



WHERE LIFE & PURPOSE CONNECT

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of June 5, 2023

Weekly Prayer

Faithful God, I thank you that you have given me your promise to always be with me. I know that you will never go back on that promise. I can count on you to be there for me in any difficult or scary situation, even when the pits of life are deep and dark. You have brought me through storms of adversity in the past and will do so again. Amen.

Monday, June 5

Scripture: Daniel 1:8-15, 3:4-5, 8-27

Daniel decided that he wouldn't pollute himself with the king's rations or the royal wine, and he appealed to the chief official in hopes that he wouldn't have to do so. Now God had established faithful loyalty between Daniel and the chief official; but the chief official said to Daniel, "I'm afraid of my master, the king, who has mandated what you are to eat and drink. What will happen if he sees your faces looking thinner than the other young men in your group? The king will have my head because of you!" So Daniel spoke to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: "Why not test your servants for ten days? You could give us a diet of vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance to the appearance of the young men who eat the king's food. Then deal with your servants according to what you see." The guard decided to go along with their plan and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵At the end of ten days they looked better and healthier than all the young men who were eating the king's food.

The herald proclaimed loudly: "Peoples, nations, and languages! This is what you must do: When you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument, you must bow down and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

At that moment some Chaldeans came forward, seizing a chance to attack the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar: "Long live the king! Your Majesty, you gave a command that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument should bow down and worship the gold statue. Anyone who wouldn't bow and worship would be thrown into a furnace of flaming fire. Now there are some Jews, ones you appointed to administer the province of Babylon—specifically, Shadrach, Meshach,

and Abednego—who have ignored your command. They don't serve your gods, and they don't worship the gold statue you've set up." In a violent rage Nebuchadnezzar ordered them to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were brought before the king. Nebuchadnezzar said to them: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: Is it true that you don't serve my gods or worship the gold statue I've set up? If you are now ready to do so, bow down and worship the gold statue I've made when you hear the sound of horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument. But if you won't worship it, you will be thrown straight into the furnace of flaming fire. Then what god will rescue you from my power?" Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar: "We don't need to answer your question. If our God—the one we serve—is able to rescue us from the furnace of flaming fire and from your power, Your Majesty, then let him rescue us. But if he doesn't, know this for certain, Your Majesty: we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you've set up."

Nebuchadnezzar was filled with rage, and his face twisted beyond recognition because of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. In response he commanded that the furnace be heated to seven times its normal heat. He told some of the strongest men in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the furnace of flaming fire. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were bound, still dressed in all their clothes, and thrown into the furnace of flaming fire. (Now the king's command had been rash, and the furnace was heated to such an extreme that the fire's flame killed the very men who carried Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to it.) So these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell, bound, into the furnace of flaming fire. Then King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in shock and said to his associates, "Didn't we throw three men, bound, into the fire?" They answered the king, "Certainly, Your Majesty." He replied, "Look! I see four men, unbound, walking around inside the fire, and they aren't hurt! And the fourth one looks like one of the gods." Nebuchadnezzar went near the opening of the furnace of flaming fire and said, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. The chief administrators, ministers, governors, and the king's associates crowded around to look at them. The fire hadn't done anything to them: their hair wasn't singed; their garments looked the same as before; they didn't even smell like fire!

Observation

Some folks have never read the epic tale of Daniel and the lions' den. Even if they've heard the story, they don't always know the backstory. Daniel and his three friends (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, renamed by the chief official as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) arrived in Babylon as prisoners, exiles from Jerusalem. Though chosen for training to serve the Babylonian court, they decided early to be faithful to Israel's God. Sometimes that was relatively easy, like keeping the Hebrew food laws. But it also got dangerous, like publicly refusing to worship a gold statue the king created.

Application

We don't know why the golden image story didn't name Daniel. The rest of the book made it clear he didn't worship the image either. Making the furnace seven times hotter "is hyperbole." With the technology available it would not have been possible even to double

this temperature, about 1650° F. The story's point wasn't in the details, but in God saving his faithful servants from the king's rage. How can that story speak to you about spiritual (not just physical) protection today?

