

### Inspire Series #3 – Daniel, Study Notes.

#### Put God First.

Let's start with some background on what was going on in Daniel's time. The big news item of his day was the conquest of the known World by the King of Babylon. A man named Nebuchadnezzar. That's where our story starts.

*Daniel 1: 1-2. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.*

This is a sad moment in the history of God's chosen people. Their slow spiritual decline. The failure and resistance to follow God's word through his prophets had come to a head. God withdrew his protection and blessing. Not only did God allow Nebuchadnezzar to defeat Israel but they lost a number of their sacred objects which were placed in a pagan temple. This was the final indignation.

This was how the Babylonian empire conducted itself. They captured the people of the land and then forced their own culture on others. They would also take note of the smartest and best people and use them for the empire.

*<sup>3</sup> Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—<sup>4</sup> young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. <sup>5</sup> The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.*

*<sup>6</sup> Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. <sup>7</sup> The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.*

Daniel 1: 3-7

Daniel is smart, good-looking, and hand-picked to serve the Babylonian way. To be indoctrinated in to the Babylonian way of doing things. And he was hugely successful. He rose through the ranks of the administration. To give you some idea of How successful he was – The King organised the entire empire into 120 provinces. He named a ruler of each one. Daniel was one of those leaders. Let's read on.

Darius the Mede decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a high officer to rule over each province. <sup>2</sup> *The king also chose Daniel and two others as administrators to supervise the high officers and protect the king's interests.* <sup>3</sup> *Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire.* Daniel 6: 1-3. Daniel proved himself so capable, so gifted that the King not only trusted him but made him second in charge of the entire empire. Now it gets interesting.

<sup>4</sup> *Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy.* <sup>5</sup> *So they concluded, "Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion."*

<sup>6</sup> *So the administrators and high officers went to the king and said, "Long live King Darius!"* <sup>7</sup> *We are all in agreement—we administrators, officials, high officers, advisers, and governors—that the king should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions.* <sup>8</sup> *And now, Your Majesty, issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked."* <sup>9</sup> *So King Darius signed the law.*

<sup>10</sup> *But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.* <sup>11</sup> *Then the officials went together to Daniel's house and found him praying and asking for God's help. (Daniel 6:4-11).*

I don't know if you noticed but Daniel lived a life of such integrity that his enemies concluded in verse five, "Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion". In other words, spiritual attack. Spiritual attack goes to the very core of who we are. It's real, it hurts us and can completely overwhelm us if we don't fight back. For those of you who were here last week I spoke about putting on the whole armour of God. We are in a battle and Daniels was just beginning.

Put God first. Let's look at verse ten again. <sup>10</sup> *But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God. Daniel 6:10-11.*

Did you notice that “as usual”. He prayed three times a day- “as he always had”. Daniël’s spiritual life was ordered around prayer. We are told he had a set place in his home, an upstairs room. He didn’t leave anything to chance. He built it into his life and he prioritised it. The Bible says, “just as he had always done”. It was a pattern, a habit. Dare I say a discipline.

Daniel was a disciplined son of God. And this part of his story inspires me to be more disciplined in my spiritual life. He had decided in the midst of all his responsibilities that this was an area they he would not neglect. As a result, he established a set time and place for prayer in his life. He put God first.

Think about it. His life must have been incredibly demanding and busy. He was one of the top administrators in the entire empire. Huge responsibilities and work-load. Remember what we read in verse three, <sup>3</sup> *Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel’s great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire.*

Verse ten again, <sup>10</sup> *But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.*

Did you notice these words about Daniels prayer life. “Just as he had always done”. That phrase stands out to me. Even though he was busy he ordered his life to make time for prayer every day. He had a set time. He prioritised it. It was an established pattern. A habit. He disciplined his private world. He was disciplined where it mattered most.

Some of us know how Daniel’s story turned out. He was thrown into the lion’s den. You may have heard that phrase, “Lion’s den” but for Daniel it wasn’t a phrase. It was a real den with real lions and he was really thrown in. There was a stone rolled over the top of it and it was sealed. He was kept there overnight to give the lions plenty of time to devour him.

Daniel knew the power of spending time with God. He is a great example and inspiration for us to do the same. Jesus also spent time with the father. In fact, he was very intentional about making sure this happened. In particular Jesus was intentional about how he started the day.

<sup>35</sup> *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1:35.* If you look at the life of Christ you will find that he went out of his way withdraw from time to time. It was about nurturing his spiritual life. His life with the father. He began his day with prayer. The focus of his time was clear and so was the quality of this time.

It involved solitude and silence. In Lukes account, we read; <sup>16</sup> *But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5:16.*

Once he was alone in a quiet place, he prayed and studied the Scriptures. We know this because we see his knowledge of the Scriptures, his amazing familiarity with the Scriptures all through his life. In the very beginning of his ministry Jesus went into forty days of solitude in the wilderness. This is where he was tempted by Satan himself.

As evangelicals we believe in the quiet time. A time set aside in the morning or some other time to focus on God. This is also the idea behind Sabbath rest. The fourth of the ten commandments God says, *"Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labour and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or your sojourner who is within your gates. (Exodus 20:8-10).*

The word Sabbath doesn't mean Saturday or Sunday. It literally, means to cease-to-stop, to rest. The word Holy means to be something different, set apart, unique, unlike anything else. Its not just about the absence of work or hurry but the presence of something that fills you. John Ortberg described the act of sabbathing this way, "eat foods you love to eat, listen to music that moves your soul, play a sport that stretches and challenges you, read books that refresh your soul, wear clothes that make you happy and as you do these things God for his wonderful goodness".

Psalms forty-six says, "Be still and know that I am God" (verse ten). Somewhere in our week we need to find time to be still. How do we know God? We have to be still. We have to stop long enough to let God speak to us. He will reveal himself and engage with you but you must stop. Silence and solitude together are so powerful.

Once we have found a space to stop what do we do next? Next, we should read the word of God, reflect on the word of God and then respond to the word of God. Reading allows you to take in the words. Reflecting on the word of God engages your mind as to what is below the surface. Responding to the word of God is allowing for what we have seen to live within our hearts. Ken Gire has said, "reading the word without taking time to reflect on it would be like sitting at a table where a scrumptious meal has been prepared and eying all the food but never eating it.

However, silence and solitude, reflection and meditation aren't all that's involved in a quiet time. We have to learn to listen. But we need to be quiet to hear what God is saying. As we reflect on Gods; word to us through the Bible, we will experience God speaking into our lives. This is key. The quieting of your heart will allow God to impress himself upon you. He will give you guidance, direction, prompting and insight.

Both Daniel and Jesus followed a similar pattern. They both built in a regular time with God in their lives. Daniel never let that time be taken away from him and neither did Jesus. The time they put aside was a regular pattern not in a legalistic way but in a disciplined committed way.

Daniel was one of the busiest leaders in the Babylon empire and Jesus was the son of God. Yet, they both found the time to spend with the father. Sometimes our walk with God can be a little dry. We need to create some space and quiet and let the word of God gently fall on our souls so we can soak up every drop.

We need to turn down the volume of our lives. *"If only you had listened when I corrected you, I would have told you what's in my heart; I would have told you what I am thinking<sup>24</sup> I called, but you refused to listen; I held out my hand, but you paid no attention". (Proverbs 1: 23-24).*

Of course, the final component of our time with God is prayer. Conversation, communion and communication with the living God. I drink deeply from the story and life of Daniel. What set him up for his radical moment of obedience. Obedience even in the face of death. He had a depth of discipline and commitment to God that enabled him to stay true the one living God. He put God first. Long may he serve to inspire us all.