

#2, “Defiant Prayer” // Daniel 6:1–10; 10:11–14 // Press Through

Easter

Big time. You know us. We’ll make the gospel clear and accessible. The music will be amazing. We’ve got a bunch of different service options all weekend so take advantage.

Introduction

Prayer is the most undervalued resource of the church.

- The Bible teaches us that **all the blessings** that God wants to bestow on us, he does so through prayer. Prayer is **the conduit** by which his power comes into our lives and into our families.
 - John Wesley, pioneer of the Great Awakening in our country, once said, “*God does nothing on earth except in answer to prayer.*” That’s clearly an overstatement, but he’s getting at the fact that the means why which God releases his power on earth is through prayer.
- Prayer is the **way we lay hold** of the promises and blessings of God and make them our own.
 - The Bible is a book of promises: 3000 of them, all of which are “yes” in Christ Jesus, for you.
 - I want you to read through the Bible, yes, but more importantly I want you to *pray* through it.
 - Prayer works like a laser. The way a laser works is you stack light beams on top of each other until, and as you do, they intensify. When waves go opposite directions, they cancel each other out. (like noise cancelling headphones). When they go the same direction, they increase in strength. Prayer is adding the wave of our faith to the wave of God’s promises and his expressed will, and the result is the laser of God’s power.

Where is the power and blessing of God absent from your life and family, simply because you have not risen up to claim the blessings and power of God as your own?

Last week we looked at Jacob, a man who laid hold of the promised blessing from God by wrestling with him. God had already declared the blessing to be his, so he wasn’t trying to manipulate God into giving something he had come up with on his own, it was something that God had declared for him; but he took it through a night of wrestling. He pressed through, and won his blessing.

Today we’ll look at another guy whose life was similar. Daniel. Daniel is one of the most famous Bible heroes of all time.

- BTW, anybody watching the Bible on the *History Channel*?
- That’s what Christians watched last week; pagans watched the Oscars. But I’m not **judging**.

I will show you 3 things about Daniel’s prayer: Daniels’ **Discipline** of prayer; Daniel’s **Defiance** through prayer; and Daniel’s **Endurance** in prayer.

- (“*Oh yes, just when you thought you’d gotten all of the **Southern Baptist** out of the boy, he goes and pulls something like this and alliterates his sermon. Daniel’s Discipline; Defiance; Endurance. **Except for** endurance; but if you’ll put the emphasis on the DUR, en-DUR-ance, it’s like they all start with D. Is that lame?/You like that? I’m a professional.*”)

Daniel 6:1–10

Daniel was an Israelite captive that had been carried off to Babylon, probably, scholars say, somewhere in his middle school years.

- God had told Israel that if they were unfaithful to him, he would send them out of the promised land of Israel into exile.
- Well, after repeated warnings Israel would not return from her unfaithfulness, so God kept his word to them and in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of the Babylon rode into

Jerusalem, killing thousands and taking a bunch more as captives and slaves.

- As I mentioned, Daniel was likely in his middle school years, and means he probably saw his parents murdered in front of him and then he had been put into a cage and carted off to Babylon.

Well, after he got there, **Daniel was selected to be part of a program** where some of the best and brightest of all the young men in Babylon got to train as interns in the palace.

- And they included some of the Israelite captives so they could brainwash them into Babylonian ways and use them as leaders of their people.

Well, through a series of events, God blessed Daniel and **Daniel distinguished himself** above all the others.

