

Main Idea: Our prayer lives can be more honoring to God if we observe and implement two components found in Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9.

- I. The Bible directs our preparation for prayer (1-3).
  - A. Daniel discovered a promise of God (1-2).
  - B. Daniel prayed in light of that promise (3).
    1. We must fill our minds with Scripture.
    2. We must humble ourselves so God can be exalted.
- II. The Bible directs our perspective in prayer (4-19).
  - A. He looks up (4).
    1. God is great.
    2. God is good.
  - B. He looks back (5-6).
    1. We confess the wrong we did (5).
    2. We confess the right we didn't do (6).
  - C. He looks down (7-10).
    1. You are righteous, but we are ashamed (7-8).
    2. You are merciful, but we've been rebellious (9).
    3. You are faithful, but we've been unfaithful (10).
  - D. He looks to Scripture (11-14).
  - E. He looks up again (15-19).

*Scripture Reading: James 5:13-20*

The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16).

But what kind of prayer does a righteous man offer to God that is so powerful? How can we be sure that what we pray will indeed be effective? We're going to find out this morning as we look at righteous Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9. Daniel's prayer was a *Bible directed prayer*.

Amazing things happen when people pray Bible directed prayers. It was just over a century ago that the Welsh revival took place, which began in 1904. Granted, today the term "revival" is tossed around too flippantly, and frankly there's much confusion about it. J. Edwin Orr, an author who has specialized on the subject, says he saw a sign in the San Fernando Valley that read, "Revival Every Monday." Five miles down the road he saw another sign, "Revival Every Night Except Monday."

My friend, a genuine revival cannot be manufactured by putting up a sign in front of a church. It's the work of a Sovereign God. So does it happen?

Consider the Welsh Revival. Its leading figure was a 26-year old student by the name of Evan Roberts.<sup>2</sup> With the permission of his college principal, Roberts left his studies and went to a church in his home of Lougher. Only 17 people were there to hear his first message.

He gave them four points: Confess any known sin to God and put right any wrong done to man; Put away any doubtful habit; Obey the Spirit promptly; And, confess faith in Christ openly. The response was instantaneous.

Within three months, 100,000 converts had been added to the churches in Wales. You say, "Was it genuine?" Five years later, a person wrote a book to try to discredit the

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\*\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For an earlier development of this passage, see the Daniel series at WBC in 1996.

<sup>2</sup> as told by Orr, *Campus Aflame*

validity of the Revival, and the author's main point of attack was that of the 100,000 added to the churches, only 80,000 remained five years later. *Only 80,000!*

J. Edwin Orr writes, "The influence of the Revival upon life in Wales was beyond calculation. Crime was so greatly diminished that the magistrates in certain counties were presented with white gloves, signifying not a case to try. Drunkenness was cut in half, and a wave of bankruptcies swept the taverns of the principality. Profanity was curbed, until it was said that the pit-ponies in the mines could not understand their orders."<sup>3</sup>

What would it take to see such a spiritual awakening in our day? Again, true revival is the work of God. Period. So we can't cause a revival by scheduling a week of meetings.

Yet we can create a climate for revival. Historically, revival has occurred when God's people, no matter how small the remnant, gave serious attention to prayer.

There are few people in the Bible more qualified to teach us how to pray than Daniel. Daniel was truly a man of prayer. In Daniel 2, with his life on the line due to the edict of Nebuchadnezzar, remember what Daniel did? He scheduled a prayer meeting with his friends (2:18). Then in chapter six, when the options were either pray-and-die, or not-pray-and-live, Daniel chose to pray and face the lion's den. And God delivered him.

We find the most vivid insight into the prayer life of Daniel, however, in Daniel 9. If we are serious about wanting to learn how to pray, I mean *really* pray, then we must give serious attention to Daniel 9.

Daniel models for us Bible-directed praying. We learn two basic prayer lessons from his example. The first has to do with *preparation.*, the second with *perspective.*

### I. The Bible directs our preparation for prayer (1-3).

Let's notice the preparation that led to Daniel's prayer by jumping right into the account. Verse 1 begins, "In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom."<sup>4</sup>

So Daniel, a Jew, was in exile. Daniel was also a prophet to whom God revealed future events in a series of visions which Daniel recorded in chapters 7-12. I remind you that the book of Daniel is not arranged chronologically.

When did Daniel's prayer in chapter 9 occur, according to verse 1? In the first year of Darius. We first met Darius back in Daniel 5:30-31. It was Darius the Mede who took control of Babylon when the Medo-Persians overthrew the Babylonian kingdom.

