

January 21
Lesson 8 (NIV)

A PRAYER

FOR AN OBEDIENT FAITH

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 130
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Daniel 9:1-19

DANIEL 9:4-8, 15-19

⁴ I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: “Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. ⁶ We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

⁷ “Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. ⁸ We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you.”

¹⁵ “Now, 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, we have sinned, we have done wrong. ¹⁶ 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 ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

¹⁷ “Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. ¹⁸ Give ear, our 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 Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”

KEY VERSE

Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.—Daniel 9:19

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the content of Daniel’s prayer in today’s text.
2. Explain how this prayer can serve as a model for Christians today.
3. Write out a prayer of confession and repentance based on Daniel’s prayer and use it each day this week. (Report on its impact at the next gathering of the group.)

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. When Direction Is Needed
- B. Lesson Background

I. People’s Sins (DANIEL 9:4-8)

- A. Rebellion (vv. 4, 5)
A Difficult Admission
- B. Deafness (v. 6)
- C. Shame (vv. 7, 8)
When Leaders Fail

II. God’s Holiness (DANIEL 9:15, 16)

A. Holy in Power (v. 15)

B. Holy in Mercy (v. 16)

III. Daniel's Request (DANIEL 9:17-19)

A. For Worship Renewal (v. 17)

B. For National Renewal (vv. 18, 19)

Conclusion

A. Priorities in Prayer

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. When Direction Is Needed

We all go through crossroads moments—times we know that life will change because of decisions we have made or are making. Here are common bits of advice for those at crossroads moments.

To newlyweds: Never go to bed angry.

To parents of a newborn: Live to be the kind of person you will want your child to marry.

To first-time homeowners: Don't ignore home maintenance.

To new drivers: The car you drive can be one of the deadliest machines ever invented.

To the teen leaving for college: Don't give up what you want most for what you want now.

These words of advice may seem trite, but they are important. At certain points of our lives, we must know who we are, what we have got ourselves into, and where to turn for help. We know what it is like to reach a crossroads moment. When such a moment comes, we know that life may change dramatically. Daniel's decision at a crossroads moment has much to teach us.

B. Lesson Background

After the incident of the fiery furnace (last week's lesson), Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego no longer appear in the book of Daniel. The spotlight turns on Daniel himself to demonstrate unwavering faith and godly courage in pagan surroundings.

Much happens in the book of Daniel between last week's lesson from [chapter 3](#) and this week's lesson from [chapter 9](#). In [Daniel 4](#), the book's namesake interpreted a dream for King Nebuchadnezzar, one with an ominous, alarming message of coming judgment on that ruler. In [chapter 5](#), Daniel interpreted the famous "handwriting on the wall" for the terrified King Belshazzar. That message too was one of pending doom; indeed, Daniel's words came to pass that very night ([5:30, 31](#)).

[Chapter 6](#) is the well-known account of Daniel in the lions' den. [Daniel 7-12](#) records a series of dreams and visions granted to Daniel about things to come. Daniel's prayer of [chapter 9](#), located among these, is the subject of today's lesson.

I. People's Sins

(DANIEL 9:4-8)

Daniel offered the prayer of today's text "in the first year of Darius son of Xerxes" ([Daniel 9:1](#); compare [5:31](#); [11:1](#)). That was about 538 BC. Since Daniel was taken to Babylon in 605 BC ([1:1](#)), this means that he has been on foreign soil for nearly 70 years. He has become an old man.

While [Daniel 9:1](#) tells us of the earthly ruler in power at the time, the verse that follows affirms that the heavenly ruler, the Lord, remains very much in control. That verse also records Daniel's recognition that Jerusalem's desolation was to last 70 years, according to [Jeremiah 29:10](#). This means the captivity of Daniel's people is nearing its end.

This awareness stirs the elderly man of God to offer the profound prayer of our lesson. The heartfelt sincerity of the prayer is seen in [Daniel 9:3](#) with the mention of Daniel's fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.