- **First, the king had commanded** these guys to eat the best Babylonian diet, but the problem was it included many foods that were forbidden by the law of God for Jews to eat. So Daniel determined in his heart he wouldn't not defile himself with the king's meats. But his supervisor said, "You have to. This is the diet that we have determined makes you the smartest and most physically fit. And you can either eat it, or be executed." Daniel said, "What if you test us for 10 days, choosing our own foods, and see if in a couple of weeks we have suffered for it." So the guy agrees and when they examine them after 10 days they are healthier and stronger than all the others.
- **Daniel 2 says that God gave Daniel** an incredible amount of wisdom and skill in all the maths and sciences, setting him at the top of his class in everything.
- **And God gave him the ability** to interpret a few **dreams**, which caught people's attention. Not only could Daniel tell you what was in the books you studied, he could tell you what was in your head the night before. He was the ancient version of Google.
- Finally it says that God had put "**an excellent spirit**" in him, which I take to mean that he just exuded favor and graciousness. You've been around people like that.

So that's where we pick up in chapter 6. [6:1] It pleased Darius (who was the king who replaced Neb) to set over the kingdom 120 satraps... (some kind of high-ranking Babylonian government official) [2] and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account...

- So out of the top 120 they selected 3, and Daniel was one of them.

[3] 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.

[4] Then the (jealous) 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... because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him.

[5] 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."

- "This guy just obeys the laws of God too much." You're in good shape when that's all they got against you.

[6] Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "*O King Darius, live forever!* (Shameless flattery, "oh your most exalted awesomeness")

[7] All (of us) 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**. (*the den was their ultimate punishment*)

[8] 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." (The law of the Medes

and the Persians was this code that said that once something had been signed into law it couldn't be undone even if all the parties changed their minds. Think "blood covenant" or a pinky swear, or a sequester order.)

[9] Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

- He fell to flattery and bad political advice.

I love this next part. [10] 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.

- Daniel didn't get his marching orders from the king or the daily newspaper or the school administration officials or what was popular now and trending on twitter or what was deemed socially acceptable and politically correct or anything else.
- *He got his marching orders from God—which was, by the way, the key his success.*
- When you try to please everyone, you will fail. When you are concerned with pleasing only God, not only is decision making much simpler, *he* prospers you. You live for an audience of one.

So here are our 3 things:

I. Our prayer should be characterized by DISCIPLINE

The story tells us Daniel prayed routinely 3 x a day.

- I'll make the case that this was one of the primary sources of Daniel's strength. He met with God as often as he ate!
- The most important discipline I have is meeting with God every day. For those of you who don't have a daily time with God, I don't know how you do it—marriage, relationships...?
- Jesus prayed all night before choosing his disciples. How many big decisions have you gone into without seeking God's direction? (Josh 11). But oh, Jesus was weak and you don't need that like he did...? Prayer is *how* God releases his wisdom and power for change in you.

- *You see, let me use an example on the other side...*
 - The night before Jesus died, Jesus had taken 3 of his closest disciples deep into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with him. Jesus was about to go through the greatest struggle he'd ever been through, and he needed these guys to pray with him.
 - He left them in a place to pray and went on a little farther into the garden to pray by himself, telling them they needed to pray that they would not fall into temptation themselves.
 - When he came back, he **found them asleep**. When he woke them up they probably **tried to pretend** like they were praying, "*Oh God, yes, and bless the missionaries, in Jesus' name, Amen.*" But Jesus **wasn't fooled**. He said, "Could you not even watch and pray with me for an hour?"
 - *Later that night, Peter would deny Jesus 3x.*
 - **Here's the question:** What if Peter had stayed awake for that hour? Jesus told him to stay up and pray, "that he would not enter into temptation." Maybe he would not have crumbled that night and made the greatest mistake of his life.
 - When Jesus had found Peter sleeping he said, "*The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.*" Exactly!¹
- ***What if prayer is God's means of strengthening your spirit to avoid temptation and to snap the world's power over you?***
- Read this in a book recently called *The Circle Maker*.
 - *On July 16, 1969, Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins, and Buzz Aldrin propelled into space aboard Apollo 11. The rocket apparatus weighed 102,907 pounds, but carried 5,625,000 pounds of fuel.*

At takeoff, the five engines produced 7,500,000 pounds of thrust in order to reach the escape velocity of 17,500 mph

¹ Insight taken from Mark Batterson, *The Circle Maker*, 170–1.

required to break the gravitational pull of our world and get into orbit.

