

How to Influence Our Fallen World

Daniel 1-6

**A sermon preached by Dr. Calvin Warpula
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Every one of us wants our life to count. We want to make a difference in our world, and most of all, we want our lives to count for God.

We do not want to spend our time making mud pies or picking blackberries at the burning bush. We want to know our reason for existence and live out the experience with God in the fullest degree.

We want to be faithful to God in a fallen world, and yet there are times when we blush with embarrassment when spiritual matters come up in a conversation. Sometimes we are fearful. Doors of opportunity are opened before us and we turn away.

For the past several weeks, we have seen a different posture from Daniel and his three friends: Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, or better known to us by their Babylonian names, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These four, both as teenagers and as grown men, influenced their world.

I want us today to think one last time about the lives of these men and try to summarize and encapsulate what made them the way they were.

Their story, told in the first six chapters of Daniel, is a tremendous encouragement to each of us to live a godly life in the midst of a pagan environment. They lived in Babylon, a pagan environment, for roughly seventy years. They walked in victory. How much more should we be able to do so today? We have more history of God's working and more Scripture to encourage us.

These men had a tremendous influence on the world about them. In each chapter, the king and other leadership are impressed by what God does. These four men lived out their faith. They served where they were. They were not afraid of "the system." They walked with God one day at a time and dealt with crisis situations where they arose. They might have experienced fear of physical harm at times, but they basically responded consistently with wisdom and graciousness. Times of confrontations became teachable moments to articulate their unwavering faith in the one living God. So the net result is that the four youths, and later men, were not

swayed by the Babylonian system but that specific individuals within the system were swayed by these four faithful friends.

These four men were not preachers. They were not primarily prophets. They were palace administrators. They were not people like me who preach all the time; they were people like you who work every day in the world outside.

This is exciting because the God of 600 B. C. is our God today. God is just as adequate, just as interested, just as available, and just as powerful as he was in Daniel's day. He wants to help us live in our world just as he helped them live in theirs.

What was it about these four friends that allowed them to impact their world? What can we learn from them? Where should we start?

I. Let God Alone Be the Object of Your Worship

Babylon was a city given to idolatry. The city had 53 temples to various gods, 180 open air shrines for Ishtar alone, and 1800 niches, pedestals, and sacred places for other gods.

Our world today is given to worshipping objects, either physical or abstract. We worship things made of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

In Chapter three, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to worship anyone or anything besides God alone. Jesus said, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve" (Matt. 4:10).

No one else is worthy of our worship. His hand holds us. He sent his son to die for us. The Bible says, "And he died for all, that those who live should not live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:15).

II. Keep Learning about God from His Word and from Your Life

Daniel knew God's word. He may have had access to Isaiah's writings, especially chapters 40 through 66. He knew the writings of Jeremiah (Dan. 9:2). He knew the truth. In chapter one, he resisted pressures to conform. In chapter two, he had the qualities of discernment and discretion.

Daniel also knew God from life. He observed and learned of God.

As you live daily, learn from God. Look for principles about the character of God, the weakness of man, and the nature of life. Stop

during the day to ask yourself, “What can I learn from my day so far?”
“How have I seen God’s hand at work?”

Learning about God is not purely academic, but relational. Get to know God as you spend time with him. Become intimate with the Creator of the universe.

III. Live Your Life in Dependence upon God

Knowledge of God involves obedience. He’s in charge. He’s calling the shots.

He helps us obey him. He gives us power to do whatever he asks of us. Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The apostle Paul said, “God works in us both to will and to do his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Only as we look to him is fruit borne in our lives. God will supply what we need to live. God will give us patience, wisdom, endurance, and encouragement.

Two key statements in Daniel reflect this dependence upon god. In 3:28, Nebuchadnezzar praised God for the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace. He says, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They *trusted* in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.” In 6:23, the record says that Daniel was lifted from the lions’ den and “no wound was found on him, because he had *trusted* in his God.”

Our tendency today is to trust in ourselves. In an editorial in the Houston Chronicle on March 12, 2011, David Brooks writes that a survey of high school students found that 70% of them, according to their own estimations of themselves, have above-average leadership skills and only 2% are below average. We have tremendous faith in our own abilities. In our culture that emphasizes self-expansion, 80 per cent of high school seniors believe they are “a very important person.” That’s why there is so much show-boating celebration after a home run or a touchdown reception. We are becoming a nation of praise addicts. Our narcissistic attitude affects our politics. We say, “I know how the country should be run and anybody who disagrees with me is just in the way.” The enlargement of the self has caused us to forget others and has made us unwilling to sacrifice. What this shift in values means is that we

are more prone to depend on ourselves and not on anyone else, not even God.

This type of thinking leads us to believe and act as though there really is no God and that we create our own morality. For example, Senator Harry Reid of Nevada has called for an end to the legal brothels in his state. This has created quite a negative reaction among those who practice the sex trade. In the Houston Chronicle for Feb. 28, 2011, one young woman named Brooke is quoted as saying, “Here we are being safe and professional and earning a living, and he wants us to end it? Absolutely not. This is what I choose to do, and there is nothing wrong with it.” Brooke has placed making a living above God and his word. What God calls sin, she says, “There is nothing wrong with it.”

