

Main Idea: From Daniel 6:1-15, we're going to be reminded of the importance of seeking first God's kingdom by highlighting Daniel's response to three situations.

- I. The Promotion (1-5)
    - A. Daniel rose to the top (1-3).
    - B. Daniel had fixed priorities (4-5).
      1. God is first.
      2. My other responsibilities come next.
  - II. The Plot (6-9)
    - A. His peers framed him (6-8).
      1. They used flattery.
      2. They used deception.
    - B. The king forgot him (9).
  - III. The Prayer (10-14)
    - A. Daniel prayed like he always prayed (10-11).
      1. It was a bold prayer.
      2. It was a biblical prayer.
      3. It was a humble prayer.
      4. It was a disciplined prayer.
      5. It was a grateful prayer.
      6. It was a specific prayer.
    - B. His peers pounced on him as planned (12-15).
    - C. A pagan king prayed (16).
- Make It Personal: Two lessons from Daniel...
1. We must take the Lord seriously.
  2. We must take prayer seriously.

*Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-8*

Prayer. It's what we do. We're commanded to pray. We're privileged to pray. We need to pray. Our mission advances as we pray.

So what would you do if the law said it was illegal to pray? I mean, *really* pray, not in a generic form but as the Bible instructs, in the name of Jesus Christ. This question of course is not hypothetical but reality for millions of our brothers and sisters.

The ministry of Open Doors ranks the countries where Christians face the worst persecution in the world. Here's the World Watch List for 2015<sup>2</sup> showing the top ten.

1. NORTH KOREA
2. SOMALIA
3. IRAQ
4. SYRIA
5. AFGHANISTAN
6. SUDAN
7. IRAN
8. PAKISTAN
9. ERITREA
10. NIGERIA

So again, what would we do if the law said we couldn't pray?

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<sup>\*\*</sup>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> <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/stories/tag-blog-post/the-2015-world-watch-list-unveiled/>

God's Word provides us with a vivid example of what we should do in Daniel 6. It's the familiar story of Daniel in the Lion's Den, and the obvious lesson is *we should pray because God is sufficient*, no matter what.

At the outset, I want to tell you what's going to happen at the end of this message. We *are* going to pray. And not just a perfunctory prayer of habit to close the service. I am going to invite you to pray like Daniel prayed, to call out to God from the heart, and say, "O God, I need You, and I need Your help. I pledge allegiance to You."

Years ago God did some surgery on my heart while attending the Moody Bible Institute's Pastors Conference. On the Wednesday of the conference, Jim Cymbala, pastor of the inner city Brooklyn Tabernacle, challenged us as pastors to get back to the basics and lead our churches to be praying churches.

Back in 1971, when Cymbala became pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, the church numbered under 20 people. Today the church has more than 10,000 people, with multiple Sunday services. But the heartbeat of the church, said Cymbala, was it's midweek prayer service, and in fact, Pastor Cymbala said there was standing room only the previous Tuesday evening as God's people came to pray at the Brooklyn Tabernacle.

Cymbala remarked, "I hear Christians upset because there's no prayer in the schools, and I say, 'What a joke! No prayer in schools? There's no prayer in the churches!'"

He was and is right. What we really need today is not legislation. We need as God's people to get on our faces before God. God hasn't changed. Throughout the Scriptures, His invitation is the same, "Call upon Me, and I will answer you. Call upon Me."

But if we don't call, He won't answer.

So at the end of the service, I am going to give you an opportunity to pray. We're going to respond to the proclamation of God's truth with a time of praying.

This morning we're going to consider a familiar story and a largely forgotten lesson. It's the familiar story of a man who prayed when it would have been safer not to pray. We've heard of Daniel in the lion's den from childhood, yet never grow too old to appreciate its powerful message, a message which says, "It's always right to seek first the kingdom of God."

We'll take two weeks to work our way through this wonderful sixth chapter. Today, from Daniel 6:1-15, we're going to learn about God's sufficiency as we consider Daniel's response to three situations.

### I. Situation #1: The Promotion (1-5)

Allow me to set the stage. Daniel is now in his eighties. Nebuchadnezzar, the king who destroyed his homeland and deported him into captivity, is gone. Belshazzar is gone. In fact, the Babylonian empire is gone. Just as Daniel predicted in his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter two, the kingdom of bronze had overthrown the Babylonians. The Medo-Persians were in control under a leader named Darius (5:31; 6:1; possibly another name for Cyrus).

Ponder an obvious lesson. The wicked come and go, but the godly stand. Mighty Pharaoh is gone, but godly Moses still speaks to us. King Herod is no more, but you hold the testimony of John the Baptist in your hands. Nero is gone, but Paul's words live on. Pilate is no more, but Jesus is King forever.

Yes, the wicked come and go, but the godly stand forever. So it was with Daniel.

**A. Daniel rose to the top (1-3).** Let's read verses 1-2, "It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom,<sup>2</sup> with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss."

When Darius took over, he set up a new chain of command. He appointed 120 "princes" (AV; NIV "satraps") who were accountable to 3 "presidents" (AV, NIV "administrators") whose job it was to represent the will of king Darius.

Once again, Daniel rose to the top. Verse 3 states, "Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom."

Like cream, Daniel keeps rising to the top. Years ago I heard the observation that there are three types of people in the world: people who make things happen, people who watch things happen, and people who wonder what happened.

Daniel was a leader. As a teenager, he excelled in chapter one. In his mid-life years, he saved the day and was promoted in chapter two. Later, during Belshazzar's reign, he advanced to the third highest position in the land. And now, under Darius, he rises again.

Why did Daniel prosper? Was it because of his smarts and charisma and that he knew how to work with people? Not really. What was his secret? It was this.

*He knew how to follow God, and he did, no matter what.* Leadership skills? Yes, he had them, but what set him apart from his peers was that God was real in his life.

**B. Daniel had fixed priorities (4-5).** We discover what his priorities were by listening to a discussion about Daniel held by his jealous fellow leaders. Notice the beginning of verse 4, "At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so."

That's staggering! In our day, with our public leaders under the careful scrutiny of the media, it seems like eventually we discover a skeleton in the closet of every official. Not so with Daniel! How could that be?

Verse 4 continues, "They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent."

There simply was no mud in Daniel's life. He was a man of integrity, not flashy but reliable over the long haul. He'd been in public service over sixty years, and his critics could not find one trace of corruption. Day in and day out, he did his job. He was not negligent, and indeed provides us with a good work-ethic model.

Titus 2:9-10 instructs, "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God, our Savior, in all things."

Do you make God look good on your job? Daniel did. He was promoted because of it. And that's what irritated his jealous peers.

Watch what they blurted out in frustration in verse 5, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

I need what I'm seeing right here. It's easy to think, "This world is so corrupt! Is it possible to live a godly life in it?" Daniel did! Daniel lived in the midst of corruption and lust, surrounded by government officials who were self-seeking and wicked. Yet his

integrity remained intact, by God's grace. It is possible to remain pure in a hostile secular world.

But...you have to have the right priorities, the fixed priorities that motivated Daniel. Here they are, and the order is critical.

1. *God is first.* I find it interesting that not only did Daniel know what his priorities were, but his critics knew them too. They knew Daniel's commitments. They knew there was only one potential area to get at Daniel, and that had to do with the law of his God.

And why were they convinced that this was the area to attack? Because they knew that in Daniel's priority structure, God is first.

Not *the gods*. Not God in the generic. But *his* God, and *his* God is Yahweh, the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the one who made all things and purposed to send the Messiah into the world to save sinners (we will hear much from Daniel about this divine plan in chapter 7 and following, and it's worth noting that Daniel received his vision in chapter 7 *before* his test in chapter 6).<sup>3</sup>

So for Daniel this was the first rock in the jar. God is first. That was a non-negotiable, a fixed reality in every situation or decision.

2. *My other responsibilities come next.* Pretty basic, isn't it. God is first, everything else comes next. That's how Daniel operated, and his critics knew it.

God is first, the king is second. God is first, my job is second. God is more important than my family, my reputation, my country.

And every day that priority grid is put to the test.

