

Prayer of Daily Devotion and Fasting

Daniel 6:1-26

Summer Sermon Series on Prayer

Kenwood Baptist Church

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TEXT: Daniel 6:1-26

This morning we will focus our attention on Daniel 6. We been looking this summer at a series



on prayer. I know that for many prayer is a struggle, and consistency in prayers is a challenge. We war against distractions in our minds and finding time for prayer, and yet prayer is a vital, life-giving spiritual discipline. We are so vulnerable to the temptations of this world and drifting from the Lord if we are not people of prayer. Our hearts migrate to things of lesser importance. We have been looking at different prayers in Scripture,

alternating between Old Testament and New Testament, seeing God's people in prayer.

This morning, as we look at Daniel 6, we look at a beautifully told narrative in the court of Persia. We find the story of God's power to protect and save; we find schemers brought to justice; and we find the increase of God's fame in the world. This whole narrative turns on the fulcrum point of Daniel 6:10 where we see Daniel's daily life of prayer. It is this daily devotion that is often the greatest indicator of our spiritual health. It is the gripping image of Daniel on his knees in daily prayer that turns this whole chapter and really explains the character of the man that inspires us in this text. Daniel embodies and lives out the prayer of Psalm 55:17-18:

"Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and He hears my voice. He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me."

We want to look at this text together and focus in on the scene in Daniel 6:10.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the main characters of this story. In Daniel 6:1-2, we are introduced to Darius. This is Darius the Mede. There different views by scholars concerning Darius. Some think that Darius the Mede is the throne name of Cyrus the Persian; others think that Darius the Mede is a leading official named Gubaru who was placed with royal authority

over Babylon. In either case, the time is about 539 BC, just after the Persians have defeated Babylon and taken over this part of the world. They reorganized the system. The Persians were master organizers, the creators of the royal road from Susa all the way to Sardis. The US Post Office takes its motto from the Persian courier system that neither rain, sleet, nor snow can keep these messengers from fulfilling their task. Darius organizes the society into 120 satrapies or regions, and there are three top officials over those regional governors. We learn that one of these three is Daniel. Daniel has, then, a very high position in the society. The Persian Empire was the largest empire that had yet arisen on the face of the earth, stretching from India all the way to Egypt. Daniel is placed in one of these three super government positions, just underneath the authority of the king himself, and we read in Daniel 6:3:

“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.”

Satraps are the governors. The NIV says he distinguished himself by his *exceptional qualities*. This is slightly misleading. The Aramaic of Daniel 6 says that what actually distinguished Daniel was *an excellent spirit, or an extraordinary spirit*. What distinguished Daniel from his contemporaries was the presence of God with him. It wasn't his natural giftedness; it was that God was with him, an extraordinary spirit. We hear of this in many places in Daniel. When Israel was first taken into exile and leading members were selected for service in the king's court and trained, we read in Daniel 1:4 that they were:

“. . .youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding, and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court.”

In Daniel 1:8, we read:

“But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.”

Part of Daniel's extraordinary spirit is his deep inner commitment not to feast at the king's table in Babylon, to hold himself back from the luxury of the court and the idolatry, and to keep himself for God, guarding the spirit within him.

We read in Daniel 1:17 concerning Daniel and the young men with him:

“And as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom; Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams.”

For every matter of wisdom and understanding which the king consulted them, the king of Babylon found Daniel and his friends 10 times better than all the other courtiers in his realm.

They had an extraordinary spirit because they had the Spirit of the living God, and they guarded and cultivated God's presence with them.

In Daniel 2, the king promotes Daniel and makes him ruler over the province of Babylon. In Daniel 5, we read of Belshazzar, the last king of Babylon, at whose banquet courtiers feasted and drank using goblets from the Temple of God in Jerusalem. During the feast, writing suddenly appears on the wall. The king is stunned and calls, "What is the meaning of this?" No one can answer him, and yet in Daniel 5:11-12, the queen tells Belshazzar:

"There is a man in your kingdom in whom is a spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father, illumination, insight, and wisdom like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. . . This was because an extraordinary spirit, knowledge and insight, interpretation of dreams, explanation of enigmas, and solving of difficult problems were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel now be summoned, and he will declare the interpretation."

There was an excellent spirit in Daniel, the Holy Spirit of God, and the queen tells Belshazzar to call for him. Daniel is summoned and interprets the vision for Belshazzar with tremendous courage. Imagine telling the king of the land, "The vision means that tonight is the last night of your reign. God has weighed you on the scales and you've come up a little light." You can say something like that only if you're walking closely with God.

As we turn to Daniel 6, there is a change of power in the land. Now the Persians are ruling the world, and Daniel is recognized for his gifts. He is placed high in the society and the king is considering making Daniel the number one of the three leading counselors, and so the courtiers plot against him. In Daniel 6:4, we read:

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

The administrators and satraps were unable to find charges against Daniel for three reasons:

Number one: He was faithful and trustworthy.

