

The Lion's Den

Daniel 6

By [Wiley Lowry](#)

If you would turn with me to Daniel chapter 6 or you can look there on your handouts. Martin Lloyd-Jones once said that "everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer." Everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer, and yet prayer is a vital component of the Christian life. It's a vital component of how God works in us and nurtures us and provides for us and protects us amidst worldly distractions and disappointments so that we can live faithfully and joyfully with righteousness to Him. So we're going to look at Daniel chapter 6 and really see how prayer stands out as a part of Daniel's life this evening. So let's pray again and we'll look at that passage.

Father, we give You thanks for Your Word. We give You thanks for faithful men and women who have gone before us and exemplified a life of godliness and holiness. And we look to Daniel tonight but we ask that You would help us to look to Jesus, that we would see Him and our deliverance in Him and we would hope and be faithful to You. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Daniel chapter 6. We'll read the whole chapter:

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God."

Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days,

except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, "O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?" The king answered and said, "The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." Then they answered and said before the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day."

Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, "Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed." Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions - they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom

of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces.

Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."

So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian."

The Life and Ministry of Daniel

Well last time I was here I believe it was a few months back; we looked at Daniel chapter 5 and in that passage we saw that Belshazzar was king in Babylon which had now become Persia. We saw that Belshazzar was weighed in the balances and found wanting. And in the space of one night his kingdom was summarily overthrown and the Persians came in and set up their kingdom in the capital of Babylon and Darius the Mede was placed in charge of that kingdom. Around 70 years have passed since Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego - around 70 years have passed since they were brought as young men, as boys, impressionable youths from Judah as exiles, as captives, to serve and to live in Babylon. Daniel's not a young man anymore; he's over eighty years old. And so much has gone on in his lifetime in Babylon. Think of all the storms he's weathered, all the trials he's endured, the political turmoil he's witnessed. Over and over again kingdoms rise and fall - kings are set up; kings are taken away. In his lifetime he's lived in three different kingdoms - first in Judah, and then in Babylon, and now in Persia. And in fact that's one of the main themes of the book of Daniel is the fleeting nature of human power.

Daniel could certainly attest to that by his own experience. And what was true in Babylon was also true in Persia, that there are no grounds for placing our hope and our peace on human kingdoms, on human rulers. What would be the effect of that? What was the effect that that would have had on Daniel as he sees all these changes in his lifetime and the fleeting nature of human power? Because you cannot find peace and hope and security in human power, does that mean that he found no hope and security and peace? What would have been the cumulative effect of all these changes in his life? Of course he still had hope and he still had peace. That comes out over and over throughout this passage - his security and how settled he is in the midst of all these changes. Why could he do that? Because he had a hope and a certainty in God's dominion, in God's rule.

I wonder if we can relate to the spiritual challenges facing Daniel? We know that from experience if not by the Word of God that we can't place our hope and security in money, in family, in health, or in a certain political party. Does that mean we give up hope and any aspirations for security? Of course not, because our hope in God is certain. And Daniel gives us a great example of how his prayer life nurtured that hope and nurtured that security that he had in God.

I. The Discipline of Prayer

We know that prayer is an important part of Daniel's life in the first place because he was disciplined in his prayer. Think about that. The hours and the days and the years of Daniel's life were marked by prayer. He had an ingrained pattern or habit of prayer in his life. We saw there in verse 5 of chapter 6 that when the men are trying to find a ground of complaint for him, against him, it says, "We shall not find any ground of complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God." They know that Daniel's righteous, they know that he's innocent, and the only way that they can hope to unseat him or to unsettle him is by looking to find a way to entrap him according to the law of God. Think about that. Can that be said about us? What a compliment that is to Daniel that that could be said about him. There's actually a lot of parallels there with Christ, isn't there? Remember when Christ was at His trial and His accusers were trying to condemn Him that Pilate said, "He's innocent. I can find no grounds to condemn this man." And they said, "Look for a way to condemn Him according to your own law." That's what these men are doing.

And when Daniel hears about the law, what does it do? Look at verse 10. It says, "He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously." Everything in that verse demonstrates Daniel's discipline of prayer.

Disciplined in Body

In the first place he disciplined his body. It says he got down on his knees. And not only is that a physical demonstration of humility and dependence and submission but it's an indication of the way Daniel prepared his soul and his body to pray, that he was intentional to be attentive and alert and set out a specific time and a place, that he was concerned about the position and the time of his prayer.