So the events in chapter 9 chronologically follow right after the events recorded in chapter 5. The date for Daniel's prayer and prophecy in chapter 9 was 538 or 537 BC<sup>5</sup>, a year of intense political upheaval and uncertainty in the Middle East.

What happened to Daniel that year? Two things according to verses 1-3.

**A. Daniel discovered a promise of God (1-2).** Verse 2 tells us how it happened, "In the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years."

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<sup>3</sup> Orr, p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> AV, "In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans."

<sup>5</sup> According to Strauss. The NIV Study Bible says 539-538 BC.

The AV says, "I Daniel, understood by books the number of the years."<sup>6</sup> I don't know how many books of Scripture were available to Daniel in the sixth century B.C. I do know that somehow he obtained the book written by Jeremiah.

Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, served in Judah when Daniel was a child. It was Jeremiah who preached to the Jews and told them God was going to send them into captivity. In time, he wrote down his prophetic message, but king Jehoiakim burned the scroll in the fire (Jer 36:23). At the Lord's instruction, Jeremiah rewrote his book. Later, this man of God was taken captive by his fellow Jews, carried off to Egypt against his will, and where he eventually was buried in a nameless grave in a strange land.<sup>7</sup>

But that's not the end of the story. Somehow, the timeless Scriptures which Jeremiah wrote found their way across desert and mountain to far away Babylon, and fell into the hands of Daniel. "My word...will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it," said the Lord through His prophet Isaiah nearly two centuries earlier (Isaiah 55:10-11).

We need some dates if we are to appreciate Daniel's response. Daniel was carried into captivity in Babylon in 605 B.C. He read Jeremiah's scroll around 538 BC, about 67 years after his captivity began.

Now here's the stunning part. Guess what Daniel read in Jeremiah's book? Jeremiah prophesied that the desolation of Jerusalem would last, according to verse 2, *seventy* years.

Let's look at Jeremiah's actual prediction that Daniel read. You'll find it in Jeremiah 25:11-12, "This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.<sup>12</sup> But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the LORD, "and will make it desolate forever."

Daniel must have marveled as he read Jeremiah and then read the local newspaper. They both spoke of the same event, the destruction of the king of Babylon!

Then Daniel found something else in Jeremiah, this time in Jeremiah 29:10-14, "This is what the LORD says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.<sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.<sup>12</sup> Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.<sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.<sup>14</sup> I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the LORD, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.'"

What a timely promise! God said He would bring His people back home after seventy years, and the seventy years was nearly up. So guess what Daniel did with this promise? He did precisely what God said to do in the Book.

**B. Daniel prayed in light of that promise (3).** Jeremiah 29:12 says, "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you." And that's exactly what

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<sup>6</sup> AV, "In the first year of his reign, I Daniel, understood by 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."

<sup>7</sup> According to Walvoord, 202.

Daniel did in verse 3, “So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.”

What made Daniel such a man of prayer? Simply this. He was a man of the Book. He searched the Scriptures to discover what God had said, and then he prayed in light of what God had said. The Book prompted prayer. The Book shaped his prayers. The Book showed him that prayer was necessary. The Book gave him divine promises to put his weight into in prayer.

Friends, if we want to become prayer warriors as was Daniel, we must follow his example in two ways.

1. *We must fill our minds with Scripture.* We need Bible intake. We cannot pray Bible prayers if we don't know the Bible.

Historically, an important transition took place for the Jews in Babylonian captivity, and Daniel is a case in point. The temple was no longer at the center of their lives, for there was no temple. What became central to godly living was *the Book*. Yes, God spoke to Daniel in visions, but those were exceptions and not the norm. What was the chief source of Daniel's spiritual direction and strength? The Book.

For the man of God in the sixth century BC, the Book was where you turned to meet with God, to hear from God, to learn about how to live for God. The Book became central to godly living.

Don't miss this. Daniel's great prayer in chapter 9 flows out of his time in the Book.

You say, "Pastor, what can I do to improve my prayer life?" The answer is, spend time in the Book. Get to know what God has said, specifically His promises. In the Book God shows us how to pray, which of course, ultimately is through Christ, for the Book points us to Christ, who alone is the mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5).

This cannot be overemphasized. Apart from the Book our prayers are near-sighted, if not off target. We're like selfish two-year-olds with God, demanding He give us what we want, challenging Him when He doesn't.

But His Book helps us view Him rightly, and ourselves, and our need for a Savior to intercede for us when we approach the heavenly throne.

By his example Daniel teaches us something else.