Number two: He was not corrupt.

Number three: He was not negligent in his task.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if people said that about you and me, if they looked into our lives and said, "You know I'm trying to take this guy down, but everyone knows that he's faithful, and he's incorruptible, and he's diligent in his task"? These are the things that surround him because of an extraordinary spirit, the Spirit of God within him. I want to ask you the question at this point in the narrative: "How is it that Daniel's spirit is extraordinary? What is it about his

life and manner of living that cultivates this very real sense of God's Spirit with him, leading him, giving him insight and courage to speak to the king? What is it about this man? Is it a birthright, or is it a practice of daily devotion in secret that is the real source of power in his life?" I believe that's the source, as we will see.

In Daniel 6:5 the administrators and the satraps say:

"We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

They knew they could never frame Daniel on any of the customary charges, so the only thing they could think of was something with regard to the law of God. So these administrators and satraps come as a group to the king. They give the customary greeting: "O king, live forever!" You always have to say that when you come into the presence of the Persian king. If you don't start with that, things go from bad to worse. These men come and they flatter the king, and they say in Daniel 6:7-8:

"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 man during the next thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, O king, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered--in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed."

Notice that they say that anyone who makes a request to any god or man for 30 days will be cast into a den of lions. Hunting for lions is the sport of kings in Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. There are many monumental reliefs depicting this. Kings often kept something like zoos inside their cities with wild animals. The kings would hunt there and also in the wild. These men come and flatter the king with language that suggests that he should see himself in a semi-divine status. The king is new in his role here, whether it is Cyrus ruling over Babylon, or Gubaru with royal authority, he is new in the land, and this existing court apparatus really flatters him. They say, "Why don't you issue this decree," almost posturing themselves as though "we are really on your side here. We really want to make things clear right out of the gate of your reign that 'you're the man.' The best way to say 'you're the man' is to say that you are the one here standing for God, so if you're going to mess with the king, you're messing with God." I imagine Gubaru, or Cyrus, with a flood of decrees and lots to get done in the initial days of his office, and these courtiers slip this onto his desk. Their motivation is to work against Daniel; their edict places Daniel in a place of conflict between his devotion to God and loyalty to the state. The laws of the Medes and Persians cannot be repealed, we read. This is confirmed Esther 1:19:

"If it please the king, let a royal order go out from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes so that it may not be repealed. . ."

Diodorus Siculus, a Roman historian, relates an incident under the reign of Darius the third. When Darius the third had passed the sentence of death upon a certain Charidemus and then realized that the man was innocent, Diodorus Siculus says:

“Immediately he repented and blamed himself, as having greatly erred; but it was not possible to undo what was done by royal authority.”

It was part of the culture of the Medo-Persian Empire, and Darius signs the document and the decree is passed.

We turn to Daniel 6:10, which is really the crucial verse of this passage. Daniel was in the court of Persia, far to the east, and he learns that the decree of the king has been published. He goes home to his upstairs room, where the windows open toward Jerusalem, the city of God, and what does he do there? He does what he has been doing all along. Three times a day, we see Daniel, a man of God, in prayer, morning, noon, and evening. Three times a day, we read that he got down on his knees looking toward the city from which he had left as a young man. On his knees, he prays. The words that are used here give us very concrete images of the prayer of Daniel. It says that he was in the posture of bowing down, a posture of worship. It says that he prayed; it says that he gave thanks to God. Daniel 6:11 says:

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

When they burst into his home and saw him in the upper room, he was beseeching God for mercy. Here is a picture of a man in prayer, a regular habit, three times a day, in a private place upon the roof of his house, oriented towards the sanctuary, praising God, bowing down before Him giving thanks to God and pleading for His help. This is a gripping and inspiring picture of prayer.

The element that I find most striking and stirring to my own heart is that Daniel is looking towards Jerusalem. As he is looking towards Jerusalem and orienting his prayer towards the sanctuary, we must remember that the sanctuary is an ash heap at this time. There is no worship service going on; the city is in ruins; and the worship of Almighty God is not happening in that place. What is happening is in Daniel's heart. Daniel, as it were, is holding on to the worshiping life of this whole community inside the boundaries of his own heart, and we read in this short, but very powerful phrase, that Daniel did this three times a day **as he had done before**. Daniel was brought to Babylon when he was probably 14 or 15 years old. He is now 79 or 80, and he has been praying like this for at least 65 years. When you think of the vicissitudes of your life, the ups and the downs, the moments of opportunities, the temptations that you face, what carries you consistently through? I think if you could ask Daniel, he would say it is the hidden life of prayer that brings you faithfully through this life, whatever God brings your way. What do you do when you face public or private pressure to limit your own devotion?

What do you do? Where do you locate your highest loyalty and duty in life? Would you rate your own level of responsibility and the demands of your schedule higher than Daniel's? Three times a day the man of God goes and prays.

The story continues rapidly. As we read in Daniel 6:11, the men come, and they find Daniel praying as they had imagined. They go to the king and remind the king of his edict. In Daniel 6:14, we read:

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

We imagine the decree of the king will be carried out upon the next day. The king is unsuccessful; courtiers remind him of the edict and that the law cannot be changed. So, the king reluctantly gives the decree in Daniel 6:16:

"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!'"

Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, yet the king himself comes to Daniel. Imagine looking him in the eye and saying, "May your God, whom you serve continually, may He rescue you." The king then goes to his palace, and we read in Daniel 6:18:

"Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep."

Would that we could explore fasting in greater depth this morning, but it ends up that it is the king who fasts. The king refuses to eat, refuses the entertainment brought to him. He could not sleep. The king of Persia stays up all night praying, fasting. At the first light of dawn, the king gets up and he hurries to the lions' den. He comes near the den; he draws close, and he calls out to Daniel in an anguished voice in Daniel 6:20:

"Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

Daniel shouts out from the pit in Daniel 6:21-22:

"O king, live forever! 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, O king."

Daniel doesn't miss the customary greeting: "O king, live forever!" He is still at the top of his game. The king recognized that Daniel was a person who serves God continually, and in Daniel 6:23 we read:

"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."

Daily prayer is essential for your spiritual health. You can't go very long without drinking. Your body will communicate to you. You can go a little bit longer without food, but the message of hunger starts to rise pretty quickly, too. Many of us, though, are trying to live daily without any of the transforming power of God in our lives. Daily devotional prayer is not so much about changing the world around us as it is about changing the world within us. John Wesley said:

"Prayer is where the action is."

Corrie ten Boom said:

"Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it. A man is powerful on his knees."

The British writer S.D. Gordon said:

"The great people of the earth today are the people who pray! I do not mean those who talk about prayer; nor those who say they believe in prayer; nor those who explain prayer; but I mean those who actually take the time to pray. They have not time. It must be taken from something else. That something else is important, very important and pressing, but still, less important and pressing than prayer. There are people who put prayer first and group the other items in life's schedule around and after prayer. These are the people today who are doing the most for God in winning souls, in solving problems, in awakening churches, in supplying both men and money for mission posts, in keeping fresh and strong their lives far off in sacrificial service on the foreign field, where the thickest fighting is going on, and in keeping the old earth sweet a little while longer."

R. F. Horton, a British Nonconformist, said:

"Therefore, whether the desire for prayer is on you or not, get to your closet at the set time; shut yourself in with God; wait upon Him; seek His face; realize Him; pray."

Matilda Erickson Andross said:

"Time spent alone with God is not wasted. It changes us; it changes our surroundings; and every Christian who would live the life that counts, and who would have power for service must take time to pray."

J.H. Jowett said:

"It is in the field of prayer that life's critical battles are lost or won. We must conquer all our circumstances there. We must first of all bring them there. We must survey them there. We must master them there. In prayer we bring our spiritual enemies into the Presence of God and we fight them there. Have you tried that? Or have you been satisfied to meet and fight your foes in the open spaces of the world?"

Prayer changes us. For Daniel to go to God three times a day in prayer in this chapter is an act of civil disobedience, and there are times when you will have to say 'yes' to God and 'no' to the law of the land. It's an assertion of kingdom loyalty to God; it's a strengthening of Daniel's own spirit; it is interceding for his own people; and it is also a liturgy or worship service of the heart. We often use the language of having a *quiet time* with the Lord, or *daily devotion*. Those are great expressions. I found myself this week stirred and motivated to think, I'm just going to have a worship service right in here, in my own heart, and I'm going to do that a couple times a day, Lord willing, and all the rest of the time in between those services is different. I get motivated and stirred by your company, and we worship God together, but being with God in prayer daily in those hidden ways really empowers us to live in faithfulness to Christ in the world. My challenge for you is to just open up the chambers of your own heart and renew a commitment of daily devotion to God. If it helps you to do that, to see it as a worship service of the heart, may Daniel's life and practice inspire you, challenge and convict you, and help you to bring this into your own life in person as your offering to God. Let God's presence change you and sustain you and equip you, that others might see "that man has an excellent spirit. The Spirit of God is in that woman, in that young man. He serves God continually." May that be said of us, and may we see His power and rescue in our lives.

Lord, we thank You for this morning. We thank You for Daniel 6, and we thank You for the image of a man of God just bowed down to You in prayer. We thank You, Lord, for the worship service of the heart, and we pray, Father God, that You would empower and strengthen us today. I pray, Lord, that You would help us as a congregation to renew our daily devotion. Maybe for some of us, Lord, that starts off with the top five minutes, but I pray, Father, that You would breathe on those five-minute intervals, and that You would warm our hearts into a burning blaze of devotion for You. Lord, help us to bring the first offering of ourselves, and let us be mindful of You morning and evening, that we might serve You all throughout the day. Bless each one, Father. Draw us close to You we pray, in and for Jesus' sake.
Amen.