A. Rebellion (vv. 4, 5)

4^a. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed:

"Lord, the great and awesome God,

Daniel's address of the Lord as *my God* should not be bypassed too quickly. Consider how much Daniel had learned to trust the Lord during all the turmoil in his life and pressures to conform to the surrounding pagan culture. For nearly 70 years, the Lord had repeatedly shown himself faithful. Daniel can truly, genuinely call him *my God*.

HOW TO SAY IT

Abednego Uh-*bed-nee-go*.

Babylon Bab-uh-lun.

Babylonians Bab-ih-*low-nee-unz*.

Belshazzar Bel-*shazz-er*.

Cyrus Sigh-russ.

Darius Duh-*rye-us*.

Judah *Joo-duh*.

Lamentations *Lam-en-tay-shunz*.

Meshach *Me-shack*.

Moriah *Mo-rye-uh*.

Nebuchadnezzar *Neb-yuh-kud-**nez**-er*.

Shadrach *Shay-drack* or *Shad-rack*.

Sinai *Sigh-nye* or *Sigh-nay-eye*.

Xerxes *Zurk-seez*.

We may normally think of the word *confessed* in terms of making an admission of wrongdoing. But here at the very beginning of his prayer, Daniel does not confess sins. Rather, he acknowledges important truths about his God.

The word *awesome* speaks to a sense of reverence we should have toward God. Just because he is a personal God (*my* God) does not mean that he can be approached casually or flippantly. Daniel knows this.

4b. “who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments,

While Daniel has acknowledged the Lord as his God, he is also keenly aware that the Lord is close to many others as well—specifically *those who love him and keep his commandments*. Daniel’s language echoes that of Moses in [Deuteronomy 7:9, 12](#). Much later, Solomon used this same language during his eloquent prayer at the dedication of the temple ([1 Kings 8:22, 23](#)). That temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians, the same people who took Daniel and his friends into captivity. But the Lord’s faithfulness to *his covenant of love* is not subject to such treatment.

What Do You Think?

How should remembering God’s character shape how we talk to God about our sins?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

With reference to his holiness

With reference to his love

With reference to his faithful consistency

5a. “we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled;

After exalting the Lord for his majesty and faithfulness, Daniel now begins to confess the brazen unfaithfulness of the people. He starts by piling up the four phrases we see here, actions that are similar in meaning. This is the only place in the Old Testament where all four occur (in Hebrew) in the same verse. (Coming close with three of the four are [1 Kings 8:47](#); [2 Chronicles 6:37](#); and [Psalm 106:6](#).)

By the use of the first-person *we*, Daniel counts himself among the guilty. We may wonder why Daniel should include himself among the sinners or take part of the blame for what has happened. But those who know the Lord and his character most intimately, as Daniel clearly does, are painfully aware of their own unworthiness. Those most self-aware of their own spiritual poverty cannot help but pray the prayer of the publican: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” ([Luke 18:13](#)).

5b. “we have turned away from your commands and laws.

Although technical distinctions can be made between *commands* and *laws*, Daniel uses them together in a whole-picture way. God had set his standards firmly in place, whether one is talking about decrees, regulations, commands ([2 Kings 17:37](#)), or laws ([Nehemiah 9:13](#)). Those standards have not changed, and the people *have turned away from* them due to all the actions just mentioned in the previous half-verse. That is why they are in exile.

A DIFFICULT ADMISSION

Marion Jones was a superstar track and field athlete who won five medals at the 2000 Summer Olympics. But she was stripped of those medals after admitting to steroid use. In her public confession, she accepted full responsibility and blamed no one but herself. She spent six months in prison for lying to investigators.

Daniel did not mince words when it came to confessing the sins of God’s people. It’s interesting to note that he includes himself in the confession by using first-person *we*. His prayer of corporate confession pulls no punches regarding the people’s sins.

After her time in prison, Marion Jones established a nonprofit organization called Take a Break. It’s dedicated to getting young people to step back and think about the potential life-altering consequences of their decisions. Secular culture’s term for this is “reinventing” oneself. Christianity has a different description: producing “fruit in keeping with repentance” ([Luke 3:8](#)).

—D. C. S.

What Do You Think?