Prayer

Lord God, I'm not an exile in a hostile land (thank you!). But help my loyalty to you to show, in loving ways, when I feel pressure to "go along" and obscure my identity as your servant. Amen.

Tuesday, June 6

Scripture: Daniel 6:5-23

So these men said, "We won't find any fault in Daniel, unless we can find something to use against him from his religious practice." So these officers and chief administrators ganged together and went to the king. They said to him, "Long live King Darius! All the officers of the kingdom, the ministers, the chief administrators, the royal associates, and the governors advise the king to issue an edict and enforce a law, that for thirty days anyone who says prayers to any god or human being except you, Your Majesty, will be thrown into a pit of lions. Now, Your Majesty, issue the law and sign the document so that it cannot be changed, as per the law of Media and Persia, which cannot be annulled." Because of this, King Darius signed the document containing the law.

When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went to his house. Now his upper room had open windows that faced Jerusalem. Daniel knelt down, prayed, and praised his God three times that day, just like he always did. Just then these men, all ganged together, came upon Daniel praying and seeking mercy from his God. They then went and talked to the king about the law: "Your Majesty! Didn't you sign a law, that for thirty days any person who prays to any god or human being besides you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into a pit of lions?" The king replied, "The decision is absolutely firm in accordance with the law of Media and Persia, which cannot be annulled." So they said to the king, "One of the Judean exiles, Daniel, has ignored you, Your Majesty, as well as the law you signed. He says his prayers three times a day!" When the king heard this report, he was very unhappy. He decided to rescue Daniel and did everything he could do to save Daniel before the sun went down. But these men, all ganged together, came and said to the king, "You must realize, Your Majesty, that the law of Media and Persia, including every law and edict the king has issued, cannot be changed."

So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and hurled him into the pit of lions. The king said to Daniel: "Your God—the one you serve so consistently—will rescue you." A single stone was brought and placed over the entrance to the pit. The king sealed it with his own ring and with those of his princes so that Daniel's situation couldn't be changed. The king then went home to his palace and fasted through the night. No pleasures were brought to him, and he couldn't sleep. At dawn, at the first sign of light, the king rose and rushed to the lions' pit. As he approached it, he called out to Daniel, worried: "Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God—the one you serve so consistently—able to rescue you from the lions?" Then Daniel answered the king: "Long live the king! My God

sent his messenger, who shut the lions' mouths. They haven't touched me because I was judged innocent before my God. I haven't done anything wrong to you either, Your Majesty." The king was thrilled. He commanded that Daniel be brought up out of the pit, and Daniel was lifted out. Not a scratch was found on him, because he trusted in his God.

Observation

Chapter 6 of Daniel was set after Babylon fell to the Medes and the Persians. (Daniel 5 described that, though not in ways that totally match the non-Biblical records historians know.) Again, the story's main point was not to document details of Persian governance. It showed Daniel's refusal to give up his loyalty to God even as he worked with (and faced harassment from) those who didn't share his faith.

Application

"A pit of lions"? "The Aramaic word used means 'pit.' The pit envisaged in this story seems to be an underground cavity with a relatively small hole at the top that could be covered by a large stone.... the Persian kings used some horrible forms of execution." The king valued Daniel, yet foolishly signed the law his aides offered. What are some forms of pressure today that might feel at least a bit like someone throwing you into a pit of lions for sticking to your faith commitments?

Prayer

Dear God, the memory of Daniel's unflinching allegiance to you has sustained your people through many hard times over the centuries. Help it to strengthen me to be faithful, whatever kind of "lions" I may face. Amen.

Wednesday, June 7

Scripture: Daniel 3:25, 6:21-22; Acts 12:1-2, 5-16

He replied, "Look! I see four men, unbound, walking around inside the fire, and they aren't hurt! And the fourth one looks like one of the gods."

Then Daniel answered the king: "Long live the king! My God sent his messenger, who shut the lions' mouths. They haven't touched me because I was judged innocent before my God. I haven't done anything wrong to you either, Your Majesty."

About that time King Herod began to harass some who belonged to the church. He had James, John's brother, killed with a sword.

