

God's Protection Sustains His People

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: God advances His kingdom through His people's faith in Him, including when their faithfulness leads them into trials.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: Daniel 6

In 1653, Bulstrode Whitelock traveled to Sweden as an ambassador from England on behalf of Oliver Cromwell. He had the difficult job of representing his country that was still dealing with the fallout of a civil war and tensions in the government and the church. The night before his departure, Whitelock anxiously paced the floor, when a trusted servant led in this exchange:

“Pray, sir, do you not think that God governed the world very well before you came into it?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“And pray, sir, do you not think that He will govern it quite as well when you are gone out of it?”

“Certainly.”

“Then, sir, pray excuse me, but do not you think you may trust Him to govern it quite as well as long as you live?”

Gripped by the correction, Whitelock went to bed and was soon fast asleep.¹



How does our appetite for control forfeit the peace of God in our lives?

Group Time

Point 1: God's servant faithfully prays to the Lord (Dan. 6:6-10).

⁶ Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever!" ⁷ 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.

⁸ 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." ⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

¹⁰ 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.

Things were difficult for Daniel in exile. Though he enjoyed the esteem of each monarch he served, the officials serving with and below him resented his favor with King Darius. These wicked men conspired to discredit Daniel, but his impeccable integrity exposed no flaws (6:1-5). So they manipulated Darius to entrap him. Still, Daniel kept himself anchored to the kingdom of heaven through his daily petitions.

Voices from the Church

"Our lack of spiritual power in Christianity today is not due to the sermons we preach or the songs we sing. Rather, it is due to our lack of prayer. We do not pray like it matters."²

—Steve Gaines

Sin's Effects in the World: Sin has infected and redirected the social structures of society, leading to _____ and oppression. The good news of the _____ is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of _____.

Daniel resolved to obey God rather than men. His refusal to comply with the king's command was not an aggressive act of rebellion but a deep devotion to God's higher law instead. So too, a Christian's commitment to Christ must always take precedence.



What are some ways it is difficult to be true to Scripture in our context?

Point 2: God's servant faithfully relies on the Lord for rescue (Dan. 6:13-23).

¹³ 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." ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ 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."

¹⁶ 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!" ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him.

¹⁹ Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. ²⁰ 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?" ²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! ²² 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." ²³ 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.

After placing his favorite Hebrew in the lions' den, Darius could not eat or sleep that night. Daniel, however, had a much different experience. He had prayed willingly despite the hasty law that threatened him, and he enjoyed a peaceful evening despite his feline company. The Lord protected him and spared his life.




How have you experienced God's peace through faith in the midst of your obedience and its results?

A different result in the lions' den would not have been a failure by Yahweh. Daniel knew what the Lord *could* do, but he was at peace no matter what his God *chose* to do. His obedience was settled whether he lived or died. We do not obey God to avoid death; we obey Him without fear because we understand death does not have the last word.


Point 3: God uses His servant to advance His kingdom (Dan. 6:25-27).

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: “Peace be multiplied to you. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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.”

Through the opportunity afforded by Daniel’s faithfulness, God revealed to a pagan king His strength, eternity, and sovereignty. Certainly, the Lord’s character would not have been in jeopardy had Daniel capitulated to the evil around him, but His divine attributes may have remained hidden from those around Daniel apart from his steady endurance through an extremely frightening trial.

 How has God used your faithfulness in the past week to make Himself known to others in your spheres of influence?

What was the significance of Daniel’s life? The kingdom of heaven would march forward with or without this godly man. Yet the lifelong commitment of this individual resulted in repeated acknowledgments throughout the known world that Yahweh is the true God. Despite his pagan surroundings, Daniel pointed both Jews and Gentiles to the only kingdom that really matters, and both Jews and Gentiles will benefit from this kingdom for all eternity through the coming of the Messiah.

 What priorities should we have so our lives have eternal significance for the sake of the Messiah and His kingdom?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read Daniel 6:1-5

Daniel's elevation during Israel's exile is inspiring. Under three unbelieving leaders, God's servant remained faithful and righteous, earning him the trust of all he served. Not everyone, however, celebrates when the people of God function as salt and light in the world. The resistance Daniel faced is not unlike the open hostility that living as a Christian in the twenty-first century invites. Though God will use us to be a blessing to many, some enemies will resent and lash out at genuine faith. The more God elevates us, the greater the resistance likely will be.

Responding correctly to attacks like these requires tremendous confidence in God's sovereignty over your life and an abiding contentment with His plans. The hatred of a few should not prevent us from blessing as many people as possible as we live by faith. Daniel's commitment was unshakeable, much like the resolve of Jesus. We too must strive to live with complete integrity no matter the personal cost.



How has your service to the Lord been a blessing to others? How has it cost you?