When I was in High School, I had a Cross Country coach who was committed to winning. I learned a lot from him about hard work, but there was one area that really challenged my convictions. Coach had practice on Sunday afternoons. It was "optional," and it was supposed to be relaxing (although I never figured out how a 5 mile run was relaxing), but the unspoken assumption was, "If you want to be a winner, you need to come to this workout."

I tensed up every time coach asked if I was coming to the Sunday practice. The issue wasn't about a desire to win, or a willingness to pay the price to become a winner. It had to do with our subject at hand, *priorities*.

Shouldn't the Lord's day be different? I'm to work hard Monday through Saturday, for the glory of God. Is that what I should do on Sunday, too? Is Sunday just another weekend day to get done what you didn't on Saturday? Why then does the Bible call Sunday "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10? And if it's called the *Lord's Day*, are there any implications for how we treat it?

I believed there were.

So let me ask you something? What are your priorities? If your coach, or boss, or parents, or friends, pressure you do something you believe to be inconsistent with God's Word, what do you do?

Suppose your supervisor says, "Do this or lose your job," what would you do? It's easy to rationalize, "Well, God gave me this job. Certainly, He wouldn't want me to lose it. I need it to provide for my family. He'll understand if I fudge a little this once."

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<sup>3</sup> 7:1 says Daniel received this vision "in the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon." Chapters 5-12 are not arranged chronologically, but theologically.

Not Daniel. "I will do what God wants. Period. Come what may, because God my highest treasure in life is first and everything else comes next."

I don't know the pressure points in your life. Maybe it's not your job, maybe it's the way you use your time. Do you put God into your schedule first, or does He get what's left, after family, work, and recreation?

Maybe it's the way you spend your money. Again, do you set aside the first part of your income for Him, or does your giving come if you have anything left in the paycheck?

Now, please realize we don't merit a right standing with God by keeping right priorities any more than Daniel did. It is by divine grace that sinners like us can be right with God, by faith alone apart from works.

But faith when it's real doesn't stay alone. It shows up in good works, or for our purposes, good priorities.

So there's Daniel's first situation, the promotion.

## II. Situation #2: The Plot (6-9)

The plot involved Daniel's peers and the king. Notice the part both played.

**A. His peers framed him (6-8).** Verses 6-8 explain how they did it, "So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: 'May King Darius live forever!' <sup>7</sup> The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. <sup>8</sup> Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.'"

It was a sinister plot in which Daniel's peers used two wicked tactics to frame him.

### *1. They used flattery.*

They set the king up big time. Listen again to their sugar-coated words, "King Darius, live forever!" Of course, what they meant was, "We'd like to be king, but since that's not possible, we're going to use you to bump off Daniel and move ourselves up the ladder." T

So they flattered the king with this clever plan to "honor" him. Their proposal sounded like a pledge of loyalty to him, but in actuality, it was a pledge of hatred against Daniel.

### *2. They used deception.*

How so? Don't miss the three letter lie in verse 7. The cabinet members told the king, "The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have **all** agreed."

Hold on. Did they *all* agree? At least one didn't. He no doubt wasn't even in the conversation, for he wasn't invited.

By the way, please don't think, "If I do good, live my Christian life, and mind my own business, the world will applaud, or at least leave me alone, right?"

Wrong. Righteousness blows the curve on the test. It also stirs up jealousy and hatred and antagonism.

Daniel was a righteous man, but that didn't keep his peers from framing him. By a clever use of flattery and exaggerated deception, they hoodwinked Darius.

And consequently, what did the king do?

**B. The king forgot him (9).** Verse 9 says matter-of-factly, “So King Darius put the decree in writing.”

It makes you want to shout, "Darius, wait a minute! Don't sign that! Don't let your ego cloud your judgment! You're about to do something you're going to regret, for you're about to throw someone under the chariot who is your most loyal public servant, someone you've been thinking about promoting to senior vice-president (according to verse 3). Stop and think!"

The problem is, when pride kicks in, people don't think clearly.

So the decree was given. For thirty days, anyone who dared to ask a favor from God or man besides King Darius would be thrown to the lions. No questions asked. It was the law.

