

Daniel

Faithful Living in a Culture of Seduction

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself. Daniel 1:8a

In twelve short chapters, we are given a glimpse into the life of a highly differentiated man of God who models a calm and faithful response to God's missional call in a time of deep personal and public crisis. Even in exile, he does not sacrifice his identity in God to ensure personal security. And, through it all, he stays connected not only to God, but to the people with whom he lives and serves. Consider how Daniel models for us:

- A life shaped by prayer that allows for a faithful response to Kairos moments;
- Integrity of self, even in the face of strong cultural pressure to conform;
- A turned-out heart that engages the culture with care and is faithful and intentional in relationships;
- Ways to bear Kingdom fruit even (especially!) in challenging times. In a time of rapid and discontinuous change.

Daniel calls us to remember who and whose we are. As his life reminds us, exile is often (if not always) the place where we are called to do our deepest work on self. It is the place where we come home to God anew and know the purpose for which we were created: to glorify and enjoy God forever! May our lives indeed be shaped from beginning to end by doxology! Praise be to God for the example of his servant Daniel.

Daniel 1 - *Coming to Terms with Exile*

Chapter Outline

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- 1:1-2 A generation delivered into exile
- 1:3-7 Training for service to king and culture
- 1:8-16 Daniel resolved...
- 1:17-20 Success for Daniel and his friends
- 1:21 Daniel's ministry in exile

Memory Verse

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself. 1:8a

Questions for Reflection

1. Ancient Babylon has been described as a “culture of seduction.” In what way is our culture one of seduction?
2. What strategies did the King use to convert Daniel and his friends? How are we challenged in similar ways?
3. How do the actions of Daniel and his friends instruct us as we seek to be “in the world but not of it” even as we serve the needs of our communities?

Practice: Prayer & Fasting

While mentioned frequently in both the Old and New Testaments, fasting is not a practice kept by many Christians today. In our fast food culture, many fear that if we don't eat at least three meals a day (not to mention the snacks) that we will starve. Yet, if we are to follow the One who emptied himself not only of food, but of divine right and prerogative (c.f., Philippians 2), we too must engage in the practice of kenosis: of emptying. My experience of fasting is that it frees me to focus my “whole self” on God in prayer. Ultimately the joint practice of fasting and prayer is intended to help us align both will and work with God. Often, the practice of fasting and prayer reveals those things that control us and thereby hold us apart from God. As Brian Taylor writes in *Becoming Christ*: “Self denial is profoundly contemplative for it works by the process of human subtraction and divine addition.” For those who cannot fast from food, fasting is not limited to food. You can fast abstaining from the media and creature comforts, all for the purpose for drawing closer to God in prayer.

Daniel 2 - *Dreams: God's Forgotten Language*

Chapter Outline

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- 2:1-13 The king and his advisors
- 2:14-23 Prayers and God's revelation
- 2:46-49 The king's response

Memory Verse (Daniel 2:14b)

Daniel spoke to (the king's commander) with wisdom and tact.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does Daniel's approach to Arioch show "wisdom and tact"?
2. The root of the Aramaic word for "tact" in 2:14 means "to taste, to form an opinion based on its flavor". Upon hearing of his death sentence, Daniel could have become reactionary and argumentative with his would-be executioner. Instead he chooses to ask questions in a respectful and tactful way. Reflect on a time when you failed to ask clarifying questions before you acted? What was the result? What might we learn from Daniel?
3. How does Colossians 4:6 further inform our understanding of "tact"?
4. In verse 18, Daniel and his friends "plead" for mercy from God. In Aramaic, the word plead means "to ask, pray for, look for" with a sense of urgency. Interestingly, this word occurs in scripture twelve times, each time in the book of Daniel. How does the four young men's approach to prayer inform our response to crisis?
5. Verses 20-23 have been called Daniel's Psalm. What aspects of God's character are emphasized? How does Daniel's response to answered prayer inform our prayer lives?
6. How does Daniel's telling and interpretation of the king's dream inform our practice of "telling the truth in love" in difficult circumstances?