Are we in the church guilty of teaching a form of self-serving Christianity? Kendra Dean Creasy is a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary and the author of a new book entitled, Almost Christian. She says that many pastors and parents are passing on to their youths “moralistic therapeutic deism.” What that is is a watered down faith that portrays God as a “divine therapist” whose chief goal is to boost people’s self-esteem. She argues that this “imposter faith” is one reason that teens are abandoning churches. She says, “If this is the God they’re seeing in church, they are right to leave us in the dust. Churches don’t give them enough to be passionate about.” Is she right? Is this what we are teaching our youth? That God exists to serve us? How are we living our lives? We all have to ask ourselves these questions: “Does my life reflect who God is and what he’s done in my life? Am I pursuing God? Am I allowing him to work in my life to make me like Jesus? Are we really showing the life Christ has called us to or are we just talking about it?”

Daniel was true to God no matter what the cost. In chapter 6, when Daniel is about 82 years old, and the king orders that no one is to pray to any god but him for thirty days, what does Daniel do? Does he pray silently? Does he pray in a closet so no one will see or hear him? No. Daniel went to an open window and prayed like he always had. He did not change his prayer life to save himself from a den of lions. This is obedience of the highest order.

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were threatened with death in the fiery furnace, did they back down and worship the golden image? No. They said, “O king, the God we serve is able to save us, but if he does not, we will not worship your image.” They were true to God even when their lives were on the line.

A believer is to live every moment in dependence upon God and his word. We don't determine our own values of what's right and what's wrong. By his very nature, God has already determined that for us. We recognize that without God we are nothing worthwhile spiritually. Every day, every moment, and every breath is lived in dependence upon God. Jesus said it so well, "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). The apostle Paul said that all the credentials, pedigrees, and accomplishments of this world are really nothing but trash compared to the greatness of knowing Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:9-10).

IV. Function as Part of the Body of Christ

These four men spent time together. In chapters one through three, they ate together, they informed one another about what was happening, they prayed together, and they resisted idols together.

God want us involved with others. No one does well as an island. The body is not just gravy on the potatoes, but part of the potatoes themselves. Certain things can only be learned in a context with others.

So be involved with the body of Christ. We need to be in a group where people really know us, where there is freedom to share joys and struggles, where we can be challenged and encouraged and prayed for and supported in every possible way.

We have many opportunities here to do that. We have Sunday morning classes, worship assemblies, Sunday evening small groups, Monday night class, Wednesday night class, ministry groups, and teaching and serving opportunities like VBS and Leadership Training for Christ. The church functions as a body, not as a collection of separated, isolated, individualistic parts. We belong to each other. We need each other. We are here to help and serve each other.

V. Rest in God's Sovereign Control over History

The story in the book of Daniel can be tragic in many ways. Four teenagers captured by an invading, conquering army. They are torn away from loving parents. They are separated from their whole way of life. They are deported to a strange, overwhelming, idolatrous place. Yet that provided a prime opportunity for God to work.

God is very active in their lives. He gives them wisdom. He upholds and encourages them. He spares their lives. God brings light out of darkness and life out of death. Daniel and his friends live significant lives.

Things have happened to us that we never dreamed could happen. But God is all powerful and can redeem any situation. He is adequate to handle anything life throws at us.

God will work in your life to accomplish his purposes. Let God use your life in big places and little ones, to touch large numbers or just a few.

God's love for us is seen in the cross. He makes himself totally available for us. His love continues now.

You may have asked, "God, what do you want me to do? What do you want me to do?"

The answer comes through loud and clear, "Faith and duty, faith and duty, faith and duty." God says to us, "Do what I command and trust me to take care of the rest."

Today, we face frustrations. Maybe it's from our boss, our marriage, our children, our health limitations, or from our financial circumstances. We all have problems. Life is problem solving—solving one problem after another. What does God want us to do? "Faith and duty, faith and duty, faith and duty." God says, "Do what I command and I will take care of the rest." And he will.

In every one of these six chapters, Daniel and his friends trusted God and obeyed God, no matter what. They gave God the glory in everything. They let nothing sway them from obeying and serving God.

That's what God wants from us in our day and age, 2,500 years later. He wants us to stand our ground. He wants us to trust him to take care of the rest.

We can trust God because of who he is. I have inserted into the bulletin a card like this. Please take it up now and look at it with me. These are thirteen attributes of God. This is who God is. But every doctrine of the Bible has practical applications for us. The attributes of God mean that God relates to us in those ways. I want us to read these now. I will read the attribute of God and I've asked Ryan McDonald to lead you in reading the application line. Let's read it together.

Because God is a personal Spirit....I will seek intimate fellowship with him."

Because God is all-powerful...He can help me with anything.

Because God is ever-present...He is always with me.

Because God knows everything...I will go to Him with all my

questions and concerns.

Because God is sovereign...I will joyfully submit to His will.

Because God is holy...I will devote myself to Him in purity, worship and service.

Because God is absolute truth...I will believe what He says and live accordingly.

Because God is righteous...I will live by His standards.

Because God is just ...He will always treat me fairly.

Because God is love...He is unconditionally committed to my well-being.

Because God is merciful...He forgives me of my sins when I sincerely confess them.

Because God is faithful...I will trust Him to always keep His promises.

Because God never changes...My future is secure and eternal.

[The above attributes of God and his benefits are from Bill Bright's book, Discover God and His Attributes of God]

Let's stand our ground and be strong and firm for God, no matter what. The apostle Paul urged us, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (I Cor. 15:58). Paul also urged us, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. . . . Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Eph. 6:10-11, 13-14).

-cwarpula@westchurch.com