Prayer is the way we escape the gravitational pull of the flesh and enter God's orbit.²

- **(Application)**
 - I'm not saying prayer **3x a day** is the magic number. But what if you **bathed each day** in prayer?
 - What if you **prayed through your calendar** each morning? That's one of the things I do—pray through my calendar.
 - **You need to set a time.** "Oh, I just pray throughout the day." No, you don't. You need to set a time and be disciplined.
 - I'm trying to **teach this to my kids**: 10 minutes in the morning. *Jesus Calling*.

Before I go on to my next point, let me share with you the cool ending to my astronaut story: On Sunday, July 20, 1969, Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong landed their lunar module, called 'the Eagle,' on the Sea of Tranquility on the surface of the moon. The first thing they did was celebrate Communion. (*BTW, because of a lawsuit filed by the ACLU, when NASA aired the reading from Genesis by the astronauts of Apollo 8, it decided to black out that part of the broadcast.*)

Aldrin, an elder in the Presbyterian Church, took out the bread and poured the wine for him and another astronaut. Because gravity there is only 1/6 as strong as on earth, the wine curled gracefully up the side of the cup. Buzz Aldrin read John 15:5: "*I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*"³

Why pray? Because apart from him you can **do nothing**. Nothing of lasting spiritual value.

² Mark Batterson, *Circle Maker*, p. 172–73.

³ *Circle Maker*, 172–3.

- **Memorize this verse—Psalm 127:1:** "Unless the Lord builds the house (the family, the career, the ministry, the legacy, our church), those who labor, labor in vain."
- **You must develop the discipline of prayer**

OK, so #2...

II. Our prayer should be characterized by **DEFIANCE**

Defiance of what? Of Babylon's laws not to obey God, yes. But there's something more. When Daniel prayed, he was defying a situation he didn't want to be in and that he believed God wanted to change.

The words of one of Daniel's prayers that he prayed 3x a day are given in Daniel 9:

*[17] Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy, and for your own sake, O Lord, make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. [18] O my God, incline your ear and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name. For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy. [19] O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name." **Daniel 9:17–19***

That prayer is a model prayer with so much in it to see. *What do you see in that prayer? I see...*

- **A spirit of repentance and humility**: God is not going to hear you when you are defiant against him.
- **Great hope in God's mercies**: He says: "For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy." God doesn't hear prayers that are based on the idea that you are worthy to be heard. He hears prayers that make their hope *his great mercy*.
- **But I also see an... Awareness of the promises of God**. What Daniel demands there ("O Lord, pay attention and act. Your city ") is a near verbatim quote of a promise God gave in

Deuteronomy 30 that if Israel went into exile, when they repented, God would restore them to Israel.

- See what Daniel is doing? He is holding up God's words to God. He is "catching God in his words."⁴

Write this down: *Effective prayer begins when you perceive the gap between where a situation is and where God wants it to be.*

- Jesus taught us to pray, 'Your kingdom come; your will be done earth as it is in heaven.' We **see a gap** between his will and his kingdom and our situation, and we pray it into existence.
- We add the **wave of our faith** to the wave of his will and thereby release the laser of his power.

*Now, that has to be done with humility because we **don't always know the will** of God. But a lot of the will of God we **know through his word**.*

***So here's my question:** How well do you know the word of God?*

The strengths of our prayers to God are entirely dependent on our knowledge of the word of God.

- *This is your prayer book.* Your ability to lay hold of the promises of God is entirely dependent on your knowledge of those promises!
- ***Prayers that start in heaven are heard by heaven. If you want the help of heaven you must listen to the words from heaven.***

Prayers that are effective begin and end with the promises of God. To have your prayers answered you must pray according to the will of God.

You can't know God's will any more than you know his word. So if you want to pray well, know the word well.

