

February 18 Lesson 12 (NIV)

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.

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.

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!"

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

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- B. Prayer
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How to Say It

AshurbanipalAs-shure-**bah**-nee-pahl.

Babylon*Bab*-uh-lun.

BelshazzarBel-*shazz*-er.

HoseaHo-zay-uh.

MedesMeeds.

NebuchadnezzarNeb-yuh-kud-**nez**-er.

XerxesZerk-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.

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.

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.

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.

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.).

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.

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.¹

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