

Faith in Times of Trouble

Devotional Reading: Matthew 8:18–27

Background Scripture: Daniel 6:1–28

Daniel 6:10–11, 14, 16, 19–23, 26–27

10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open 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 aforetime.

11 Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

14 Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

20 And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.

22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

23 Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

26 I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.

27 He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

Key Text

My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.—Daniel 6:22

Faith That Pleases God

Unit 3: The Righteous Live by Faith

Lessons 10–13

Lesson Aims

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

1. Summarize Daniel's personal conviction of faith in God in the midst of injustice.
2. Compare and contrast Daniel's faith-expression with those of his three colleagues in last week's lesson.
3. Commit to bearing faithful witness to God in facing a personal "lions' den."

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Authentic Prayer
- B. Lesson Context
- I. Violation and Consequence (Daniel 6:10–11, 14, 16)**
 - A. Daniel's Prayer (vv. 10–11)
Consistency
 - B. Darius's Problem (v. 14)
 - C. Den's Predators (v. 16)
- II. Release and Vindication (Daniel 6:19–23, 26–27)**
 - A. The Question (vv. 19–20)
Flooded with Faithfulness
 - B. The Innocent (vv. 21–23)
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Conclusion

- A. Confession as Celebration
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

AhasuerusUh-haz-you-ee-rus.

Ashurbanipal *As-shure-bah-nee-pahl*.

Babylon *Bab-uh-lun*.

Belshazzar *Bel-shazz-er*.

Hosea *Ho-zay-uh*.

Medes *Meeds*.

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

Introduction

A. Authentic Prayer

Would you feel comfortable “correcting” someone who was praying in a way that seemed wrong? My guess is that a majority of Christians would instantly respond *No! Prayer is personal between God and the person praying! Who am I to criticize or correct the prayer of another?* Alongside that reaction, however, we can place Scripture passages that *do* direct the form, content, and motives of our prayers. See, for example, Matthew 6:5–13; Luke 11:1–13; 18:1–14; and James 4:3.

Personal motives that stand behind prayer practices vary widely. Prayer has been used as a tool to gain political clout, as a public act of remembrance, or as a habitual nicety before meals. These kinds of prayers are often little more than exercises in ceremonial theism. Such “window dressing” prayer may achieve the desired earthly outcome, as it motivates people to act. The danger of such prayer is that it treats God as a kind of cosmic vending machine: insert the right words, get the right publicity, and receive the vended outcome. We know better in that regard, but do we *do* better?

A first step in doing better with regard to prayer is to remind ourselves that God is already aware of our needs (Matthew 6:32)—we can’t tell Him something He doesn’t already know. The foundational part of prayer, rather, is that it orients us to God’s faithfulness and ability to provide and protect. In prayer, we address the God who loved us enough to give His Son for our sins. And He wants to hear from us!

B. Lesson Context

The context for this lesson is generally the same as for lesson 11. However, several years had passed between the events of Daniel 3 (see lesson 11) and today’s Scripture. The most notable is that a new empire replaced the Babylonians: the Persians (2 Chronicles 36:15–20).

After a hand wrote a message of warning to Babylonian king Belshazzar, the king died (see Daniel 5:1–30). Scripture does not reveal exactly how he died, only that it occurred and that the 62-year-old “Darius the Median” (5:31), “son of Ahasuerus” (9:1), replaced him in power. Outside of Scripture, there is no mention of this particular “Darius,” and it was a common

name; therefore identifying him is nearly impossible. He is likely not the same as the Persian king Darius I (also known as Darius the Great) (reigned 522–486 BC) mentioned in Ezra 4–6; Haggai 1–2; Zechariah 1; 7; and perhaps in Nehemiah 12:22. One proposal identifies our “Darius” as a regional governor of Babylon, installed under the oversight of Cyrus. Another proposal hypothesizes that “Darius” was another name for a Persian commander who led the Persian army into Babylon.

Today’s study has as its backdrop the appointment of 120 “princes” under the oversight of three “presidents” that included Daniel (see Daniel 6:1–2). Daniel’s reputation with previous kings influenced Darius. The king “preferred” Daniel over all the other princes and presidents and “sought to set [Daniel] over the whole realm” (6:3). However, the king’s high regard for Daniel led Daniel’s peers to scheme against him. Although they tried to find fault with Daniel, they could not find grounds to file charges against him (6:4–5). Instead, they developed a trap that Darius could not overturn.

