

This morning, I decided to bring with me something that I have been dependent on more and more over the past few years. Does anybody have one of these...a smartphone?

I brought this smartphone up on stage because over the past few years, I really have become *dependent* on this phone. I now carry it wherever I go. I put it in my pocket. It travels with me. The amazing thing about this smartphone is that I can receive phone calls from people. I receive text messages from my friends and family. I can even read my emails, check the weather, and find out if my team won – all on my smartphone. Over the course of the past few years, my dependency has grown greater and greater on this smartphone. This smartphone is a very handy device when it is working properly.

Let me ask you a question, what happens when you continue to work or play on your phone during the day? The phone power goes down. As I continue to use the smartphone, the power will continue to drain from it. In fact, my phone even tells me when I get down to 20%. It reminds me again at 7%. It reminds me that I need to re-charge the phone. Why is that so important? Anybody ever let their phone run out of power and energy? It does not work. My dependency on the smartphone would be worthless if the battery died. What happens when I charge the smartphone? The power comes on. The smartphone can begin to work again. I am able to use it again. Anybody here dependent on their smartphone? Anybody know people who are a little too dependent on their smartphone. They may need to take a break from it.

This morning we are continuing our series on the book of Daniel. We are going to look at a character, a certain character. Anybody want to guess who? Daniel. Daniel does not have dependency on a smartphone like many of us. *Daniel has a dependency on something much greater than a smartphone.* This morning, I want to share with you a famous story many of you may have heard as a child: “Daniel and The Lion’s Den.”

If you are new with us this morning, we are going through the book of Daniel this month. We first met Daniel, when he was a teenager. Daniel was taken from his homeland and brought to Babylon, where Daniel studied a new culture, new language and new literature. Daniel grew in knowledge, wisdom and understanding during his teenage years because he became dependent on God. As Daniel continued to grow in wisdom and knowledge, he grew in his maturity as a follower of God. Through the book of Daniel, we see Daniel serve different kings: first it was King Nebuchadnezzar, when he was a young man; then later, it was King Belshazzar. Now in Daniel 6, we learn Daniel is serving a King named “Darius the Mede.” All three of these kings had put Daniel in key positions in their kingdom. Each of these kings understood Daniel as a man of integrity. Daniel was trustworthy, dependable, honest, and reliable. Daniel performs and does an outstanding job in all that comes his way.

In chapter 6, Darius the Mede is a new king. Darius the Mede appoints 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom with three administrators to rule over the satraps of which Daniel is one. Daniel is 85 years old. Now Daniel was so distinguished over all the leaders of the land that the king had planned to have Daniel be put over the entire kingdom in a short time. Daniel

is one of the most powerful people in the entire kingdom. Daniel was powerful, he was wealthy, and he had authority.

Well, you can guess that when the other leaders (satraps and administrators) thought of Daniel taking over the entire kingdom they were jealous of him. They were filled with envy. They were bitter. How could the king put a foreigner, of all people, over the kingdom? You can imagine they were livid and mad.

When you get to certain position of power and authority, there will always be people who won't like you. They will want to get rid of you. It happens today. It happened back in biblical days as well. The satraps and administrators worked together and they came up with a plan to rid of Daniel. ***“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. Finally these men said, ‘We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.’”***

What is the first thing they do to take out Daniel? They throw money to find some dirt on Daniel. They start to investigate to see if Daniel has broken any rules while governing the people. Daniel must have taken a bribe here or there. Daniel must have bent the rules to favor himself. There must be some dirt on Daniel. At the end of their investigation they cannot find anything on Daniel. There is no corruption on Daniel's record. With all the people Daniel worked with, with all the projects that were done, Daniel is above reproach on everything. Daniel does the right thing and is considered trustworthy. There is nothing anybody could charge him with. We see Daniel as a man of integrity.

Did this stop the satraps and administrators? No way. They had to think about Plan B. What could they do to rid of Daniel? They turned to Daniel's god. Everybody knew Daniel was a religious man. Everybody knew Daniel had a deep faith in God. Daniel did not keep it hidden. So what did the “satraps and administrators” do? Let's read again verse 6-7, ***“So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: ‘May King Darius live forever! 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 human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den.’”***

Darius the Mede likes this idea very much. Imagine all your leaders coming to you and saying, we should all bow and worship you. You might even get a little high (PRIDE) about yourself. Darius had to think to himself, 30 days of people praying and bowing to me. Yes, I am the greatest! Darius the king put the decree into writing. The satraps and administrators now have a way to trap Daniel. A way to get rid of Daniel forever! Everybody knew Daniel prayed to God. Everybody knew Daniel's routine of prayer. What was Daniel going to do now?