In what ways would a Christian’s behavior change if he or she assumed personal responsibility for communal sins?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding private prayer

Regarding public prayer

Regarding Christian activism

Other

B. Deafness (v. 6)

6. “We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

God had warned the people time and again of the judgment that awaited should they turn away from him. To issue such warnings was the primary duty of *the prophets*. The prophet Ezekiel had been called specifically to be a “watchman” ([Ezekiel 3:16-21](#); [33:1-9](#)), sounding the alarm and warning of coming doom. But in one way or another, all the prophets were tasked to do so.

Yet who has listened? When the leaders of the people (the *kings* and the *princes*) have no desire to hear what the Lord has to say, judgment cannot be far behind. See [2 Chronicles 36:16](#) for a summary of how God’s messengers have been treated.

C. Shame (vv. 7, 8)

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

Again Daniel contrasts the Lord’s being *righteous* with the sin of his people. The phrase *covered with shame* highlights the visible, public disgrace that they have brought upon themselves *because of [their] unfaithfulness*. Jeremiah notes that God’s people had lost their ability to blush in shame for their wrongdoing. The people have gladly, proudly flaunted their disobedience ([Jeremiah 6:15](#); [8:12](#)).

Since they have not voluntarily exhibited shame associated with repentance, they now involuntarily exhibit shame associated with captivity. No one is exempt from divine judgment. People throughout the lands of *Judah* and *Israel* suffer their respective exiles. Although politically divided for about 400 years by the time noted in [Daniel 9:1](#), the 12 tribes of Israel share a common rebellion against God. Thus they share a common fate.

8. “We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you.”

This repeat of leadership culpability and shame serves to emphasize the problem.

WHEN LEADERS FAIL

In 2015, the leadership of a certain church determined that they had treated one of their members unbiblically. The member had decided to separate from her husband after he confessed involvement with illegal pornography. She felt she needed to separate to keep her children safe. But church leaders had insisted that she extend grace to her husband and keep living with him while the problem was addressed. Shortly thereafter, however, they realized their error and sought to rectify the situation through their own repentance and confession.

The distress of Daniel and his people was traceable, in large part, to their leaders. They had set the bad examples of idolatry and spiritual complacency (example: [Jeremiah 44:16, 17](#)). Therefore, Daniel confessed to the Lord the sins of such leaders.

The humble actions of the penitent church leaders removed obstacles along the woman’s path to healing. As Daniel confessed the sins of leaders, he “owned” those sins as his. Did those sinful leaders themselves ever do the same? Do ours?

—D. C. S.

II. God’s Holiness

([DANIEL 9:15, 16](#))

In [Daniel 9:9-14](#) (not in today’s lesson text), Daniel continues to call attention to the wide chasm that exists between God’s faithfulness and the people’s rebellion. God has not pulled any surprises on the people in bringing judgment. To the contrary, he warned them through the Law of Moses ([9:13](#)) and later through the prophets ([9:10](#)). But the people disobeyed anyway ([9:14](#)).

A. Holy in Power (v. 15)

15. “Now, 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, we have sinned, we have done wrong.

Having spoken of “my God” at the outset of the prayer, Daniel now uses the inclusive *our God*. In so doing, Daniel turns the focus to God’s actions in history on behalf of his people, specifically the exodus *out of Egypt*.

That event was foundational for Israel’s existence as a nation. The exodus had brought the Lord *a name*, or fame, far greater than it was possible for any other so-called god to obtain. The Israelites were to promote that renown by living in obedience to him and thus being a witness to the pagan peoples around them ([Deuteronomy 4:5-8](#)). But repeated sinfulness had brought shame, not fame, to themselves and to the Lord’s name.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to ensure that we thank God regularly for past rescues?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In corporate worship
- In private prayers and devotions
- Other

B. Holy in Mercy (v. 16)

16. “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 ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us.

Daniel now pleads with the Lord to continue to act in a manner consistent with his righteousness. God’s *righteous acts* include not only judgment against sin

but also when that judgment has run its course, when “enough is enough.” In that regard, Daniel begs that the Lord’s *anger* and *wrath* be turned away from *Jerusalem*.

