

04

SESSION FOUR

Protection in the Lions' Den

SESSION SUMMARY

In today's session, we encounter Daniel as he ministered to King Darius. Because of the king's edict, Daniel was thrown into lions' den. Through God's supernatural protection, Daniel escaped the claws and teeth of the lions. This happened so the nations would know that the God of Daniel, "is the living God enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end" (v. 26). Daniel demonstrated that God's people are to show courage as we trust and obey Him, despite the circumstances. Our courageous witness of faith will be a sign to the world that Jesus is the one true King.

SCRIPTURE

Daniel 6:1-28

THE POINT

God glorifies Himself through the rescue of those who trust Him.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Have you ever played a game of Bible trivia or word association, in which you match well-known people and events? Here are a few examples:

Adam and _____. Cain and _____. Noah and the _____. Jacob and _____. Samson and _____.
David and _____. Sodom and _____. Jonah and the _____.

And what do you think of when you hear the name Daniel? Most likely, you think of a “lions’ den.” Now we’ve arrived at the most famous story in the book of Daniel. This man of God ruled with wisdom under Nebuchadnezzar (5:12). He had a good reputation and was known to be a man of character, filled with the Spirit of God. No one had anything negative to say about him, even into the reign of Belshazzar, the last Babylonian King. Even king Darius shared their opinion and appointed Daniel to a position of significant leadership.

Suddenly, Daniel faced a crisis—a major test of faith. Within a few short days, we see a faithful 80-year-old man thrown into a pit with ravenous lions ready to tear him apart. Why? Because he wouldn’t stop praying.

- **What do you know about the story of Daniel in the lions’ den? Why do you think this particular story has become so well known in culture and in the church?**

Option 2

Even when our lives are busy, we make time for what is important to us. Ask the students to list things they make time for during the week. This list may include: sports, clubs, concerts, time with friends and family, and so on. As we make time for the activities we want to do and the goals we want to accomplish, we create work patterns and habits that follow us throughout life. We learn to “show up” to follow through with what we have committed to do.

- **What are some commitments you have made? Have you ever missed something you committed to attend? What happened?**

Daniel was fully committed to God. Even when he was young, He was loyal to God no matter what he faced. He built up habits, and *a life*, committed to following God completely. When threatened for worshipping God, he continued anyway. And God faithfully delivered Him from death.

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God glorifies Himself through the rescue of those who trust Him.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Daniel** - was taken captive to Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem; remained faithful to God during his time in exile
- **King Darius** - one of the kings of Babylon during Daniel's exile

PLOT

Our story picks up with Daniel years later, serving in a high administrative role to King Darius. Not only does this session demonstrate God's favor upon Daniel in terms of his influence with the king, but it also presents the familiar account of Daniel being cast into the lions' den. Through God's supernatural protection, Daniel escaped the claws and teeth of the lions, showing us a courageous example of faith in God.

TIMELINE

DANIEL IS DELIVERED

God protects Daniel in the lions' den.

THE JOURNEY HOME

God keeps His promise to bring His people home.

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE

Despite immense opposition the temple is rebuilt.

DANIEL REMAINS FAITHFUL TO GOD

Daniel's rise in power was not because of his natural ability, but because God worked in Daniel's life, and Daniel walked with God. Still, as many have discovered, it can get lonely at the top. Success can increase your enemies. The blessings of the righteous can stir up the jealousy of the wicked. In the passage that follows, we see the plot to bring down Daniel.

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God." Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked." Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously. (Dan. 6:1-10)

According to this passage, Daniel displayed excellent character and those around him noticed a difference. However, because of the envy and jealousy of the other officials, a plot was devised to ruin Daniel's reputation. Of course, these deceptive officials faced a serious problem—they could find nothing that would incriminate Daniel or call his character into question.

Daniel was the model worker and employee. Daniel's walk with God was consistent. When emergencies or crises presented themselves, Daniel was already prepared to meet and handle them. His daily communion with God shaped his character. He knew who he was and what was required of him.