2. *We must humble ourselves so God can be exalted.* Notice what Daniel did to prepare himself to pray according to verse 3. He *turned* to the Lord God and *pleaded* with Him. He *fasted* (and keep in mind that Daniel is a man in his 80s). He put on *sackcloth and ashes*.

These are all expressions of humility. Fasting reminds us that we need God more than food. Wearing sackcloth admits that we don't deserve the comforts of life. Putting ashes on one's head is an expression of grief for sin. In short, Daniel practiced the truth James later recorded in James 4:10, "Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up."

Brothers and sisters, there's something here we must not miss about Daniel. The Lord was real to him, and it showed up in the way he treated the Book and prayer. Those are the two non-negotiables for a God-pleasing life. He paid attention to what God had said, and he spoke in light of what God had said, first to God and then to others.

Martin Niemoller, a German pastor and prisoner of Adolph Hitler, once shared this account at a meeting with the National Bible Society:<sup>8</sup>

"Let me tell one story of my life, of how I came to know what this book is worth. It was on the 2nd day of March, in 1938. I had been in prison in Berlin for eight months and had been tried. After the trial I had been taken by the Secret State Police and they had put me in a van, and had brought me to a concentration camp north of Berlin. They took my wallet, they took my wrist watch, they took my wedding ring, and they took my pocket Bible, which I had been allowed to have with me during the days and weeks and months in Berlin prison. This first night I shall never forget, because I didn't sleep for one minute. I didn't find any peace. I was quarreling with God and blaming Him. I had lost my memory during the very strenuous weeks of the trial. I couldn't remember a single verse from the Book by myself. I was dependent on what was printed. I assure you I should gladly have given not only eight oxen but years of my life if only I could have had that Book. Next morning, when the commandant entered, I asked him, 'Let me have my Bible back.' The man wavered. I was the personal prisoner of the Fuehrer. If he treated me too harshly it might be bad; and if he treated me too well that might be bad also. In the end he turned to the orderly and said, 'Go over to my office and bring the book which is on my desk. It is the Bible; you bring it here.' I had not yet been for twelve hours in the concentration camp and the Book had entered--the Holy Bible--the Book that bears witness and testifies to the One to Whom all power belongs in heaven and earth, even in concentration camp. There the Book was, and there He was with all His strength, with all His comfort, with all I needed."

Do you cherish the Book like that? There's a children's song that says it well.

*Read your Bible, pray every day, pray every day, pray every day.*

*Read your Bible, pray every day, and you'll grow, grow, grow.*

*And you'll grow, grow, grow. And you'll grow, grow, grow.*

*Read your Bible, pray every day, and you'll grow, grow, grow.*

But the second verse is also true...

*Neglect your Bible, forget to pray, forget to pray, forget to pray.*

*Neglect your Bible, forget to pray, and you'll shrink, shrink, shrink.*

*And you'll shrink, shrink, shrink. And you'll shrink, shrink, shrink.*

*Neglect your Bible, forget to pray, and you'll shrink, shrink, shrink.*

So lesson one. The Bible directs our preparation for prayer.

## II. The Bible directs our perspective in prayer (4-19).

We see Daniel's actual prayer in verses 4-19. Daniel models for us five perspectives in prayer (we'll look at the first three this week, and the final two next time, the Lord willing).

**A. He looks up (4).** In order to pray, we must take our eyes off of ourselves, and *look up*. Prayer is not talking to ourselves. It's talking to God. Prayer is not looking within ourselves (as in transcendental meditation). Biblical prayer is looking up to God.

Notice how Daniel began his 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."

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<sup>8</sup> in Wallace, 151

What do we learn about God here from Daniel?

1. *God is great.* Daniel addressed Him as "the great and awesome God." You can't have an accurate concept of *yourself* until you have an accurate concept of *God*. He is in a class all by Himself. He is great.

2. *God is good.* I love the two words Daniel uses to describe God in verse 4, "I prayed to the LORD *my God*." This is personal, for this is a personal conversation between two individuals who have a personal relationship.

You say, "If God is so great, how can I talk with Him? I'm so small, and so sinful."

It's because He who is great is also so very good, so good in fact that He has made a way for us to be able to say *my God*.

Not *my* as in, *He exists for me*. He's not a genie. But *my*, as in covenantal terms, and He established the covenant, and the terms.

He came after Abraham, and said I am yours and you are mine. He came after Moses and said the same. And Joshua. And Ruth. And David. And Isaiah. And many others, including Daniel, who said, "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands,

And then this covenant-making God sent His Son into the world who said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That's why we can say in prayer, *my God*, because of the work the Redeemer accomplished in our behalf. By dying on the cross Jesus the Christ took away the enmity, the barrier of sin, and by rising from the dead and ascending to heaven He opened the door, so that through Him we can now say, "My God."

In order for our prayers to be biblical, we must look up. The problem is, we're plagued with deficient thoughts of God. We're inclined to minimize His greatness and doubt His goodness.

Several years ago, I was in my study and the telephone rang. I answered it, "Wheelersburg Baptist Church," and heard a lady's voice ask: "May I speak with the owner?"

Taken back briefly, I replied, "The owner? This is a church."

To which the lady replied matter-of-factly, "I'd like to talk with the person who owns the residence."

I couldn't resist the opportunity so I responded, "God owns it. Are you calling to sell something?"

"Yes. House Insurance," was her reply.

And our conversation ended. I know the lady's call was more mistaken than intentional, but it reminded me that people, including us, have a tendency to leave God out of the picture. Yet the first perspective we need when we pray is to *look up*. We need to fix our attention on the One who is great and good.

**B. He looks back (5-6).** And specifically, he looks back and rehearses sin. This is a prayer of confession.

Verse 4, "I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed." To confess, what must we do? We must look back at our past. Daniel again shows us how. In his prayer, Daniel shows that in confession we must look back and verbalize two things to God.

1. *We confess the wrong we did (5).* Verse 5, "We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws."

Daniel didn't beat around the bush. He said it plainly, "We have sinned."

Did you realize that Daniel is one of the few characters in the Bible to whom some sin is *not* ascribed. Look back at the story. What sin in his life do you see recorded? Look at just about anyone else and you'll see it. Noah's drunkenness. Abraham's lying. Moses' anger. David's adultery and murder. The sin is right there in black and white.

But not even a hint against Daniel. Why then does he include himself in this confession, "*We have sinned*"? Was it really Daniel's fault that God judged the Israelites seventy years earlier?

Daniel had a better handle than most of us do on two issues. One is the corporate nature of God's covenant. Daniel's prayer, like the Lord's prayer, isn't an *I* prayer, but a *we* prayer. In God's covenant, it's not God and *me*, but God and *us*. We are entitled to both privileges and responsibilities because we are members of the community of God's redeemed.

The other issue Daniel grasped is the holiness of God. It may be true that your sin isn't as repulsive as your neighbor's sin in *your* eyes, but it's also true that *all* sin is repulsive in God's eyes and must be judged.

Daniel knew that. So when he prayed, he looked back and confessed the wrong *we* did.

But there's more. There's a second area which warrants our confession.

2. *We confess the right we didn't do (6)*. We can be guilty of sins of omission as well as commission. Daniel confessed of the former in verse 6, "We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land."<sup>9</sup>

Oh the heartache that could have been prevented had God's people listened! So Daniel grieves, "Lord, time after time You warned us. You pleaded with us. But we didn't listen."

*We didn't*. And we can relate, can't we? How often have we had to learn the hard way in our lives? We've heard what God wanted us to do. Our parents told us, "If you run with that crowd, you're going to get in trouble." Our youth leaders told us, "Don't be deceived. Sex is a beautiful thing inside the marriage bond, but it's a cruel master if you seek it before or outside of marriage."

Yes, we've known the right thing to do, but often, we didn't do it.

I enjoy languages, and am fascinated by words and sounds in different languages. In my estimation, here are three of the hardest words to say, and they're English, by the way. "*I was wrong*." It's hard to admit it, and even harder to say it.

Yet God-fearing Daniel said it, for he knew that confession is a prerequisite for restoration. It was for Israel. It is for us.

Did you realize that the true revivals of the past were always marked by confession of sin? When revival occurs, people make things right, first with God, and then with each other. We can't move forward until we face what's in our past with brokenness and humility.

Do you have any known sin in your life? Know this. Sin short-circuits the blessing of God—from your family, from your church, from yourself. But here's the good news. According to Proverbs 28:13, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."

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<sup>9</sup> The Living Bible: "We have refused to listen to Your servants the prophets, whom You sent again and again down through the years, with Your messages to our kings and princes and to all the people."

So let's look back this morning. And as we see things we shouldn't have done, or things we should have done, let's confess it to the One who knows. Let's say as did the psalmist in Psalm 130:3-4, "If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? <sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared."

That brings us to the third perspective in Daniel's prayer. He looks up, then looks back.