Practice: Prayer Partners

Note how Daniel, when in crisis, immediately went to prayer... not alone, but in the company of three trusted friends. While I treasure my time apart with God in prayer, there are also times when I need the support and accountability of trusted brothers and sisters in Christ. Not only does the company of others keep me focused, but I find myself blessed by the gift of mutual discernment. Together we seek what is the will of God and test the fruit of our actions. Do you have a Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in your life?

Daniel 3 - The Fiery Furnace

Chapter Outline

- 3:1-7 Nebuchadnezzar's Image of Gold
- 3:8-12 The Accusation Against the Three Friends
- 3:13-18 The Confrontation with Nebuchadnezzar
- 3:19-27 The Miraculous Deliverance
- 3:28-30 Nebuchadnezzar Worships God

Memory Verse (Daniel 3:16-18)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Questions for Reflection

1. Some believe that times of trial are due to sin or lack of faith. How does the story of the three friends in the fiery furnace inform our understanding of trials and tribulations?
2. What can we conclude about the character of the three friends?
3. What does it mean to be loyal to Christ? Have you predetermined your loyalty to Christ?
4. What commitments can you make to the Lord today to prepare you for future trials and temptations?

Practice: Submission

Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God— that is your spiritual act of worship. —Romans 12:1

Confess your agenda to God and honestly ask the Lord what must die in you for God's will to come forth.

A Simple Prayer

Lord, I am willing to receive what you give, release what you take, lack what you withhold, do what you require, and be who you desire. Amen. —Spiritual Disciplines Handbook

Daniel 4 - Humility or Humiliation

4:1-3 Nebuchadnezzar's Decree to Praise God

4:4-18 Report of the Dream

4:19-27 Interpretation of the Dream

4:28-33 Fulfillment of the Dream

4:34-37 Healing and Doxology

Memory Verse (Daniel 4:37)

And those who walk in pride, God is able to humble.

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Daniel 4:4. How does our culture define “contented and prosperous”? How would a Christian definition of “success” differ from that of Nebuchadnezzar?
2. What role does pride play in Nebuchadnezzar's understanding of himself? How do you get snared by pride?
3. What did Daniel advise Nebuchadnezzar to do in verse 27? How might Daniel's advice provide direction in your own life and that of your congregation?

Practice: Relinquishment

The Spirit teaches me to yield my will entirely to the will of the Father.
—Andrew Murray

Richard Foster in **Prayer** writes that relinquishment “means freedom from the self-sins: self-sufficiency, self-pity, self-absorption, self-abuse, self-aggrandizement, self-castigation, self-deception, self-exaltation, self-depreciation, self-indulgence, self-hatred... It means freedom from the everlasting burden of having to get our own way. It means freedom to care for others to genuinely put their needs first, to give joyfully and freely (p. 54). Using any of the gospels go with Jesus into the Garden. Stay awake and watch. See his sorrowing soul. Let your heart be saddened too. Struggle with him in seeking other options, hoping to avoid the cup. Now, speak his words as your own: “Not my will but yours be done.” Invite the resurrected one to interpret the words into your life, your family, your call.

Today, O Lord, I yield myself to you.

May your will be my delight.

May your way have perfect sway in me.

May your love be the pattern of my living.

I surrender to you: my hopes, my dreams, my ambitions.

Do with them what your will, when you will, as you will.

I place into your loving care: my family, my friends, my future.

Care for them with a care that I can never give.

I release into your hands:

my need to control, my craving for status, my fear of obscurity.

Eradicate the evil, purify the good, and establish your kingdom on earth.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. —Richard Foster

Daniel 5 - The Writing on the Wall

Chapter Outline

5:1-4 The profaning of the Holy Vessels
 5:5-12 The Writing on the Wall
 5:13-28 Daniel's Interpretation
 5:29-31 Reward and Punishment

Memory Verse (Daniel 5:17)

You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

Questions for Reflection

1. How is Daniel described in Daniel 5:10-17?
2. What was Belshazzar's defining mistake (see 5:22)?
3. Read Isaiah 63:7-10. How do the passage underscore the concepts found in Daniel 5:23 ?

