

The Gospel Project® for Adults

Daily Discipleship Guide ESV, Unit 16, Session 3

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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.

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?

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

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?

My Mission

Because we are citizens of the kingdom of God through Christ, we obey God above the world's governments and, if necessary, engage in civil disobedience to advance the gospel.

- **How do you need to lay down your life in service to the Lord who laid His down for your salvation from sin and death?**
- **In what ways can your group support each other as you live distinct from the fallen culture around you?**
- **What radical commitment in your life might give you an opportunity to share your faith?**

Voices from the Church

“While Daniel suffered but lived, our Lord died a terrible death, as did many Christians who were thrown to the lions ... and as many do today. Deliverance may or may not come in this life. We have the advantage over Daniel in that we know the Messiah has come and conquered death for us.”³

–Angukali Rotokha