Their plan encouraged Darius to establish a statute that whoever should pray to any deity or man, except the king, for 30 days would be thrown into the den of lions (see Daniel 6:7). Prayer *for* a monarch was standard in the ancient Near East. But prayer *to* a monarch was exceptional. Further, the officials maneuvered the king to issue the decree “according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not” (6:8). There would be little Darius could do to prevent the enforcement of the statute after it he “signed the writing and the decree” (6:9).

I. Violation and Consequence (Daniel 6:10–11, 14, 16)

A. Daniel’s Prayer (vv. 10–11)

10. Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open 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 aforetime.

Daniel experienced a high level of privilege (and wealth) as an official of the king (Daniel 6:1–3). Houses in ancient Babylon would have had a flat rooftop that functioned as another room or patio. Frequently, these rooftop patios would have included walls and windows for privacy. However, for a man in Daniel’s position, his prayers could not have remained secret, even if he desired (compare Matthew 6:5–6).

The Law of Moses includes general commands regarding the people’s daily remembrance of God’s commands (example: Numbers 15:37–41). However, it did not command kneeling and praying *three times a day*.

At the dedication of Solomon’s temple, the Lord commanded the people to pray toward *Jerusalem* and the temple at various times of distress (see 1 Kings 8:35–38, 44–45, 48–49). Kneeling and bowing are mentioned together in Psalm 95:6 as parallel postures of worship.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can a consistent daily prayer time be beneficial to your relationship with God?

Digging Deeper

How can you guard against this practice becoming only a dry ritual?

Consistency

When I think of the word *consistency*, a deacon in a church where I ministered immediately comes to mind. Numerous crises had affected his life, including the death of his wife and his cancer diagnosis. Despite these tragedies, he kept a calm demeanor and a faithful presence in our congregation. His commitment to our community revealed his consistency in character and his consistency in his love for God and others.

That man was our church's Daniel. How do you practice consistency in the ways that you follow God? You might never know whose faith you strengthen as they watch the character of your faith!

—J. M.

11. Then these men assembled, and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.

These men were those who had pushed Darius to pass the decree that only the king was to be worshipped (see Lesson Context). Daniel's open windows made catching him in the act quite simple (see Daniel 6:10, above). He was *praying and making supplication* as was his habit without regard for any danger it posed (compare 9:2–3).

B. Darius's Problem (v. 14)

14. Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him: and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.

The phrase *these words* refers to Daniel 6:12–13 (not in our printed text), in which the king's officials reminded Darius of his decree and then revealed Daniel's disobedience to it. After hearing this, Darius realized how his officials had manipulated him for their selfish gain. They had used deception and Darius's naivete to launch their plan. He had inadvertently been a pawn in their scheme against Daniel. Rather than direct his displeasure toward Daniel, the king was *displeased* with his own behavior. The king had failed to see the underlying reason for the officials' request for the decree.

The king exerted himself in order to find grounds *to deliver* Daniel from the consequences of breaking the decree. "The law[s] of the Medes and Persians" are only mentioned in this narrative (Daniel 6:8, 15, not in our printed text) and in the book of Esther (Esther 1:19). The exact stipulations of these laws are unknown because there is no nonbiblical reference to them. Simply revoking the decree was out of the question (see Daniel 6:15; compare Esther 8:8). For the king to provide a way out for Daniel seemed impossible.

What Do You Think?

How does hoping for God's deliverance from harm differ from expecting a worldly authority to help?

Digging Deeper

How do you balance expecting God's deliverance with acknowledging that He might have other plans?

C. Den's Predators (v. 16)

16a. Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions.

The officials had forced the king's response, and he could not revoke the decree that initiated this chain of events. If Darius had responded in any way other than to approve the punishment, he would have revealed a disrespect for his culture and law. So he *commanded* that the previously determined consequences were to be leveled against Daniel.

The Lion Hunt of Ashurbanipal, an excavated Assyrian relief from the seventh century BC, depicts the sport of hunting lions and its importance for the Assyrian royals. The *den* was a place to hold trapped *lions* for use in a royal lion hunt. Lions remained there until the appropriate time when they would be released into an arena for the king to "hunt" and kill.

16b. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee.

Darius likely practiced a form of polytheism—the belief in many gods. As a result, if he believed in the same *God* that Daniel served, it was not a belief in God as the only true God. The text is unclear whether we should interpret the word as a form of skeptical sarcasm or a genuine prayer, though the latter is more likely.

Darius's response should prompt comparisons to Nebuchadnezzar's reaction when the three Jewish men refused to bow before the golden image (see Daniel 3, lesson 11). In that example, Nebuchadnezzar doubted that any god could rescue the three men (see 3:15). Only after seeing how God saved them did the king proclaim that "there is no other God that can deliver after this sort" (3:29). Darius, however, believed that God could *deliver* Daniel, even without him having evidence.

What Do You Think?

How do you encourage others as they wait for God's deliverance?

Digging Deeper

What verses encourage you when you are waiting on the Lord?

II. Release and Vindication

(Daniel 6:19–23, 26–27)

A. The Question (vv. 19–20)

19. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions.

The king's rising *very early* the next *morning* reveals his urgency and distress regarding Daniel's fate. Darius's anxiety regarding what he had done to Daniel led to a restless night (see Daniel 6:18, not in our printed text). Additionally, *the den* had been sealed with the royal signet and the signets of the other officials (see 6:17). No one would dare break the seal and save Daniel. The only way for Daniel to have survived the night with the *lions* would have been if God had intervened.

20. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel; and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?

A night without sleep or food would have escalated the king's anxiety regarding the life of one of his most trusted presidents. As Darius approached the sealed den, he called out *with a lamentable voice*, assuming the worst possible outcome.

The king's address to *Daniel* revealed his deepening understanding of the one true God. The pagan gods, idols, and images of Babylon (example: Daniel 3:1; 5:4) were lifeless (see Psalm 135:15–18). They were incapable of giving life to their worshippers. In contrast to these so-called gods, Darius recognized that the God of Daniel was *the living God* (also Daniel 6:26). Scripture uses this title regarding possible doubt (examples: Deuteronomy 5:26; 1 Samuel 17:26, 36; Isaiah 37:4; Matthew 16:16; John 5:26) or regarding God's provision (example: Psalm 84:2) and power (example: Jeremiah 10:10). The people of Israel survived because the living God was in their midst (see Joshua 3:9–10) and He made them His people (see Hosea 1:10). When the other nations trusted in their idols, the Israelites could trust the living God, the Lord who was their help and their protection (see Psalm 115:1–11).

Daniel's faithfulness to God was evident. The presidents and princes acknowledged that Daniel was free from fault and was entirely trustworthy (see Daniel 3:4). He behaved as a *servant* of the living God by showing honor and respect as a servant of the king.

Flooded with Faithfulness

My wife and I decided we would serve as foster parents. After completing the state's screening process, which included an inspection of our rental house, we were approved to foster. As we waited for the arrival of the children, a rainstorm flooded our house. Although we had no control over the flooding, we were evicted and told that we had caused the flooding.

Our dreams of being foster parents seemed dashed. However, after an extensive search, we found a new rental house. Much to our relief, it passed the state inspection. We were again approved to be foster parents! God's plan for our lives continued, despite us experiencing an apparent injustice.

Everything was outside Daniel's control, but it wasn't outside God's control. The next time you experience injustice, will you respond so that people call you a "servant of the living God"?

—J. M.

B. The Innocent (vv. 21–23)

21. Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever.

The king's advisors, direct reports, and even the queen wished for the king's good health and long life (Daniel 2:4; 3:9; 5:10; 6:6). However, this is the first and only time in the book that an Israelite greeted the *king* in this manner. Even though Daniel's situation came about because of the king's lack of insight, *Daniel* still greeted him with respect and honor.

22. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

Daniel first attributed his survival to the intervention of an *angel* from *God* (see also Daniel 3:28). Angels are heavenly beings who serve God and follow His commands (see Psalm 103:20). Their ministry includes serving God's people (see Hebrews 1:13–14; example: Numbers 20:16), including protection (see Psalm 34:7; example: Acts 12:11). This angel miraculously *shut the lions' mouths*, though precisely how is unknown (see also Hebrews 11:32–33).

Second, Daniel noted that he survived because he was innocent before God and the *king*. Innocence does not mean that Daniel lived perfectly. Later, he confessed before God the ways

that he had been a part of the sin of his people (Daniel 9:1–19). Instead, Daniel could claim innocence in this matter because he had followed God and was faithful to God’s law.

23. Then was the king exceeding glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.

The king’s distress changed to joy and gladness upon seeing God’s deliverance at work (compare Isaiah 25:9). Daniel escaped his ordeal without being *hurt* or wounded (compare Daniel 3:27). Although God saved Daniel, Scripture is clear that faithfulness does not obligate God to save believers from death by martyrdom. For some believers, martyrdom is possible (see Luke 21:16; examples: Acts 7:54–60; Hebrews 11:35–38). Anyone who remains faithful to God in the midst of suffering has been promised eternal rewards (see Revelation 2:10). Public displays of faithfulness will have a transforming influence on the community. This transformation can occur individually, such as how Darius became exceedingly *glad* for Daniel. However, it can also occur for a whole kingdom, as the following verses indicate.

C. The Decree (vv. 26–27)

26a. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.

After hearing from Daniel and observing how God had saved him from the lions, Darius proceeded with two actions. First, he commanded that the officials who had accused Daniel face the same punishment they had intended for him (see Daniel 6:24, not in our printed text). Second, Darius wrote *a decree* to “all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth” (6:25). Such wide-reaching language suggested the scope of *every dominion* of the *kingdom* (see also 3:4).

Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar had decreed that no one speak against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:28–29). Darius’s decree went further—it legislated that all people *fear* the *God of Daniel*. Coming from the mouth of a pagan king, this kind of fear could include being afraid of the consequences of God’s righteousness (see Genesis 3:10; Isaiah 33:14; Luke 12:4–5; Hebrews 10:31). It could also refer to a respectful sense of worship to God (see Deuteronomy 6:2–3; 1 Samuel 12:24; Psalms 2:11; 147:11).

26b. For he is the living God, and steadfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.

The decree provided several reasons why the king’s subjects should fear Daniel’s God. First, Daniel’s God is *the living God*, and He alone can give life and sustenance to all who would receive it (see commentary on Daniel 6:20, above). Second, God’s kingdom would never be destroyed and would never end (see Psalm 145:13). Earthly kingdoms, like the Babylonians, will end. However, God is the eternal king, and His kingdom will be eternal (see Exodus 15:18; Isaiah 9:7; Daniel 2:44; 7:14, 27; Luke 1:29–33; etc.).

What Do You Think?

How do you refute the idea that God is not active in His creation?

Digging Deeper

Do you have any habits that might suggest God is not active in creation? If so, what change will you make to acknowledge His continued work?

27. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

The decree also emphasized how God had done miraculous work for His people. God showed His power to His people by delivering and rescuing them (examples: Exodus 20:2; Psalm 34:4; Daniel 3:26–29; Jeremiah 15:11). When God rescued His people, He frequently did so through miraculous *signs and wonders* (see Exodus 14:13–30; Jeremiah 32:19–22). The way God *delivered Daniel* was no exception.

Conclusion

A. Confession as Celebration

Public confessions model something meaningful for today's Christians. It's easy to think of "confession" as an admission of sin, especially in a lurid, tell-all fashion. But that is not what the word means when describing the texts in Daniel. Here, the confession tells good news. The Lord chose to deliver Daniel, which resulted in the king's surprising new edict. Daniel's confessing what happened with the lions and the king's reaction reoriented both the characters in the story and those reading about them to a larger truth. God's reign is both eternal and full of goodness. God's loyalty to His people reflects His divine character and the large-scale divine plan to redeem humanity. Daniel knew that, and eventually, so did Darius.

So do we. The church continues to confess its sins but also God's redemption. Our life of celebration begins where Darius ended his learning experience. By repeatedly confessing God's goodness, we bring those outside within hearing distance of the gospel itself. Daniel did so by his faithfulness in this story, and we do so too when we confess the gospel of our salvation.

What Do You Think?

What would you say is the greatest "wonder" God has worked in your life?

Digging Deeper

How will you confess this wonder in order to edify both believers and unbelievers?

B. Prayer

Living God, You care for Your people and have promised to be with us no matter what we face. Give us the courage to face adversity and maintain faithfulness to You. Help us behave with mercy to those who have sought to harm us. Show us how to follow You in a manner that brings other people closer to You. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Our faithfulness to God has personal and public implications.