Practice: Confession

In the least several decades, many core practices—including the rite of reconciliation—have been restored in the Reformed tradition. As the Liturgical Resource for Pastoral Care notes: “The recovery of a ritual that proclaims the good news of God’s grace and forgiveness... is not a denial of the Protestant heritage but a recovery of its core: God graciously accepts the returning sinner.” While a Prayer of Confession is central to most Reformed liturgies, there are times when a more intentional process for making confession and receiving reconciliation is needed for the care of one’s soul. Jesus, upon his resurrection, gifted the Body of Christ with the power to forgive (cf, John 20:19-21). The intentional practice of confession allows for transformation born of forgiveness. At its core, confession is a form of praise in which we can give thanks for God’s hold on us. Practice 1. Read Mark 12:28-31 2. Ponder the fourfold emphasis to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. 3. Over a designated period, prepare a life (or season) review. Begin by praying for the Holy Spirit to help you. Then proceed with self- examination. This would be a time to name those things that are weighing on your conscience. 4. Upon completion, offer these to God in prayer. If helpful, you might want to schedule an appointment with your pastor to make a “formal confession” as outlined in our Book of Common Worship and receive pardon with the laying on of hands. Whether your confession is made personally or in the presence of the Lord, never forget that “if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

Daniel 6 - In the Lion's Den

Chapter Outline

6:1-9 The Plot Against Daniel

6:10-18 The Trap

6:19-24 Daniel's Rescue/His Accusers' Demise

6:25-28 Darius' Decree

Memory Verse (Daniel 6:4b)

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

Questions for Reflection

1. Some believe that times of trial are due to sin or lack of faith. How do the trials of found in Daniel 3 & 6 inform our understanding of trials and tribulations?
2. What can we conclude about the character of the four men?
3. What commitments can you make to the Lord today to prepare you for future fiery furnaces and lion's dens?

Practice: Doxology

Jesus came that his JOY might be in us and that our JOY might be full! —John 15:11

An old French Proverb reminds us that “gratitude is the heart’s memory.” When we remember to count our blessings, we come to more fully delight in the Lord. To set our hearts on joy is to live lives shaped by praise and doxology. To be sure, choosing joy is a discipline. But it is a discipline that draws us closer to God and through God to one another and the stranger in our midst. Practice Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God. Recall God’s gifts and provision for your life. To celebrate God’s grace, write a poem of praise or song of doxology. Give praise to God for his faithfulness in season and out.

A Blessing

May the Son of God who is already formed in you grow in you—so that for you he will become immeasurable and that in you he will become laughter, exultation, and the fullness of joy which no one can take from you. —Isaac of Stella

Daniel 7 - The Ancient of Days

Chapter Outline

7:1-8 A Dream of Four Beasts

7:9-14 Heavenly Power

7:15-28 The Interpretation: Divine Victory

Memory Verses:

I, Daniel, was deeply troubled in my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself. Daniel 7:28

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Daniel 7: 9-14. Which part of this passage intrigues you the most? Why?
2. What event does Daniel 7:22 foretell?
3. What does Daniel 7:25 say will happen to the saints?
4. One of the enemy's most effective strategies is to wear us down, using our exhaustion to discourage us. Yet, the Apostle Paul reminds us that we are to "struggle with all his energy, which so powerfully works in (us)" (Colossians 1:29). How does Daniel, in his life, exhibit God's strength? How might we better nurture this strength of spirit in us?