On May 2, 1996, the Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, the highest award for an American citizen, was given to Billy Graham. There in the Capitol Rotunda in Washington D.C., our nation's powerful leaders honored this man of God. His reception speech was gracious, yet direct. He said that America is a great country, yet America is in trouble. He said what we need to do is repent and turn to God through Jesus Christ.

God gave Billy Graham a platform, and he used it to honor God. And that was twenty years ago.

What are you doing with the platform God has given you? Every one of us has a platform. Your job, your position as little league coach, your family, your singleness, your Sunday School class, your house with the neighbors around you. They're all divinely crafted platforms.

Unfortunately, God gives some people a platform, and they fall in love with the platform. Like Daniel's peers. They have an important position of civil service, and they claw and scratch to keep it, or more.

But Daniel. What a man of God! He used his platform for the glory of God.

### III. Situation #3: The Prayer (10-14)

Here's the best part of the story. Watch the response of the three parties, of Daniel, of his peers, and of the king. First, Daniel. What did he do? Not surprisingly...

#### **A. Daniel prayed like he always prayed (10-11).**

What would you have done? If we're honest, most of us have to overcome the fear of man to bow our heads and pray in a public restaurant, and the worst that could happen is somebody might snicker a little. But with his neck on the line, Daniel prayed.

Let's notice six things about Daniel's prayer.

1. *It was a bold prayer.* Verse 10 states, “Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”

My friend, when Daniel prayed that day, it wasn't out of ignorance. It wasn't a slip up. It wasn't a case of poor judgment. He knew about the decree. It didn't matter. He did what he always did. He went to his house and prayed like he always prayed. With his windows open.

It was a bold prayer!

2. *It was a biblical prayer.* Notice the direction of his prayers, “toward Jerusalem,” says the text. Why towards Jerusalem?

Well, what was Jerusalem? It was the city God had chosen, where God's temple built by Solomon had been, where the sacrifices He has authorized had been offered for centuries.

But now that city lay in ruins. Yet Daniel opened his window towards that city and prayed.

Why? How did that make Daniel's prayer a biblical prayer?

I want to take you on a trip to find the answer. First, look at Jeremiah 29:1. You'll notice it says that the prophet Jeremiah had sent a written message from Jerusalem to the captives in Babylon.

Second, look at Daniel 9:2. There we learn that Daniel actually received and held that book of Jeremiah.

Third, look at Jeremiah 29:10-14, paying particular attention to verse 12 to find out what God told the captives through Jeremiah, "This is what the Lord says: 'When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good 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 on 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."

Do you see what Daniel is doing? He is praying a biblical prayer. He is doing what God told His people to do through the message of Jeremiah. So when he looked out that window towards Jerusalem, and called out to God, it was because he was claiming God's promise.

And that's what we are to do in prayer. Pray in light of God's promises. Back in 2012 we investigated several of those amazing promises in our series, "Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering." What an encouragement!

- We have the promise of a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13).
- We have the promise of a good outcome (Rom 8:28-29).
- We have the promise of forgiveness (1 John 1:9).
- We have the promise of God's provision (Matt 6:33).
- We have the promise of God's guidance (Prov 3:5-6).
- We have the promise of a harvest (Galatians 6:7-10).
- We have the promise of wisdom (James 1:5).
- We have the promise of sufficient grace (2 Cor 12:10).

And what a help for our prayer closets!

3. *It was a humble prayer.* Verse 10 says "he got down on his knees." What does the posture of kneeling indicate? Submission. Dependence. Humility.

When was the last time you knelt before God? I mean, literally, when was the last time you got down on your knees and called out in humble submission to God? Posture isn't everything, but it is something. Daniel humbled himself physically as he called on the Lord, a posture we'll utilize ourselves in a few moments.

4. *It was a disciplined prayer.* I remind you that Daniel was, in essence, a busy executive, one of the three top administrators in the Medo-Persian kingdom. But in spite of all the pressures and demands of his job, he put into his schedule time for prayer.

Three times a day, every day (to be accurate), he retired to his house to give thanks and pray for the peace of Jerusalem and for other needs.

Don't miss this. Godliness doesn't just happen. It takes discipline. Daniel had to say no to other things, to other good things, in order to be a man of prayer. Perhaps he skipped lunch or turned off ESPN, I don't know, but I do know that he disciplined himself to pray three times each day.

Do you discipline yourself to make prayer a priority in your life?

5. *It was a grateful prayer.* Verse 10 says he prayed, "giving thanks to his God." Giving thanks? For what? Wasn't his life on the line, and his homeland in shambles? Yes. Yet still he gave thanks because he viewed life from God's perspective. He knew God would restore Jerusalem, and if he faced the lion's den, he knew he was in God's hands.

Perhaps he knew the words of Job, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth (Job 19:25)."

And undoubtedly he knew what the Lord had done for his three peers, who, when thrown into the fiery furnace, experienced the presence of the Lord Himself.

6. *It was a specific prayer.* We see this in verse 11, "Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help." What was he saying to God in his prayer? In the AV, "*making supplication* before his God."

Beloved, that's what prayer is. Prayer isn't just words. It's not saying liturgical formulas. It's admitting need and asking for help.

Do you realize the privilege we have? God says, "Ask me for help!" "Let us come boldly to the throne of grace so that we may receive mercy and find grace to *help* us in our time of need (Heb 4:16)." Do you have needs in your life? Ask God for help!

Why don't we pray more often, more zealously, more specifically? Maybe it's because we've forgotten how much we need help. Daniel knew he needed prayer so much that he chose prayer and a lion's den over no prayer and freedom.

So Daniel prayed. It was a bold prayer, a biblical prayer, a humble prayer, a disciplined prayer, a grateful prayer, and a specific prayer.

And what happened?

**B. His peers pounced on him as planned (12-15).** Verses 12-15 tell us what happened. "So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: 'Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions' den?' The king answered, 'The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.' <sup>13</sup> Then they said to the king, 'Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.' <sup>14</sup> When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. <sup>15</sup> Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, 'Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed.'"

So after framing Daniel, they ratted on him, and carried out their caustic plan.

**C. A pagan king prayed (16).** Darius tried to find a loophole, but there was none. Ironically, the best he could do for Daniel was offer a back-handed prayer.

Verse 16, "So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, 'May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!'"

Did He? Did the Lord answer the king's "prayer"? We'll see next time.

Make It Personal: Two lessons from Daniel...

1. *We must take the Lord seriously.* Do you want to hear something that should blow our minds? Psalm 9:10 states, "Those who know your name will trust in You, for You, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek You." God doesn't forsake those who *seek Him*. Hebrews 11:6 says He is a rewarder of those who *seek Him*.

Are we really taking God seriously, individually and as a church? Consider what E. M. Bounds said, in his book, *Prayer and Revival*:

"It is much easier to send for a reputed evangelist to stir up a revival than to pray fervently until revival happens. It is much easier to engineer a great religious movement by human forces than it is to break our hearts and humble ourselves in the dust before God that He may inaugurate a real religious movement. It is much easier to preach about saving the heathen than it is to place ourselves in their stead, as their substitutes before God, and plead with Him until He touches, overpowers, and influences all the springs of human and divine action..."

Let's not play games. Let's determine to take God seriously. If we truly are, we must do something else Daniel did.

2. *We must take prayer seriously.* My friend, when was the last time you really prayed? I mean, cried out to God, in brokenness and humility, and asked God to help you? When you said, "O God, help me with this sinful habit! Help me with my wayward child! Help me reach my unsaved spouse! Help me regain my first love for You?"

How long?

One problem we have on Sundays is that we hear the Word of God, get convicted, and then leave. And the evil one snatches the seed from the soil of our hearts. I don't want that to happen today. I want to give you the opportunity to put into action the things the Lord desires.

-Listen as Joe plays: "Take Time to Be Holy"

-Sing: "I Need Thee Every Hour" (#428) Do you need Him? Do you need His help today? If you do, then...

-Kneel and pray, as Daniel knelt and prayed without shame though people were watching. While the piano is playing, pray and admit to God, "I need Your help." Confess your sin, your pride, your independence. Accept God's forgiveness in Christ.

-Come and pray with others. Our pastor's prayer partners will be in the prayer section, by the piano, if you would like someone to pray with you. If you would like to pray with those who have special needs, come. And if you would like someone to pray for you, come.