While Peter was held in prison, the church offered earnest prayer to God for him. The night before Herod was going to bring Peter's case forward, Peter was asleep between two soldiers and bound with two chains, with soldiers guarding the prison entrance. Suddenly an angel from the Lord appeared and a light shone in the prison cell. After nudging Peter on his side to awaken him, the angel raised him up and said, "Quick! Get up!" The chains fell from his wrists. The angel continued, "Get dressed. Put on your

sandals." Peter did as he was told. The angel said, "Put on your coat and follow me." Following the angel, Peter left the prison. However, he didn't realize the angel had actually done all this. He thought he was seeing a vision. They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself. After leaving the prison, they proceeded the length of one street, when abruptly the angel was gone. At that, Peter came to his senses and remarked, "Now I'm certain that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod and from everything the Jewish people expected." Realizing this, he made his way to Mary's house. (Mary was John's mother; he was also known as Mark.) Many believers had gathered there and were praying. When Peter knocked at the outer gate, a female servant named Rhoda went to answer. She was so overcome with joy when she recognized Peter's voice that she didn't open the gate. Instead, she ran back in and announced that Peter was standing at the gate. "You've lost your mind!" they responded. She stuck by her story with such determination that they began to say, "It must be his guardian angel." Meanwhile, Peter remained outside, knocking at the gate. They finally opened the gate and saw him there, and they were astounded.

Observation

The stories from the book of Daniel echoed through God's people's history in later times. Acts 12 recorded an effort by Herod Agrippa 1 (the grandson of Herod the Great, who tried to have the infant Jesus killed - Matthew 2:16) to suppress early Christian preaching. Luke's record made it plain that Christians didn't take the Daniel stories as assuring God's earthly deliverance. James died; Peter was miraculously set free to continue his ministry. Luke didn't try to explain away the different outcomes.

Application

Scholar N. T. Wright noted, "Luke is allowing us to see the early church for a moment not as a bunch of great heroes and heroines of the faith, but as the same kind of muddled, half-believing, faith-one-minute-and-doubt-the-next sort of people as most Christians we all know." The people in Acts or Daniel were like us, not superhuman. How can that encourage you when someone at the church (or you yourself) aren't as above-the-crowd faithful as you think they should be?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, give me eyes to see the signs (big or small) of your presence that point me to the eternal realities of your kingdom. And then give me a heart to move in the direction the signs point. Amen.

Thursday, June 8

Scripture: Daniel 6:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:4-10

As he approached it, he called out to Daniel, worried: "Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God—the one you serve so consistently—able to rescue you from the lions?"

Brothers and sisters, you are loved by God, and we know that he has chosen you. We know this because our good news didn't come to you just in speech but also with power and the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know as well as we do what kind of people we were when we were with you, which was for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord when you accepted the message that came from the Holy Spirit with joy in spite of great suffering. As a result you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The message about the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place. The news about your faithfulness to God has spread so that we don't even need to mention it. People tell us about what sort of welcome we had from you and how you turned to God from idols. As a result, you are serving the living and true God, and you are waiting for his Son from heaven. His Son is Jesus, who is the one he raised from the dead and who is the one who will rescue us from the coming wrath.

Observation

Calling God "living" may seem standard to us. In a pagan world, full of believers in a pantheon of "gods" known only as images of wood and stone, it truly was a turn "from idols" to the living God. The apostle Paul echoed to the Christians in Thessalonica what the Persian king said to Daniel. It was what the Israelites saw after Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:39), and what the prophet wrote about how absurd it was to worship a block of wood (Isaiah 44:9-17).

Application

Scholar N. T. Wright summed up Paul's message: "telling pagans that there was one true God... that this God had a true son and had demonstrated this fact by raising him from the dead (nobody had ever said that before). And people in Thessalonica, knowing from the start the risk they would be taking, turned away from their idols to this living God, and discovered, at the same moment, suffering and joy (verse 6)." What drew you to start or continue serving "the living God"?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, it doesn't always fit my human expectations, but you are alive and active even in this broken, troubled world. Let my life reflect yours in words, but even more importantly in actions. Amen.

Friday, June 9

Scripture: Daniel 6:22-23, 2 Timothy 4:16-18

My God sent his messenger, who shut the lions' mouths. They haven't touched me because I was judged innocent before my God. I haven't done anything wrong to you either, Your Majesty." The king was thrilled. He commanded that Daniel be brought up out of the pit, and Daniel was lifted out. Not a scratch was found on him, because he trusted in his God.