Practice: Centering Prayer

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within (for example: Lord, Jesus, Abba, Father; other possibilities: Love, Peace, Shalom).
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. "Thoughts" is an umbrella term for every perception including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, reflections, and commentaries. They are a normal part of centering prayer. By "returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word", a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of centering prayer.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes. The additional two or three minutes give the psyche time to readjust to the external senses and enable us to bring the atmosphere of silence into daily life. You may want to close this time with the Lord's Prayer or a favorite collect.
5. Centering Prayer is normally practiced for 20 minutes twice a day, usually after rising in the morning and again before the evening meal at the end of the day. Source: Thomas Keatin

Daniel 8 - Another Vision

Chapter Outline

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8:1-14 The Vision of a Ram and a Goat

8:15-27 The Interpretation of the Vision

Memory Verse: Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to him, “How long will it take for the vision to be fulfilled—the vision concerning the daily sacrifice, the rebellion that causes desolation, and the surrender of the sanctuary and the host that will be trampled underfoot?”

Questions for Reflection

1. What is the purpose of Daniel’s vision? Why does Jesus in Mark 13:33-36 tell us to “watch!”? How are the signs to inform our living?
2. Read John 14:12-13. As Christians, what is the purpose of “doing great things”?
3. What signs do you discern... for good or challenge... in the life of your congregation and community right now? How might those signs inform your present ministry?

Practice: Praying Down Strongholds

1. Identify the stronghold--what is it, and what is its effect?
2. Claim the truth of 1 John 4:4: "...the one (the Spirit of Christ) who is in you is greater than the one (Satan) who is in the world..."
3. Accept your responsibility to put on the armor every day (Ephesians 6:10-18) and engage the enemy in the battlefield of prayer.
4. Standing on the Word of God, and claiming the power of the risen Lord, pray until the stronghold is destroyed.
5. Enlist other prayer warriors to join you; share the details of the stronghold so that all prayers will be specific, direct and fearless. Trust that God will respond as promised.
6. Rejoice in the victory, even as you begin praying. God will honor your *trust*, just as God will honor your diligence and perseverance. Never underestimate the influence and capabilities of Satan, but never fear him, either. He is a defeated enemy. He has no power to stand against the prayer of faith. The victory is won!

Daniel 9 - Daniel's Prayer

Chapter Outline

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- 9:1-4a Preparation for Prayer
- 9:4b-10 Invocation and Confession
- 9:11-14 God's Punishment
- 9:15-19 Appeal for Mercy
- 9:20-27 Prophecy of 70 Weeks

Memory Verses

We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. 9:5

Questions for Reflection

1. Read Daniel 9:4-7. Daniel clearly was a man of deep integrity, yet when he prayed, he spoke of his own sins in addition to that of the people. Why would he do this? How might Daniel's prayer inform our own prayer?
2. Read Daniel 9:18. On what basis did Daniel make his requests? Again, how might Daniel's prayer inform our prayer?
3. Daniel in his prayer has been described as being "desperate for God." In this present context, how are you desperate for God? What does it mean to be desperate for God?

Practice: Intercessory Prayer

Use the Lord's Prayer as a vehicle for intercession.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Spend some time thanking God. Ponder who God is and adore God's majesty.

Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Turn your intercession to God's purposes in the world. Where are you trying to bring your own kingdom in, rather than God's? Make confession.

Give us this day our daily bread.

Pray for your own needs and that of your community. Pray specifically and by name.

Forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors.

Confess your grudges, bitterness, over-sensitivity. Thank God for the gift of forgiveness.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

As you look ahead, notice the tasks ahead. Where might you get off track. Become aware of the ways in which you might be tempted to spin the truth, manage your image, live out of your false self. Pray for the Spirit to work in you to change you. Ask for courage and protection.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

End your time of intercession with prayers of trust in God's goodness and his redemptive plan. —From the Spiritual Disciplines Handbook

Daniel 10 - Speechless on the Riverbank

Chapter Outline

Introduction to the Vision (10:1-11:1)
 The Vision (11:2-12:3)
 God's Instructions to Daniel (12:4-13)
 10:1-9 A Heavenly Vision
 10:10-11:1 A Conversation

Memory Verses

At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. Dan 10:2

Questions for Reflection

1. How is Daniel's riverbank encounter described in 10:4-6?
2. Read again Daniel 10:7-19 and note every description of Daniel's posture. Now read Ephesians 6:10-19. How do the two passages inform us?
3. In your own words, what did the angel say to Daniel in 10:12?
4. Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life. Surely Proverbs 13:12a captures the state of Daniel's heart in chapter 10. What does it tell us hope deferred does? Have you ever experienced hope deferred that later became a longing fulfilled? What of your congregation? How might Daniel's response inform us in our response to "hopes deferred"?
5. Can God trust us? Can God trust me? Take some time to journal your response. What imperative is born of your response?