I believe Daniel knew he was being setup by his co-workers and leaders of the land. Daniel is faced with tension between keeping the decree of the king and his faith in God. What are Daniel's options upon hearing the decree?

1. Skip praying to God. God would understand; it's only 30 days.
2. Daniel could pray quietly to himself. It would only be between Daniel and God.
3. Daniel could have prayed on the couch downstairs. Nobody would know.
4. Daniel could go on with what he had been doing for years. Go home, and go to the second floor room, and get on his knees, and pray to God.

What does Daniel do? What would you do if you were in that situation? Let me read Daniel 6:10, ***“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”*** I believe Daniel knew that his enemies were right there taking pictures, recording his prayers, and looking to bring Daniel down. Remember they were very jealous of Daniel.

Daniel decides to do what he has been doing for years. Daniel was saying my God is more important than my life. Daniel knew the fate that came with what he was doing. Daniel knew the consequences. Daniel was choosing to be eaten by lions rather than to miss his time of prayer with God. As the story continues, Daniel's enemies go to the king and tell the king, there is one who decides “not” to bow down to you. There is one that would rather pray to his own God than to you. You need to throw this person to the lions, your Majesty. The king said, you are right. The satraps and administrators tell the king that Daniel is the one who pays no attention to him or the decree he put in writing. Daniel stills prays three times a day to his god. When the king Darius heard this, he was distressed. He was worried. The king felt terrible. Remember, the king was going to promote him over the entire kingdom. The king was determined to rescue Daniel, and made every effort to save him.

Let's continue to read starting at verse 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!’ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. 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. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, ‘Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?’ Daniel answered, ‘May the 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, Your Majesty.’ 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. At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in***

all the earth: ‘May you prosper greatly! I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.’

What a story. After reading a story like this, we need to ask ourselves a question. **What does this story have to do with us today? What can we practically take from this biblical account of Daniel’s life to help us in our walk with God?** I believe there are two big lessons we can take away from this story.

1. It is more important to be faithful and obedient to God than to be successful in the eyes of the world.

It is more important for Daniel to be faithful and obedient to God than to be influential, powerful, successful, and popular in the eyes of the world.

As we have read stories from the book of Daniel, we see that Daniel is faced with adversity throughout his life. Daniel is continually required to make decisions that will impact how he is seen by others. Does Daniel measure success by the world’s definition, or does Daniel measure success by God’s definition?

Think of a scoreboard for a minute. There are two teams at play. How does the world value success? The world values money and wealth, being and looking successful, having power, being attractive, and having prestige. The world also values having extreme abilities to be a superstar in sports or the in the arts. These are all things people of the world value as successful. People would say that you made it in life. These are things that people of the world look at to determine success. This is the world’s scoreboard.

How about God’s scoreboard? Is God’s scoreboard different than the worlds? What is it that God values as being successful? God values our obedience and faithfulness. God values our integrity. Are we honest, caring and loving? Do we love our neighbor? Do we spend time with God?

As you can see these two scoreboards are quite different. The world values money, popularity, power, and beauty. God values something very different: obedience and faithfulness. There are some occasions where they collide, and you have a person whom society looks at as successful according to the world’s definition, and also has the ability to score high on God’s scoreboard. It is possible. Daniel is a perfect example of this. Daniel was one of the most powerful people in the kingdom. And Daniel was also obedient and faithful to God. There are people that can be both.

In our life, we are constantly faced with these tensions. We are faced with pressure all the time. What scoreboard do we pick? Do we pick the world’s scoreboard? Do we stretch the truth to make ourselves look better than we should? Do we cheat to move ahead? Do we make someone look bad to advance our own cause? I could go on. I hope you get the point. Do we pick God’s scoreboard? Are we a person who is obedient and faithful to God? Are we a person who has integrity? Are we willing to do what is right at the expense of a job, a promotion or pay increase? What scoreboard do we care about?

Sometimes in life, you can pick God's scoreboard and it may cost you. Sometimes by making decisions that are right and honorable, it may cost you in this life. It may cost you money. It may cost you a promotion. It may cost friendships. When you decide to follow God with integrity it will cost you. It cost Jesus's early disciples. Remember the early disciples who were devoted to Jesus? Many of them were persecuted because of what they believed. The world probably would look at them as unsuccessful. Yet God looked at them as successful.

Daniel had a relationship with God. Putting God first is what made Daniel successful. Having a relationship with God, praying to God regularly is what God wants us to do.