He was disciplined with his body. I think that's something that we don't always think about when we think about prayer - a way to discipline our body about being alert and being focused and having a physical display of submission and dependence. What is it that puts us in the best context for prayer? That may not always be feasible but there may be times that we're sick and we're tired, we're aching; we can't get down on our knees. But what is it that gets us in the right

context, that sets our mind to God, that makes us attentive to Him in submitting to Him, disciplining our body for prayer?

Disciplined with Time

Not only is he disciplined with his body but he's disciplined with his time. "It says he prays three times a day as he had done previously." This is not a new undertaking for Daniel. He was not thrust from all this commotion and the turmoil that was going on around him. He wasn't thrust from those things into prayer but this was a habit that had been with him for his entire life. He had a constant, a consistent and dependable time with God in prayer. It was his habit so when trials came he knew where to go; he went to God. We saw that if you were to look back in chapter 2. You remember when Nebuchadnezzar had that dream and he didn't want the interpretation of the dream, he wanted his wise men to tell him what the dream was and what the interpretation was. What did Daniel do? He and his friends got together and they sought mercy from God. It was a pattern of prayer in his life, from youth to old age, and in different positions and different administrations, when he prospered and when he was cast down, Daniel was going before God in prayer. That was his habit. It was a testimony of faithfulness that he consistently sought the Lord and went before God over and over again.

And yet I think sometimes we recoil a little bit with that. We feel uneasy equating discipline and devotion. We don't like thinking about habit and prayer together. We think in these spiritual realities, "Shouldn't they be more spontaneous or shouldn't they be more organic?" And there's a place for that in the Christian life for prayer but there's also a place, and we see the importance and the benefit that it served in Daniel's life, of being disciplined and devoted both with our body and with time to pray to God. It's a great testimony that Daniel gives to us. It's almost as if Daniel's life is structured by prayer. It's like it gave him guide rails that as he went through each day and he faced different challenges he had a compass and that compass pointed him to God over and over again. The habit of prayer kept him going. I remember Derek Thomas in seminary talking about that and commending the habit of prayer. And he said that oftentimes when you're going through difficult times, when you're depressed or when you're grieving, it's that habit of prayer that gets you through the day and it gets you to the next day; it directs you to God. It points you to Him as the source of all encouragement and as the source of all comfort.

A Source of Strength throughout the Course of Life

A lot of you may remember Mrs. Ann Comfort. Mrs. Comfort taught first grade Sunday School here at the church I think for about 175 years! She taught first grade Sunday School I think when I went through and from what I understand she ran a pretty tight ship. But I remember visiting with her in the last few years of her life and her memory had faded, her health had declined somewhat, and I asked her, "How do you sleep? Do you sleep ok?" And she said, "Oh yeah, I

kneel down by my bed, say my prayers, and put my head on my pillow and go to sleep.” And it was just a beautiful testimony of in old age and through the trials of failing health and failing memory that she still had that habit of going to God in prayer and looking to Him for peace and comfort and support and it was a really encouraging thing for me to see.

Frank Boreham, he was an Australian minister - I may have mentioned him before. He wrote an essay one time called, “The Tireless Trudge.” And he said that he overheard a debate between two men. They were trying to decide what was the most difficult of a long journey. One of them said it was the beginning when you have so much road ahead of you. One of you said it’s the end when you have so much road behind you and you’re tired. I was thinking the most difficult part of the long journey is when the Dora the Explorer videos run out! But what Boreham says is that neither one of those guys was right. It’s neither the beginning nor the end that’s the most difficult part of a long journey but it’s the middle. He says it’s the time when you’re unassisted by enthusiasm and so likely to faint. And that’s exactly the time when in our walk with God over many years, in the middle of those years when it’s maybe a tireless trudge at times, that we need a consistent and a disciplined time of prayer to keep us faithful to God and to find hope and comfort just as Daniel did. We see a great picture of that and the blessing it was to Daniel here in chapter 6.

II. The Devotion of Prayer

Now at the heart of Daniel’s discipline of prayer is his devotion of prayer. I think we see that in three different areas. The first is trust and then gratitude and then faithfulness.

Trust

The first thing is that prayer demonstrates trust. It’s a demonstration of trust. And Daniel clearly demonstrates his trust to God throughout this ordeal. His faith and his behavior are contrasted with the faith and the behavior of all those officials that we see listed in this passage. You’ll notice there the presidents and the satraps - what is it that they rest their hope in? What is their scheme grounded on? It’s grounded on the law of the Medes and the Persians. They had a confidence that the law of the Medes and the Persians could not be revoked. Four times in the passage - verses 8, verse 12, verse 15, and verse 17 we read about the king’s ruling being irrevocable, that it would stand. You know if there was anything they could count on in all their plans it was the king’s law. Actually, the king’s law did its job; it actually held up. It was just that the lions didn’t do their part. But what we see is that their trust and their hope and their confidence was in Darius’ ruling and it failed. It didn’t stand up.