The officials knew if they wanted Daniel gone, they had to use his integrity against him. By manipulating Darius into making an irreversible decree, the officials hoped to trap Daniel in an act of disobedience to the king. Their goal was not to see Daniel demoted; their goal was to see Daniel dead.

When Daniel found out Darius signed an edict honoring himself as the exclusive deity of the empire, what did he do? What he had always done. He obeyed God rather than man. He continued a pattern of spiritual devotion that had marked his life for years, a pattern his enemies knew well. He went to his home, upstairs to the place of prayer, where the windows were open toward Jerusalem. He then got down on his knees and prayed three times daily, as he had always done.

DANIEL TRUSTS GOD FOR DELIVERANCE

Godly people seek to remain faithful to God, no matter what may happen or what circumstances they may encounter. In this passage, Daniel demonstrated his complete dependence on the Lord for rescue.

Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, “O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” Then they answered and said before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.” Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.” Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. (Dan. 6:11-18)

King Darius was upset about the situation and tried to find a way to deliver a man he obviously admired, appreciated, and respected. Unfortunately, Darius was caught in a trap of his own making. His evil administrators reminded him once more (the decree is mentioned four times for emphasis and effect) of the binding nature of the law of the Medes and Persians. When the King made a law, even he was bound by his words.

More importantly, these evil men had counted on Daniel to be true to His God. Daniel knew that past faithfulness would be no substitute for present faithfulness. Indeed, the past had simply prepared him for the present and the future. One's character is not *forged* in the moment of adversity, but is *revealed* in the moment of adversity.

Most likely, Daniel knew about his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and their experience in the fiery furnace. Showing the same kind of backbone and conviction, Daniel did not falter in his faith. Just as his friends had told King Nebuchadnezzar that their allegiance to God trumped every idol, Daniel demonstrated to Darius that his fidelity to God was not subject to debate.

Much to his regret, Darius then commanded that Daniel be thrown into the lions' den. The den was probably a pit with an opening at the top. The king also sealed Daniel's tomb with the royal signet rings. We can only imagine the joy of these lords when this took place.

GOD SAVES DANIEL AND GLORIFIES HIS NAME

So what happened next? The next morning king Darius returned, fully expecting the den to be the tomb for whatever remained of Daniel's body. But Darius was in for a surprise.

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" Then Daniel said to the king, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. And the king commanded, and those men who had maliciously accused Daniel were brought and cast into the den of lions—they, their children, and their wives. And before they reached the bottom of the den, the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: "Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions." So this Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian. (Dan. 6:19-28)

TIMELINE

ESTHER RISKS IT ALL

God's providential work in the life of Esther.

HAMAN'S DOWNFALL

Haman's plot to destroy the Jews backfires.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

God works through the prayers of His people.

As Darius came near to the lions' den he cried out for Daniel, wondering if he might still be alive. Suddenly, Daniel spoke, making it clear that no harm had come upon him. God had supernaturally intervened to shut the mouths of the lions, and Daniel made sure all who were present knew this truth. Daniel was brought out of the lions' den, and the king then sent those who maliciously accused Daniel to face the lions themselves.

We see how God used this entire story to show His greatness to the pagan world. Darius was clearly impacted by God's miraculous deliverance of Daniel. His declaration accomplishes at least two important purposes: It recognizes the greatness, even the superiority, of Israel's God; and it cancels out the irrevocable edict of verses 6-9. This is an amazing example of how God can even use unbelievers to proclaim His glory. As Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."

- **Make a list of the attributes given to God in Darius' song. How is God's ultimate mission of receiving glory and honor from people of all nations revealed in this song?** (p. 36, PSG)

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Priesthood of the Believer (p. 36, PSG)

God's intention for humanity is that we be a kingdom of priests, not just a kingdom with priests. Although God set up the priestly system in the Old Testament due to the sinfulness of humanity and people's need for a mediator, His ultimate purpose is that we come to God directly, through the mediating work of Jesus Christ, thus eliminating the need of another priest. Because of the work of Christ on the cross (exemplified in His tearing down the curtain that prevented access into the holy of holies), Christians are free to approach God with boldness (Rom. 5:1-5; Heb. 4:14-16).