Practice: Mourning

At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. —Daniel 10:2
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. —Mt. 5:4

Mourning is hard. So hard sometimes that not only individuals, but communities attempt to ignore or bypass the hollow of suffering that dwells within. The problem is that when we don't allow ourselves the opportunity to mourn, we find ourselves stuck in a past we cannot change. Ironically, the willingness to mourn—to really feel our sorrow and anger and loss—can draw us closer to God and through God to one another. As people of faith, we are called, not to avoid grief, but to enter it deeply, crying out to God in our distress. Healing begins when we are willing to tolerate pain—the pain of loss, of rejection, of death—in order to grow more fully into the image of Christ... It is then, we are freed to love in ways we have never loved before... and to live forward into God's future.

Daniel II - Some of the Wise Will Stumble

Chapter Outline

11:2-4 Persia and Greece
11:15-20 Struggles between kings
11:26-45 Kings do as they please
12:1-4 Salvation of God's people
12:5-13 Final Words

Memory Verse

Some of the wise will stumble, so that they may be refined, purified and made spotless until the time of the end, for it will still come at the appointed time. Daniel 11:35

Questions for Reflection

1. Ponder again Daniel 11:35. In what ways have you stumbled? How has God used that experience to purify and refine you?
2. At what time in your life have you been “corrupted by flattery” (11:32)? What brought you home anew to God?
3. Read Romans 12:1-3. How did Daniel in his life model living his life as a “living sacrifice.” In what ways is God calling us to live as “living sacrifices”?
4. In this time of economic upheaval, what is God asking us to give up in order to heed his missional call?

Practice: Stewardship of Self

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship. —Romans 12:1

Stewardship of self begins with recognizing that everything we have and are is a gift from God. God's intention is that we are to live our lives as “living sacrifices.” Yet the powers of seduction would have us deny God's call. Rather than living out of the abundance of God, we come to live out of a sense of scarcity. Selfishness replaces sacrifice. Anxiousness replaces joy. The full use of our spiritual gifts is thwarted. No longer are we growing in maturity in Christ. Ultimately, the practice of stewardship reveals what is in our heart.

Daniel 12 - Go Your Way, Daniel!

Chapter Outline

Daniel 10-12 Introduction to the Vision (10:1-11:1)
 The Vision (11:2-12:3)
 God's Instructions to Daniel (12:4-13)
 12:5-13 Final Words

Memory Verses

Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the end of time. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.
 Daniel 12:9

Questions for Reflection

1. What part of our study has been most instructive to you?
2. Reread Daniel 12. Now read Revelation 21:1-6. What promise do the two passages provide? What things will no longer exist in the new heaven and new earth?
3. Read Daniel 12:13. What are the implications for our own living? How is God calling us to "go our way"?

Practice: Renewal of Baptismal Vows

It is not only appropriate, but even needful, for us to remember the promises made in baptism. Are you ready to renew your vows?

Renunciation and Affirmation

- Do you renounce evil, and its powers in the world, which defies God's righteousness and love? *I renounce them.*
- Do you renounce the ways of sin that separate you from the love of God? *I renounce them.*
- Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior? *I do.*
- Do you intend to be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his word, and showing his love, to your life's end? *I do.*

Prayer

God of all life and goodness, we praise you for claiming us through our baptism And for upholding us by your grace. We remember your promises given to us in our baptism. Strengthen us by your Spirit, that we may obey your will and serve you with joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.