**C. He looks down (7-10).** In shame, that is. You can't help but look down when you see your sinfulness in the sight of a holy God. So in verses 7-10, notice three contrasts Daniel draws between God and His people. "God, *You* are this, but *we* are this."

1. *You are righteous, but we are ashamed (7-8).* Verse 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."

He says something similar in verse 8, "O Lord, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you."

Twice, Daniel describes his feelings, as the KJV puts it, as "confusion of face." He cries out to God, "Lord, You are righteous, but we are covered with shame."

Listen carefully. We live in a society that doesn't believe what Daniel just said. He says that shame is the result of sin. We are told that we can get rid of shame without getting rid of the sin.

For instance, if you stop going to church, stop giving the first part of your income to the Lord, and start making Sunday mornings a time for recreation rather than worship, what will you feel? Probably some shame.

Then suppose you cut some ethical corners at work on Monday. Then what will you feel? More shame.

Then to get your mind off all this, you start mindlessly wandering the internet, looking at things you know are not pleasing to God. And you feel? More shame. In fact, the inner turmoil of conviction may get so bad you can't sleep at night, your stomach's in knots, and your blood pressure starts going up.

So you google your symptoms, and go tell your doctor what you've found. "Doc, I can't sleep at night, and my stomach's always churning, and my blood pressure is too high. I think I'm having anxiety attacks. I think I need a prescription."

You get the point. I thank the Lord for medicine, but right here Daniel shows us the God-honoring way to get rid of shame. It's to get rid of the sin.

Listen to Daniel's words again in verse 8 (AV), "To us belongs confusion of face, because we have sinned against Thee." Why the shame? Because of sin.

Then there's a second contrast. First, You are righteous, but we are ashamed.

2. *You are merciful, but we've been rebellious (9).* Verse 9, "The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him." In the original, the nouns are plural.<sup>10</sup> What's available with God? Not just mercy and forgiveness (the NIV misses this), but "mercies and forgivenesses."

You see, there are lots of needy people in this world, and God's mercies and forgivenesses are sufficient for every person who needs it.

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<sup>10</sup> AV, "To the Lord, our God, belong mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against Him."

3. *You are faithful, but we've been unfaithful (10)*. Verse 10, "We have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets."

This is in stark contrast with what Daniel prayed back in verse 4. There he affirmed that the Lord keeps His covenant. With whom? With all who love Him and obey His commands.

But what does Daniel now confess as being his people's basic problem? In a word, *disobedience*. We have *not* obeyed the Lord. Rather, we have drifted from the Book.

So here are the perspectives of God-honoring, Bible-directed prayer. When Daniel prays, he looks up and sees God for who He is. Then he looks back and confesses his sin for what it is. Then he looks down in shame when he sees his people in contrast with God. I merely want to mention the final two perspectives which we'll develop next time.

**D. He looks to Scripture (11-14)**. He allows God to interpret the predicament.

**E. He looks up again (15-19)**. After reviewing how God helped His people in the past, Daniel invites God to act in the present. "Help us, Lord, for Your sake (17), for Your Name (18), because we are Your people (19)."

This is Bible directed praying. It's what Christ makes possible, and what we need.

*Inventory Time*: In the message that God used to initiate the Welsh Revival, Evan Roberts gave his congregation of 17 people four points. Here they are again:

1. Confess any known sin to God and put right any wrong done to man.
2. Put away any doubtful habit.
3. Obey the Spirit promptly.
4. And, confess faith in Christ openly.

True spiritual awakening is the work of the Spirit of God, and cannot be manufactured. But we can create an environment for revival. We can cooperate with the Holy Spirit instead of resisting Him. I want us, this morning, to take heed to these same four points.

1. Are their sins against God and wrongs you've committed against people that mark your life? Will you choose right now to confess those sins to God, and determine to make right any wrong you've done to another?

2. Do you have any doubtful, ungodly habits in your life? Will you get rid of them? Achan's hidden sin robbed the nation of Israel of God's blessing. Your hidden habit is robbing God of glory, not to mention it's robbing you, your family, and your church of the blessing God would pour out. Choose to put away that habit.

3. Are you willing to obey the Spirit promptly? Choose today to surrender your will to Him. Tell the Lord, "My life is Yours. Use me for Your honor."

4. Are you willing to confess faith in Christ openly? We are not saved by our good works. We are saved by trusting Christ. That's a private decision, but it has public implications. When we become a Christian, we are saying, "I no longer live for myself. I live for the One Who died for my sins, and Who lives in me." Are you willing to confess Christ *openly* today?

*Time of Response in Prayer*

*Hymn of Response: "I Need Thee Every Hour" (#428)*