CHRIST CONNECTION

Throughout the Bible, the stories point us to a coming deliverer, a rescuer, in fulfillment of the first gospel promise in Genesis 3:15. Several events and people in God's Word ultimately point us to Christ. For example, the Passover in Exodus 12; the temple and the sacrificial system; and people like Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and Daniel. In various ways, the Bible constantly points toward the coming King.

The 22nd Psalm in particular connects the Messiah to Daniel. In verse 21 the Righteous Sufferer proclaims, "Save me from the mouth of the lion!" God indeed saved Jesus from the mouth of the lion when He raised Him from the dead, just as He rescued Daniel. Praise God we can have courage as we follow a risen Savior!

YOUR STORY 10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What was it about Daniel's faith that made him a model servant? How does your faith impact the things you are involved in (school, sports, family life, etc.)?** *Answers will vary.*
- **When Daniel refused to obey the king's edict, what statement did it send to the rest of the world? What are some areas in our own culture in which we are called to obey God rather than men?** *Answers might include standing up for the right to life, taking care of orphans and the poor, fighting various forms of racism, and so forth.*
- **What role do you think Daniel's consistent practice of prayer had in shaping him to be the kind of man he was? How has your own personal prayer life given shape to the person you are today?** *Answers will vary.*
- **As with Daniel, how can we make sure God receives the glory for who He is and what He has done for us?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY

God's Story of Redemption, through His Son, Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY

Where your story meets His.

YOUR MISSION 10-15 MINUTES



HEAD

God chose to glorify Himself through miraculously saving Daniel in the lions' den. God used Daniel's trial and difficulties, however stressful they may have been to Daniel on a personal level, to point unbelievers to Himself. As a result, a pagan king witnessed the miraculous hand of God and publicly proclaimed God's greatness. In fact, Darius went so far as to say that God's kingdom would have no end and that He is without rival. This should automatically cause us to wonder how God is using our own trials and sufferings to make much of Himself.

- **Share about a time when God used a difficult period in your own life to point others to Himself.** *Answers will vary.*
- **How does this account give you a different perspective on personal trials, allowing you to step back and see the bigger picture of God's work?** *Answers will vary.*



HEART

This story teaches us once again that God honors those who remain faithful to Him. Just as he blessed and honored Daniel under the Babylonians, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, he did so again under the Medo-Persians and Darius (that is Cyrus the Persian). It is also worth noting, through all of these accounts, it appears that Daniel always sought to remain humble before God—in contrast to the earthly kings around him. As we know from Scripture, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to those who are humble (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).

- **In what ways are you intentionally seeking to live a life faithfully devoted to God? What does such a life look like?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What are some ways you can cultivate humility in your own life?** *First and foremost, humility begins with truly understanding God and His authority over our lives.*



HANDS

Even though it would have been a good time for Daniel to take a month off from being faithful to God, he persevered. From a worldly standpoint, Daniel's faithfulness wasn't personally convenient; however, obedience to and love for God was deeply ingrained in Daniel. He did not push his spiritual disciplines into the shadows of privacy. He had honored God in this manner the entire time He was in Babylon, and he would not stop now—not for a month, not even for a moment.

- **What are some spiritual disciplines you have intentionally tried to hide from others out of fear of what they might think or say?** *Answers may include things like prayer, Bible reading, sharing your faith with others, and so on.*
- **How does Daniel's faithfulness challenge you to live out your own faith in the presence of others?** *Answers will vary.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

LEADER PACK

For this session, refer students to pack item #6, containing an artistic poster of Daniel and the lions' den.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPWIN17Dan)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at

GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit

MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject