

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 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. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.

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¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. ²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

²¹ Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

²⁶ "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

**"For he is the living God
and he endures forever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed,
his dominion will never end.**

**²⁷ He rescues and he saves;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth.**

He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions.”

Key Text

“My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.”—**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)
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- B. The Innocent (vv. 21–23)
- C. The Decree (vv. 26–27)

Conclusion

- A. Confession as Celebration
- B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

Ashurbanipal	As-shure- bah -nee-pahl.
Babylon	<i>Bab</i> -uh-lun.
Belshazzar	Bel- <i>shazz</i> -er.
Hosea	Ho- <i>zay</i> -uh.
Medes	Meeds.
Nebuchadnezzar	<i>Neb</i> -yuh-kud- nez -er.
Xerxes	<i>Zerk</i> -seez.

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 Mede” (5:31), “son of Xerxes” (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 “satraps” under the oversight of three “administrators” that included Daniel (see [Daniel 6:1–2](#)). Daniel’s reputation with previous kings influenced Darius. The king preferred Daniel over all the other satraps and administrators and “planned to set [Daniel] over the whole kingdom” (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 decree 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 “in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed” (6:8). There would be little Darius could do to prevent the enforcement of the statute after it he “put the decree in writing” (6:9).

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

A. Daniel’s Prayer (vv. 10–11)

10. 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.

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.



**No power can
stand against
the Lord's
purposes.**

Visual for [Lesson 12](#). Ask learners to reflect on the king's question in verse 20 and whether they question God's ability to save in certain situations.

11. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help.

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 asking God for help* as was his habit without regard for any danger it posed (compare [9:2–3](#)).

B. Darius's Problem (v. 14)

14. When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

The phrase *heard this* 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. As a result, 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 *distressed* by 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 save* 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. So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den.

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 *gave the order* 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. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”

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 “for no other god can save in this way” ([3:29](#)). Darius, however, believed that God could *rescue* 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. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den.

The king’s rising *at the first light of dawn* 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 lions’ den* had been sealed with the royal signet and the signets of the other officials (see [6:17](#), not in our printed text). 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. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you 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 administrators. As Darius approached the sealed den, he called out *in an anguished 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 human 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 administrators and satraps acknowledged that Daniel was free from corruption 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. Daniel answered, “May the king live forever!”

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 sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.”

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 mouths of the lions*, 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. The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel

was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted 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 *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 *overjoyed* for Daniel. However, it can also occur for a whole kingdom, as the following verses indicate.

C. The Decree (vv. 26–27)

26a. “I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence 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 the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth” ([6:25](#)). Such wide-reaching language suggested the scope of *every part* 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 and reverence 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 he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never 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 rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued 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 *rescued 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.

Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

Into the Lesson

Divide learners into groups of four. Challenge each group to compile a list of deep convictions that a person may have about a particular assigned issue. Depending on the temperament of your class, you might choose trivial categories (the best TV show of all time, the best place to vacation or what to do on vacation, etc.) or more serious topics (best strategies for managing money, importance of education, etc.). *Option.* Write several categories on the board and facilitate a whole-class brainstorming session to list convictions under each heading. Remind learners that they don't have to agree with the convictions.

After five minutes, ask each group to report on convictions they discussed as well as what factors play into those convictions (for instance, a TV show might be best because of the story line, strength of acting, number of seasons it was produced, etc.). Ask the whole class to brainstorm a list of factors that prompt people to abandon their convictions, either temporarily or permanently. Ask the class to agree on the top two or three factors.

Alternative. Distribute copies of “My Daily Habits” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have individuals complete it as indicated.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study by saying, “Today we'll look at a story about a faithful follower of God who would not renege on his convictions or his faithful habits, even though this refusal threatened his very life.”

Into the Word

Before class, prepare a summary of the sections of [Daniel 6](#) not included in today's printed text. Be ready to answer these questions: 1—Where were the Jews living and why? 2—Who was the king? 3—What happened between last week's lesson ([Daniel 3](#)) and today's lesson regarding government? *Option.* Assign this task to one or several learners. Then present the whole story of Daniel in the lions' den by alternating between the volunteer summaries and reading aloud the printed text ([Daniel 6:10–11, 14, 16, 19–23, 26–27](#)).

Alternative. Divide learners into groups of four to read [Daniel 6](#) and to outline and summarize the chapter. After five minutes, compare the groups' answers.

Divide the class into small groups. Distribute handouts (you create) with the following questions for in-group discussion: 1—What is surprising about Daniel's reaction to the king's decree? 2—What other choices might Daniel have made? How could these other decisions have been justified? 3—How does Daniel's situation compare with that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? 4—How did the king

feel about Daniel, and why? After several minutes, have groups present their findings. Then discuss what impact Daniel's faithfulness may have had on the other exiled Jews.

Into Life

Divide learners into pairs. Have them share with each other an obstacle, fear, or pressure that feels as strong as a lion. Invite them to share the following: 1—How is that “lion” threatening your faith today? 2—What encouragement do you receive from today's story to help you resist it?

After a few minutes of sharing time, call the pairs together. Invite volunteers to share about their “lions” and how Daniel's story helps them face the difficulties. *Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Daniel's Example and New Testament Teaching” activity from the activity page. Have learners work in groups to discuss.

Ask individuals to pray for the needs revealed in this discussion. Take time for a series of prayers, mentioning specific problems that learners are comfortable sharing. Close with a prayer of thanksgiving for the example of Daniel and the opportunity to stand up for God today.