When the ways of the world collide with the ways of God. We need to be people who pick God first. We need to remember that God is always right. Even when you don't always agree. There are times in life when I read the bible and I squirm. I know that there are things that sometimes I just want to disagree with. I want to change what God says. Yet, I have to remember that God's ways are better than mine. Even though I don't understand why God says it, I need to remember God is God. I am not God. I need to choose to follow God first.

Point #1: It is more important to be faithful and obedient to God than to be successful in the eyes of the world. If you have to choose, be faithful and obedient. Be a person of integrity.

Question: How do you become a person (like Daniel) who is faithful and obedient, a person with integrity? What is it that Daniel can teach us through this passage?

2. **We need to be plugged into God. Our dependency needs to be on God and that can only happen by prayer.**

I started my sermon talking about dependency on a smartphone. A smartphone can do a lot of things. Over time and as a society, we are becoming more dependent on smartphones and less on God. I believe it is more important that we become plugged into God. As Christians, God is our source of power. God is our dependency. We need to be people who pray.

Daniel understood the power of prayer. Daniel also understood the dependency of praying. In the story it says, that Daniel prayed three times a day. I believe the reason Daniel prayed three times a day is simply he needed to. It may have started out as a tradition of his faith that he learned from his parents. Over time, it became a necessity. Daniel felt the pressure with work, relationships, and making wise decisions in life. What Daniel understood is that he needed God's help. Daniel understood it could only be done by prayer. Daniel was dependent on God.

Question: Let me ask you this morning, is prayer a fixture in your life? Do you spend time praying to God?

When you are faced with difficult decisions in life; it may be about your future, work, making a huge decision in life or even school. When do you consult God? Do you ever think that God wants to help you? Do you ever take intentional time to pray and talk with God?

When I read this passage of Daniel, what I see is that I need to take time from my schedule and block out time in my day to meet with God. Daniel teaches us that we need to find a location. For Daniel it was upstairs in his house. We need to find time in the day. For Daniel it was three times a day.

I encourage each of you to find a location and time to be with God. Each of us needs to find a place to meet with God. This location may be your bedroom. It might be a sitting area in your house. It might be showing up at the office 15 minutes before anybody else is there.

Do you have a place where you can meet with God?

Second, you need to find a time you can meet with God. For some of us we need to pencil it in. Keep that time regular. Whether it is morning, afternoon or evening. If you want to grow in your relationship with God, you need to designate time in your busy schedule to meet with God.

Guys – This sermon is for me too. I struggle with sitting down and being with God. My mind is always racing. It is thinking about the next meeting or the person I need to meet with or what I need to get done. It is so hard at times to sit down, and pray to God. I know it is important. I know that I need to do it. Yet, I struggle with it. There are people here today that do it so much better than me. There are times where I just struggle with praying to God. Let me tell you what I do at times. I pull out my pad of paper and I write my prayers to God. I even title it, “Dear God,” and then I will write out my prayers because it is the only way I can stay focused. When my mind drifts to that next meeting or that thing I need to get done, I just bury myself in my notebook, and try again to stay focused on my prayer to God. I may write a couple of paragraphs or even a page. Then I read my prayer to God. When I read my prayer to God, I feel good about it.

- I feel like I emptied my struggles to God. I share with God the people that I am praying for.
- I can take time and confess my sins to God. It allows me to think about it. I can even question why do I do that? How hurtful it is to that person or to God.
- Then I can close with thanking God. There is peace in my heart.

Guys, praying to God is tough business. It is not easy. It takes time and energy to do it. It takes finding a place to meet with God. It takes meeting with God daily. When I meet with God daily, when I share my prayers with him that is when God becomes centered in my life. That is when I realize my dependency is really on Him.

My challenge to you this week is to take some time this week and meet with God. Find a place – your bedroom, at work, or even at the beach. Find a time to be with God. Maybe it is morning, for others it will be evening. For some of you who struggle with prayer – write your prayers down on a piece of paper. This week take some time and pray to God. It may seem weird at first. Trying anything for the first time is weird. Remember playing an instrument for the first time, or the first time you shot a basketball. It was weird. You were not sure what you were doing. Even if you did it right. It felt uncomfortable. Then over time it became easier. It begins to feel natural. It's never perfect. The key is you are doing it. This week as a congregation, let's try to spend time with God in prayer. For some of us this will be 5 minutes

for others this may be longer, 15 minutes. I just want to challenge you to take time and be with God this week. Amen. Let's pray.