When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, he voiced desire that “all the peoples of the earth may know your name . . . as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name” (1 Kings 8:43). But the *sins* and *iniquities* of God’s people made them (and the temple) an *object of scorn* to the surrounding peoples. The Lord had warned Solomon of this prospect after the temple was dedicated (1 Kings 9:6-9).

III. Daniel’s Request

(DANIEL 9:17-19)

Daniel is nearly three-quarters through his prayer before he starts making requests.

A. For Worship Renewal (v. 17)

17. “Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary.

Daniel’s request echoes the blessing in Numbers 6:22-27 that was to be issued by the high priest Aaron and his sons. The time of the “desolation of Jerusalem” is nearing its end (Daniel 9:2). Renewal of the *desolate sanctuary* will mean worship renewal. As Daniel recognizes this, he prays for it for the Lord’s sake. The next two verses expand on this.

What Do You Think?

What positive changes might result if Christians started to appeal to God to act for the sake of his reputation?
Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding interactions with fellow believers
Regarding interactions with unbelievers

B. For National Renewal (vv. 18, 19)

18. “Give ear, our 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.

Daniel asks for God’s full attention to the plight of his despondent people. The basis of Daniel’s plea cannot rest upon the righteousness of the people, since they have none. He knows full well that the only hope for God’s people rests in the Lord’s *great mercy*. The words of Lamentations 3:22, 23 acknowledge this profound truth: “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” To reverse the *desolation* of the people and of the city that bears [God’s] name will be consistent with God’s merciful character.

19. “Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”

Daniel concludes his fervent prayer with a staccato of impassioned appeals to the Lord. These appeals can have only one basis: God’s *own sake* and *Name*. Having just spoken of the Lord’s renown (see Daniel 9:15), achieved through deliverance of his people from bondage in Egypt, Daniel pleads, in effect, for a second exodus. When the Lord accomplishes this, the “great disaster” that has befallen Jerusalem (9:12) will be reversed; everyone will know that such a reversal could happen only by the mercies of God.

What Do You Think?

What should we do when God doesn’t seem to be answering our prayers?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding something yet to happen
Regarding something that has already happened

One wonders what Daniel’s posture is as he utters this intense prayer. The Scripture does not tell us. It is not hard to picture the aged saint falling to his creaking knees as he pleads with the Lord on behalf of himself and his countrymen in captivity. As his prayer reaches the especially earnest conclusion in the verse before us, perhaps Daniel falls prostrate to acknowledge total submission to the Lord and complete dependence upon him to answer the prayer.

Within the next year or so after Daniel offers this prayer (based on the date given in Daniel 9:1), the Persian ruler Cyrus the Great issued his decree allowing the Jews who desired to do so to return home (2 Chronicles 36:22, 23). We do not read of Daniel returning to his homeland; most likely both his age and his administrative responsibilities precluded him from doing so.

However, given the date cited in Daniel 10:1 (the third year of Cyrus, which would be 536 BC), Daniel lives to see the Lord answer the prayer and keep his word regarding the 70 years. We do not read of any prayer Daniel offers when the return of the captives happens, but we can be certain that he praises the Lord—with a prayer that is just as sincere and passionate as the one we have studied today.