Voices from Church History

"Satan comes as a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8-9) and uses our enemies to try to devour us (2 Tim. 4:17), but God can deliver us if it is for His glory. It is not always God's will to deliver His children from danger; many Christians have given their lives in the place of duty. But what a reward they receive!"⁴

—Warren Wiersbe (1929–2019)

Day 2: Read Daniel 6:6-10

Faithfulness to God's Word is not only difficult in our modern era, but it also puts us in direct contradiction to the expectations and rules of our contemporary context, whether spoken or unspoken. Because the days of cultural religiosity are dissipating, perhaps even gone, the basic expressions of Christianity are becoming increasingly offensive. Daniel's example is a reminder that our obedience must not change though the world around us is changing. With full knowledge of the potential cost, Daniel chose to live by a higher law. God calls us to do the same.

Doing so will require us to resist justifying compromise with unbiblical excuses. Often, keeping our faith quiet or hidden seems reasonable, not because it is but because it is much easier. While we should strive to be good citizens whose presence blesses society, we should be unashamed in our determination to please God more than those around us. Our enthusiasm to serve our true King ought to be a constant reminder that this world is not our final home.



In what ways do you feel pressure to compromise your faith because of the standards in our world?

Day 3: Read Daniel 6:11-24

The Lord always protects His people. Daniel's survival in the lions' den is a vivid example of the relentless care and security God offers to us. This does not mean, however, that our outcomes after adversity will always be as favorable as what we read here. Stated differently, the trials we face in the immediate do not negate what God provides for us eternally. Though we praise the Lord when He meets an earthly need or provides deliverance, our confidence in Him must rest beyond what we can see with our eyes. Because nothing can separate us from the love of God, we know our Savior's faithfulness is not circumstantial (Rom. 8:31-39). We do not fear those who can kill our bodies precisely because of our certainty that the heavenly Father protects our souls.

Trusting God may be a simple concept to grasp, but it is much more difficult to live. Knowing that our future is secure, however, helps us lift our gaze to eternity when the present is harsh or painful. Daniel was just as victorious before God saved him from the lions as he was afterward. And so are we—in view of our eternal well-being.



How do your circumstances today increase or diminish your confidence in God's protection over your life?

Day 4: Read Daniel 6:25-28

The enduring impact of Daniel's faithfulness to the Lord is as inspiring to us as it is instructive. After watching his servant emerge from the lions' den unscathed, King Darius not only rejoiced but also worshiped Daniel's God. Consider, for a moment, how remarkable it is that two pagan rulers voiced the eternal glory and power of Yahweh because of the witness of one man. The consistency and perseverance of Daniel were powerful tools for advancing God's kingdom in a difficult place. His presence in Babylon was even instrumental in Israel's return to their homeland.

Today, our lives possess similar potential. Though our eternal impact is rarely the result of magnanimous moments and accomplishments, the steady, constant witness of trusting God through all of life's hills and valleys has profound influence on those around us. Ultimately, only eternity will reveal the full ripple effect of our commitments to Christ.



How do you want your life to make a difference for God's kingdom?

Day 5: Read Acts 4:1-31

Boldly speaking the words of Christ and pointing others to Him can often be costly. Just as Daniel nearly died because of his faith, the early apostles faced threats and hardship because of their efforts to influence others. After Peter and John healed a lame man, religious leaders who could not deny the miracle accosted them anyway. This account is a reminder to us that just as prophets suffered persecution, circumstances will sometimes force us to choose between misunderstood obedience or sinful compromise (Matt. 5:11-12).

Yet we should not lose sight of the reality that the endurance of God's faithful servants often results in the miraculous. The early church continued to grow exponentially because of their witness. Likewise, our resolve to be salt and light no matter the personal cost will bear eternal fruit. Regardless of how well known you might be, your life can make a significant difference in God's kingdom. Insults and false accusations should never hinder our efforts to be Christ's witnesses (Acts 1:8).



How are you being intentionally bold for Christ? How has God used your efforts?

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2. A. W. Tozer, *Worship: The Reason We Were Created—Collected Insights from A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody, 2017) [eBook].

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2. Yoiyah Yilpet, "Haggai," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1102.
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Think about the encouragement people often share to help others through times of adversity. We might hear someone speak of how pressure is required to transform coal into a diamond; thus, pressure can be good for us, transforming us into someone better. Or we might be told of the hatchling that has to work to break through its eggshell, and that struggle is good for this creature—even necessary—so that it grows strong. Likewise, adversity strengthens us and positions us to be who we were meant to be.

While these illustrations might provide encouragement, they reveal something quite important about the world's view of adversity. The world sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to dig deep, gaze within their soul, and discover who he or she truly is. But the gospel tells a different story—a better story. The gospel sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to look high above, gaze upon Christ, and see who He truly is. For it is Christ, not ourselves, who carries us through all trials and suffering. Adversity positions us to rely on Christ's power, not an inner human strength that has been lying dormant.

In this volume we pick up the story of Scripture with the Jews living in bondage in a foreign land, the result of their rebellion against God. But even in the midst of judgment, God's faithful love still shines forth brightly. We will witness God continuing to guide, strengthen, and protect His people in their time of great adversity, not to help them discover who they were but rather to understand who He is. At the same time, we will see God continue to drive the events of history toward the fulfillment of His ancient promise to provide the Rescuer, the One who would free people from an even greater bondage, that of sin and death.