3. "Done wrong" - a clear admission of wrongdoing.
4. "Acted wickedly" - highlighting a departure from God's righteousness.

This sermon demonstrates how we set boundaries, like how DayCare uses cones to protect and guide the children in our care. It's an act of love, not restriction, to keep them safe and secure within those boundaries, fostering an environment where they can flourish.

Similarly, God's expectations for His children are like traffic cones guiding us. He has firmly established them. However, when we observe today's world, which no longer upholds absolutes or set boundaries, we see a society spiraling out of control, living as if God's laws are irrelevant. It's as if we've entered a zoo,

where, when society disregards God's laws and moral standards, all that remains is the law of the jungle. Our best efforts become about survival. The state of the world isn't improving; it's deteriorating as it crosses boundaries, pushes limits, and ignores God, even considering His terms outdated. They rearrange the cones, redefine words, and defy God.

Yet, as God's people, we sometimes violate His commandments and shift His boundaries, but we can't change anything in the Bible. When we tamper with God's commandments, we only bring destruction upon ourselves. God placed His wisdom in the Word to help, protect, and keep us safe.

We've missed and moved the mark, just as Daniel acknowledges. Furthermore, he says, "We have done wickedly," signifying passionate rebellion against God. We've been fully committed to our sinful pursuits, showing no restraint or reservation. Daniel states that we've rebelled by departing from God's precepts and judgments, rejecting His authority, and holding contempt for His sovereign lordship.

These four phrases in verse five describe Israel's sin, indicating they were guilty because they missed the mark, moved it, distorted the truth, committed premeditated evil, and defied God's authority. It wasn't an accidental sin but a deliberate rejection of God and His Word. They found themselves without an excuse or a way to escape their situation.

Just as they couldn't work their way out of sin, Jesus did the work on the cross to deliver you from sin. The only path to heaven is through faith in the finished work of Christ. The righteousness of Christ applied to our account makes us worthy.

Does anyone here believe they deserve heaven? Do any of us genuinely merit it? It's all about grace, mercy, and the kindness of God. He created us and came to redeem us when we messed up. It's all in God's hands; all we need to do is accept His mercy and grace.

Confession entails calling sin what it is in the eyes of God. When people ask if something is a sin, we should refer to what the Bible says without altering or rewriting Scripture. God has clearly defined right from wrong, what harms us, and what heals us. This is where Daniel learned to confess his sins.

Interestingly, the first three verbs he uses to confess sins here (we have sinned, we've done wrong, we've been wicked) are in a previous prayer recorded in 1 Kings 8:46-47. It's plausible, even reasonable, to believe that Daniel had memorized this prayer as a young boy. Now, Daniel is part of God's ultimate plan for delivering His people. While studying the Prophet Jeremiah, he realizes that God is about to rescue His people from Babylonian captivity. Daniel decides to be an active part of this deliverance. He prays for deliverance, recognizing that although God intends to visit them, they are unprepared to receive Him.

In the same way, we should consider our readiness for the return of Jesus. The world is evolving, and His return seems nearer than ever. Is the church, the modern-day church, prepared to welcome Jesus back? It's a wake-up call; Jesus is coming back. He's coming back!

What an incredible moment that should not fill you with fear or make you want to hide under your bed. We should rejoice at the thought of the Lord's return, knowing that His blood has cleansed us from our sinfulness. Praise His name!

Prayer can involve repeating and quoting scriptural prayers. A perfect example is the Book of Psalms, which served as a model for many Old Testament prayers and even for Jesus and His disciples. When you read through the Gospels, consider praying through the Psalms. It's not just a devotional or a hymnal but also an excellent prayer book. If it comes from your heart, praying these verses can be a powerful way to pray effectively.

If you want to pray correctly, open your Bible. It's filled with prayers, like an open book test in school. Remember those? You can use your book to find answers. God has provided prayers in the Bible, no matter what you're going through. Somebody has faced similar challenges. Read the prayers of others who have endured difficulties, mighty men and women of God. Remember, bad things happen to good people; sometimes, life gets tough. When you find it hard to formulate a prayer, open the Scriptures, read what someone else has poured out to God, and claim it as your own. It's powerful.

Solomon had prayed a prayer, and Daniel was familiar with that prayer. When he sought the Lord during Israel's deliverance, he aligned with Jeremiah, and they essentially prayed the same prayer.

Confession is Acknowledging Your Shame

It's important to identify our sins and acknowledge our shame, as found in verses seven and eight. "Oh Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us, shame of face." The concept of shame may seem outdated because very little makes us blush nowadays.

The King James Version describes it as "confusion of faces." It's the posture of keeping our heads down, hiding our faces before God, fully aware of our guilt in His presence. Recall the parable of the tax collector in Luke chapter 18, verse 13. It embodies the same spirit as what Nehemiah is conveying here.

Two men were at the altar praying: one was a tax collector, and the other was a Pharisee, a religious leader. The Pharisee knew the Scriptures, attended synagogue regularly, and boasted about tithing, even doubling it. However, the other man, the tax collector, prayed differently. He stood at a distance, wouldn't even lift his eyes to heaven, and beat his breast, saying, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Jesus concluded that both left the temple, but only one went home justified. Can you guess who it was? It was the man who couldn't even raise his eyes to God, feeling utterly unworthy due to his past sins.

He cried out, "Father, have mercy on me; I am a sinner," but not the one who thought he was faultless. Some people get offended when you call them sinners, but we should call it what it is, as God sees it. Sin is sin. This "confusion of faces" happens when we contrast God's righteousness with the darkness of our sinfulness. Sin has always separated us from God, and it always will.

The problem arises when we compare ourselves to others instead of God. As long as we measure ourselves against our neighbors or acquaintances, we're unlikely to feel much shame. That's because we tend to believe the other person's sins are worse than our own. The Pharisee, for example, looked at the tax collector and thanked God that he wasn't like him. He started listing all the sins of that other guy to the Lord. While cataloging his own virtuous deeds, he simultaneously passed judgment on the man at the other end of the altar, emphasizing how wicked and wretched that man truly was.

Isn't it often easier to judge others? Every time we feel that inclination, every time it crosses our minds – and I'm not saying we should excuse or ignore it – there must be compassion for the sinner. Jesus represents grace and mercy.

We're not brushing sin under the rug. There needs to be the same godly compassion that led Jesus to come down to earth and die for us.

When we feel judgmental towards anyone, we should ask God to remind us where we came from. We're no better; it's only by God's grace that we're different. Discussing others' sins, failures, and mistakes is so easy. It makes us feel holier. God help us. We have no right to judge anyone.

As my mom used to say, "Don't judge anyone, but you can be a fruit inspector." She was a pro at that. "I won't judge you for your sin, but I'll be examining your fruit," she'd say. Thanks, Mom!

Confession is appealing to God's Mercy

But listen, once you've named your sin and acknowledged your shame, you must move on to appeal for God's mercy. After realizing the meaning of "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound," you may find yourself singing, "That saved a wretch like me." How does that make you feel?

It's not about condemning others but recognizing that we were all wretched in our sins, yet Jesus found us. To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness. His mercies are new every morning, as the Book of Psalms says. You can't exhaust God's mercy. His forgiveness is available anytime, no matter what you've done. Standing in that place of forgiveness is better than Disneyland for your spiritual being. Life takes on a new meaning when you truly grasp God's forgiveness and your secure future. You could summarize the essence of Daniel's confession like this: "Oh God, we fully deserve the judgment we're facing. We admit our guilt without reservation, making no excuses or attempts to hide it. We stand before You, acknowledging our wrongdoing in Your presence."

Such an acceptance of responsibility must be refreshing in God's ears. They say that in prison, hardly anyone admits their guilt. It's funny how that works, isn't it? You ask anyone in prison if they're guilty, and most will deny it. But how refreshing it must have been for God to hear Daniel standing up and saying, "I'm guilty. I broke the law. I did wrong, and I deserve my punishment." There's no room for pride in this prayer. There's no attempt to justify or make excuses. It's a clear and humble admission of guilt.

Confession is merely an acknowledgment of our sinfulness, allowing the Lord to cleanse our hearts and make our souls as pure as snow. Regardless of the hardships sin may have brought upon us, God's mercy is wider than our sin, and His forgiveness is greater than our iniquity.

God is righteous and just in all His works, even when we have not obeyed His voice. He is fair and firm in His dealings with us.

So, as we conclude, ask yourself: Are you pushing the boundaries and moving God's cones in your life? Is there something deep down inside that torments you, something you need to confess to God? Don't hide it; let the Lord know. Confession should be a part of your daily prayer life, not a shallow formality but a sincere and relational act of getting right with God.

Remember, it's okay to admit when you're wrong and to seek forgiveness. Embrace confession to be right with God, and watch how He responds to your sincere prayers.