Conclusion

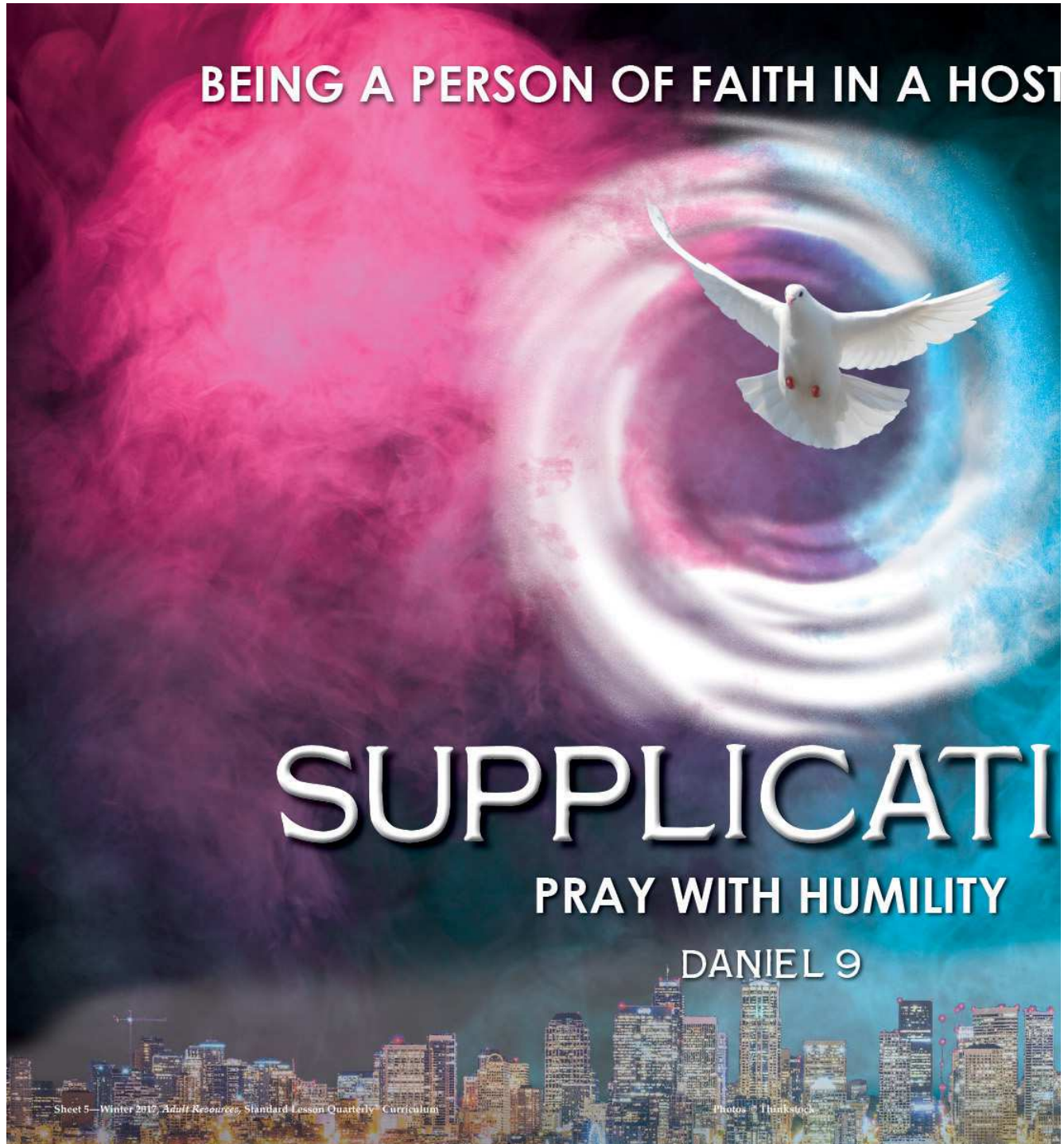
A. Priorities in Prayer

Daniel’s prayer should prompt us to ask ourselves, “Do we pray like that today? Are our prayers that earnest, that sensitive to the sin and wrongdoing in our lives and to our dependence on the mercy of God?” We may be very keenly aware of the perversion in our culture, but Daniel’s prayer says absolutely nothing about what is going on in Persian society. His focus is on his people’s desperate need for the forgiveness that God alone can provide. But note carefully that Daniel spends much more time *acknowledging* than *asking*. Do we pray that way?

Much insight can also be gained by examining the prayer life of Paul. We are not given in Scripture the specific contents of his prayers, but we can sense what

his priorities in prayer were by reading the references to prayer. As we do, we find a heavy emphasis on spiritual matters, very similar to the matters that comprised the prayer of Daniel. There was a fervent desire for the recipients of a given epistle to grow in their knowledge of Jesus and to be more aware of the spiritual blessings that accompany that knowledge.

Illustrations of this may be seen in [Ephesians 1:15-23](#); [3:14-21](#); [Philippians 1:9-11](#); [Colossians 1:9-14](#); and [2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12](#). There is really very little in these Scriptures about physical or material concerns, which usually make up the primary topic of prayer times or prayer lists in most churches.



Visual for Lesson 8. *Point to this visual as you ask learners how a Christian's supplications (requests) can become more like Daniel's.*

This is not to say that praying for physical or material needs should not be encouraged (see [James 5:14, 15](#)). Certainly God cares about every aspect of our lives (compare [Philippians 4:6](#)). But if we are honest, we must admit our clear shortcomings in failing to address on a consistent basis the kinds of issues that formed the very core of passionate pray-ers like Daniel and Paul.

We have noted that Daniel was moved to prayer by reading and understanding the Word of God that had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah ([Daniel 9:2](#)). May reading the Scriptures today, specifically a prayer such as Daniel's, stir us to reexamine and revitalize our own priorities in prayer.

B. Prayer

Father, when we read a prayer such as Daniel's, we recognize how our own prayer priorities are so mixed up. Help us remember that we are students continually enrolled in the school of prayer. Teach us to pray with the passion and priorities of Daniel! We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Take the first steps of important journeys
on your knees.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Across the top of the board, write the following five phrases:

*To the graduate / To the first-time homeowner
To the expectant parent / To the newlyweds
To one whose parent is dying*

Distribute self-stick notes and pens or pencils. Instruct students to write on **separate** pieces of paper a few words of advice to the five hypothetical people listed.

When students have finished writing, collect the notes and read each one aloud. Let students decide to whom the advice was written; post it under that header. Have the author of the note confirm or correct the decision.

Ask students to name other major events that can affect lives forever. Transition into the Bible story by saying, "We know what it is like to reach a figurative crossroads moment in our lives. We know that from that moment forward, our lives will change dramatically. Let's see what Daniel did when facing such a crossroads moment."

Into the Word

Prior to class, write one letter from each of the following three words on index cards so you end up with 22 cards: *Confess / Recognize / Appeal*. Mix up the cards, keeping the letters of each word together in three piles. Read [Daniel 9:1-3](#) aloud to set the stage. Form students into three groups and provide the following:

Group 1—[Daniel 9:4-8](#): card pile with letters of the word *confess*.

Group 2—[Daniel 9:15, 16](#): card pile with letters of the word *recognize*.

Group 3—[Daniel 9:17-19](#): card pile with letters of the word *appeal*.

Ask groups to work quickly to see who can unscramble their word the fastest, based on the assigned text. Caution that the unscrambled word may not match the lesson outline.

Ask a member of Group 1 to read its passage and state what the unscrambled word is. Wrap up the ensuing discussion by saying, "Daniel begins his prayer by confessing the sin of the people. He doesn't make excuses, blame someone else, or whine about how mean God is. He takes ownership." Have students look through the verses and call out confirmations.

Ask Groups 2 and 3 to do the same in turn. Wrap up the discussion of [verses 15, 16](#) by saying "Daniel recognizes who God is and what he's done for his people." Have students confirm by calling out examples. Conclude Group 3's discussion as you say, "After acknowledging the sins of the people and the righteousness of God, Daniel chose to appeal to God's mercy." Have students look through the verses and confirm. Then read the Lord's Prayer in [Matthew 6](#) and the Pharisee's prayer in [Luke 18:11, 12](#). Compare and contrast all three prayers in terms of the words *confess*, *recognize*, and *appeal*.

Alternative. Read aloud [Daniel 9:1-19](#). Then distribute copies of the "Mark My Words" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually or in small groups to make corrections to Daniel's prayer.

After either activity, talk about the reasons people pray. Make a transition by saying, "One reason people *should* pray is to have release from feelings of shame that result from sin."

Into Life

Ask for volunteers to tell of obstacles and distractions that keep them from having an ideal prayer life. Then ask each person to give three words that describe his or her prayer time. Say, "In the week ahead, let's strive to emulate Daniel's prayer by adjusting our three-word description to become the three words *confess*, *recognize*, and *appeal* that describe Daniel's prayer."

Alternative. Distribute copies of the "By Definition" activity from the reproducible page. Allow students to work on this activity individually.