No one took my side at my first court hearing. Everyone deserted me. I hope that God doesn't hold it against them! But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that the

entire message would be preached through me and so all the nations could hear it. I was also rescued from the lion's mouth! The Lord will rescue me from every evil action and will save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and always. Amen.

Observation

The apostle Paul spent most of his life fearlessly preaching the message of the living God even though the emperor-worshiping Roman Empire tried to legally ban it. He drew strength from the story of Daniel in the lions' den, and from passages like Psalm 22:20-22 (a part of the psalm Jesus quoted on the cross). He wrote 2 Timothy from a Roman prison, knowing his execution was near (2 Timothy 4:6-7). But he was still grateful for the times God rescued him "from the lion's mouth."

Application

Imagine the great apostle, whose message had made so many lives better, standing on trial for his life all alone. It clearly caused Paul some pain. Yet he trusted that Jesus' promise to be with him "every day until the end of this present age" (Matthew 28:20) was true (verse 17). Scholar William Barclay quoted Joan of Arc: "If to do the right means to be alone, as Joan of Arc said, 'It is better to be alone with God.'" How have you learned to trust that God never abandons you?

Prayer

Loving Lord, on the good days, it's easy to visualize my life as a parade. Remind me on the bad days that, if you are with me, I'm still a part of a victorious march through life. Amen.

Saturday, June 10

Scripture: Hebrews 11:32-40, 2:9, 14-15

What more can I say? I would run out of time if I told you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. Through faith they conquered kingdoms, brought about justice, realized promises, shut the mouths of lions, put out raging fires, escaped from the edge of the sword, found strength in weakness, were mighty in war, and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured and refused to be released so they could gain a better resurrection. But others experienced public shame by being taunted and whipped; they were even put in chains and in prison. They were stoned to death, they were cut in two, and they died by being murdered with swords. They went around wearing the skins of sheep and goats, needy, oppressed, and mistreated. The world didn't deserve them. They wandered around in deserts, mountains, caves, and holes in the ground. All these people didn't receive what was promised, though they were given approval for their faith. God provided something better for us so they wouldn't be made perfect without us.

However, we do see the one who was made lower in order than the angels for a little while—it's Jesus! He's the one who is now crowned with glory and honor because of the

suffering of his death. He suffered death so that he could taste death for everyone through God's grace.

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, he also shared the same things in the same way. He did this to destroy the one who holds the power over death—the devil—by dying.

He set free those who were held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death.

Observation

Daniel was the only Old Testament book that specifically spoke of something much like the New Testament hope of the resurrection (Daniel 12:1-3). The (unidentified) writer of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews clearly had Daniel in mind when writing about those who through faith "shut the mouths of lions." But in the violent Roman Empire, the writer realistically noted that not every story of a person loyal to God had a happy earthly ending, that God didn't always shut "lions' mouths" in this life. Which was why, earlier in the letter, the writer said Jesus had "set free those who were held in slavery their entire lives by their fear of death" (Hebrews 2:15). That willingness to face death rather than give up their loyalty to God puzzled and frustrated the Romans who tried to stamp out Christianity as a threat to the Empire. But history tells us it moved and inspired people, so that the faith grew rather than shriveling under Roman persecution.

Application

Christian thinker Dallas Willard wrote, "With this magnificent God positioned among us, Jesus brings the assurance that our universe is a perfectly safe place for us to be." That, ultimately, was the message of the story of Daniel in the den of lions. That was the message the apostle Paul crisscrossed the Roman Empire to deliver. And that was the message Jesus lived, died and rose again to give us confidence in. Colossians 3:3 told the Colossian Christians, "Think about the things above and not things on earth. You died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." As you choose to be "in Christ," God puts your life safely out of the reach of any of the bad things that can happen in our world. Have you made, or will you make, the same choice as Daniel and Paul made, to live above and beyond the reach of the brokenness of this world?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, I want to live a life of inner quiet and trust, no matter what storms may rage around me. Hold me safely in your arms to and beyond the end of my earthly life's journey. Amen.