And then we look also at the king. Notice how the king, here we are talking about

his ruling, and it's firm and it's established, and yet as we go through the passage and as the tension in the passage and the story builds, the king is actually unraveling, he's falling apart, he's anxious, he's agitated, he's worried, he's in turmoil. Look in verse 14. It says, "The king heard these words and he was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel." And down in verse 18 it says, "The king spent the night fasting. His sleep fled from him." Verse 19 - "He went to the den of lions; he went in haste." And then in verse 20 it says, "He cried out in a tone of anguish." So as the tension in the story builds, the king, who is the one who should be the most powerful man, whose law stands firm, he's falling apart. His confidence is shot. He couldn't do anything to deliver Daniel from this trial. And yet Daniel is composed and he's steadfast; he's going before God in trust and in prayer.

There's something about Daniel even in this passage that he's almost Christ-like. Daniel, in this passage, Daniel does not speak until verse 21. Through all these threats and attempts on his life he's silent. It reminds us of what Isaiah prophesies about Jesus in chapter 53. "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He was led as a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." How could He do that? How could Christ do that? How could Daniel do that? It's because his confidence and his trust was in God and he was submitting to God's will and obeying His commands, whatever the challenges called for. And that trust is evident in Daniel's commitment to pray. And then when Daniel finds himself unharmed after spending the night with the lions, look at what it says is the reason - verse 23. It says, "because he had trusted in his God." Daniel's prayer in his life exhibited a trust and a confidence in God and that showed up in his prayer.

A Call to God-Glorifying Trust

And I think a fruitful exercise for us to go through as we think about Daniel's story, and if you're reading through the narrative of the book of Daniel, come alongside it with the book of Psalms and read the psalms and you'll notice how so many of the psalms actually give words to the circumstances that Daniel was going through, that they provide prayers that Daniel would have been able to apply and to use in his trials, in his challenges, in his difficulties. Psalm 40 is one where David prays. He says, "Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me. O Lord, make haste to help me. Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion who seek to destroy my life. Let them be driven backward and brought to dishonor who wish me evil." And that's exactly the prayer that's answered for Daniel in this passage. All that he needed, Daniel looked to God to meet.

Do we do that? There may be things that we're facing right now that throw us into anxiety. We may be right on the edge of being burned out. What do we do with that? Where do we go with that anxiety, with that burnout, in a difficult circumstance like what Daniel was facing? There was an article recently, a cover

article in The Atlantic magazine. A guy wrote it and it's called, "Surviving Anxiety." And he talks about his own struggle with anxiety and he talks about how it paralyzed him in a lot of ways and how he went into different treatments and he had different kinds of medications and he studied it for himself and really his conclusion was that really the science was inconclusive, the medication was spotty at best in the way it helped him. And I think that what we can take out of that, in having God's Word and the gift of prayer, it's that while we don't deny the physical component of anxiety we also have to look to and identify a problem of trust, of trusting the Lord, of acknowledging our inadequacy, of seeking out mercy, of going to Him for help when we worry, when we face anxiety and we face trials such as that. And even if we're not delivered from those things as we go to God in prayer we're going to God, we're going to Him and we're seeking to honor Him and to glorify Him. And that can only do us good and can only bring God glory.

Gratitude

The second thing about Daniel's devotion is gratitude. Here's Daniel, he's in exile, he's faced with what is a definite life sentence; he's faced with death. This is not the most inviting work environment. You know, the morale around the kingdom would not have been good with all this going on. And you get the impression that these men are trying to frustrate and to side track and to marginalize and discredit Daniel all to no avail, that then they turn to some religious persecution. There's a lot of relevance there, I think, with our own day, and it's important for us to see how Daniel responds to all of that as he faces these challenges and these threats from his colleagues. How does he respond? Verse 10 says "he gave thanks before his God." Even in hardship, Daniel could look and he could point to the innumerable ways that God had blessed him. He had blessed him in advancing him in positions of authority, he had blessed him by calling him into the number of God's people, he had blessed him by giving him wisdom and insight into the mind of the king by showing him the mysteries and the details of history as they were about to unfold. God even gave Daniel a glimpse of God's great plan of redemption if we were to look in one chapter over in Daniel 7 where he foretells the coming of the Messiah, the Son of Man. Daniel is seeing all these things. Even in his trials, even in his hardship, God is good to Daniel and Daniel could look to those things and give thanks to God. He could be a grateful man, a grateful servant, because God has blessed him even when so much else is difficult for him.

And not only could Daniel be thankful in hardships but he could also be thankful for hardships because Daniel would know just as Joseph knew that when men meant evil God meant it for good. And Daniel also could be thankful that he was being counted worthy to suffer for the honor of God's kingdom and to give occasion for God's name to be glorified. I mean look at that last couple of verses there about how the king gives God's name honor and glory because of the way Daniel responds and the way God demonstrates His power within Daniel's

hardships. I think Daniel really gives flesh and blood to Philippians 4:6-7 that, "Do not be anxious about anything but by everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." That's what Daniel's doing - prayer and petition with thanksgiving. And his thanksgiving and his gratitude, they don't just stay in his home; it's not just a Sunday morning thing but it spills out into every day of his life in a life of faithfulness.

Faithfulness

That's the third thing - faithfulness. You'll notice there how the opposition, those people who were against him, talk about how blameless he was. Verse 16 - the king talks about how God was with him and would deliver him. Verse 20 talks about that. Daniel himself is confident of his own righteousness, of his own innocence in this matter. He had lived an upright life, he was a picture of godliness in an ungodly society, and he stands out. Daniel stands out in this whole picture. Why? Not because he's trying to bring fame or honor or attention to himself but because he's salt and light. He has a preserving and an illuminating quality to his life that for several decades he stood up for justice and truth and righteousness and bringing glory to God's name.

And we could bring that same situation into our current context, into the front page headlines that we see today. One article that I saw recently said, "How much money is morality worth?" And it was talking about, as business owners make moral choices, are they willing to risk the profit that may come to them? We could edit that headline and say things such as, "How much ridicule, how much embarrassment, how many friendships is our devotion to God worth?" What we see from Daniel and what we can begin to do is by devote ourselves to prayer and trusting God and being faithful to Him and living that out to Him.

III. The Deliverance of Prayer

Let's close with the deliverance of prayer. The last thing - discipline of prayer, devotion of prayer, deliverance of prayer. Don't let the familiarity of this story tame the lions. You know just because we've read this story in children's board books, we've seen in on Veggie Tales, don't let that tame the lions. You can get a picture or a sense of how dangerous and threatening this situation was for Daniel just by going to the zoo. You go and see the big cats and their huge paws and their giant teeth and their terrifying muscles. This was a fearful situation. Go to the zoo and look at it. If you go to the Jackson Zoo you can get a sense of how fearful it was just because you're not really sure they're going to stay in their enclosures! But you also see a little bit of how terrifying this was just by seeing what happens to the men who tried to take Daniel down. It says that "their children and their wives were cast into the den of lions and before they reached

the bottom of the den the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. “ This is a fierce situation, Daniel didn’t stand a chance, but God delivered Daniel. He shut the lion’s mouth, He sent the angel, and delivered Daniel from this trial. And yet I think what may be the more miraculous deliverance in this passage is that God delivered Daniel not just from the lion’s den but He delivered him from the effects of Babylon, that He didn’t allow Daniel to succumb to the threats and the temptations of materialism and idolatry and putting his faith on the backseat, but He kept Daniel faithful, serving Him and honoring Him in the midst of all these temptations.

A Gospel Picture

And a part of that deliverance was the destruction of his enemies. And that’s a part of the Gospel, that’s a part of the good news that we should remember. Even as gruesome and as unappealing as it is in this passage, God gives salvation and blessing to all those who trust in Christ but on all the evil He destroys and brings His judgment until the fullness of His everlasting kingdom is established in the person of Christ, our Savior and our Lord. We need that good news. We need that reminder when we face obvious challenges to our faith and wellbeing, when we’re in the middle of a lion’s den of our own. Remember what Peter says, that “our adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.” We need to take confidence in God’s deliverance of us in Christ, that the God who delivered Daniel from the lion’s den delivered Christ from the tomb, that the grave cannot overcome His people either. And we can go from there and discipline ourselves to cut off all distractions, to cast our eyes on Jesus over and over and over again, and to take advantage of that great Gospel blessing of prayer, praying in Christ’s name in gratitude and in trust and living out faithfully before God bringing glory to His name because His kingdom stands forever. Daniel gives us a great example of that; ultimately we have our deliverance from Christ and that gives us this hope that we can stand firm and pour out our requests and our needs to Him and find grace to help in a time of need. So let’s close in prayer.

Father, we do thank You for Your Word and we thank You for Your deliverance. Thank You for the gift of prayer. And even now as we come before You to bring our requests to You, we ask that You would encourage us and give us boldness as we approach You and that You would be glorified. We pray these things in Jesus’ name, amen.

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