In prayer we perceive the will of God for a situation and defy the situation that currently is and pray that "God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

John Paton:

- A young Scottish pastor in the 19th century named John Paton, who was leading a very successful church in Scotland, grew increasingly burdened about a group of islands he'd heard about in the Pacific that was inhabited by people who had never heard the gospel.
- The problem was that these islands, the New Hebrides, were filled with cannibals who had a history of eating any foreigner who came on shore. And no Westerner knew their language.
 - *What exactly do you do to start a church in a place like that? You can't pass out pamphlets that say "Easter sunrise service this Sunday: come and bring a friend."*
 - *Someone in the service might eat your friend.*
- But Paton knew that God was not willing that any perish. So he resigned his church and determined to go.
- Many tried to discourage him from going. In one of my favorite episodes from his life, Paton recounts this:

"I was besieged with the strongest opposition on all sides. One of my seminary professors told me that I was leaving certainty for uncertainty. I was leaving work in which God had made me greatly useful... only to throw my life away for the cannibals. One dear old Christian deacon said to me: 'Son, the cannibals! You will be eaten by cannibals!'"

I replied, "Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms. ...If I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms. And in the great day, my resurrection body will arise as fair as well as yours in the glorious likeness of our risen Redeemer."

(DEFIANCE)

⁴ Quote from Martin Luther, sermon on Genesis 32.

“Indeed,” he said, “the opposition was so strong from nearly all... (that I was driven to really seek) God in prayer. But, again, every doubt would vanish when I clearly saw that... (these poor men and women created in God’s image) were perishing without even the chance of knowing all God’s love and mercy to me.”

- **Paton's lifelong ministry there was both brutal and exhilarating.** His wife, whom he loved dearly, **died bearing their first child** on that island. He had to sleep on their graves for 3-4 nights to keep the cannibals from digging them up and eating them. He was under **constant siege** day and night, always on the lookout for his life.
- Eventually, **he saw a breakthrough.**
 - In fact, in one of my favorite stories from his biography: One of the chiefs who came to Christ asked him, "**When you first got here**, who was that army that guarded your hut each night?" Apparently the angels of God surrounded his family each night to preserve this Gospel witness.⁵
- *When Paton arrived on that island in 1858 there was not a single Christian. When he died 35 years later, on that same island, he said he did not know a single islander who had not professed faith in Jesus Christ.*

Where do you perceive a gap?

- In your marriage... In your kids... In your job... In a ministry situation.

Summit: I perceive a gap between where our church is and what God wants the gospel situation in RDU to be:

- I believe he wants the **gospel to be famous** here.
- I believe he wants **students who come to study** at our universities to see that Jesus is better than the lusts of the flesh and that the gospel provides better answers for life’s questions than skepticism and atheism do.

- I believe he wants there to be a **profound spirit of gospel unity** between churches here in Triangle are and together we see a massive turning to the gospel in our city.
- Racial diversity
- I believe he wants the **gospel to be made accessible to the HOPUD**, and that he wants his people to **saturate** every broken and hurting part of our city.
- I believe he wants **Raleigh-Durham to experience a re-birth of love within families**—fathers toward sons; husbands and wives to each other.
- And I believe he wants us to **plant 1000 churches and bless 1000 cities** in places where the church is not strong all around the world.

I believe all this because God’s word tells us he wants it.

And I defy the situation, when it’s not like that, and claim the promises of God to ask him to help us change that; and, btw, we will defy anyone like Darius or his jealous satraps who try to keep us from obeying God.

So, bring it on King Darius, you can put us in the lion’s den; our God is a God who shuts the mouths of lions.

OK, so last point...

III. Our prayers should be characterized by ENDURANCE

- Two quick observations from Daniel’s life:
 1. **Daniel was willing to be thrown into the lion’s den before he’d stop praying.**
 - *How valuable is prayer to you?* Daniel was willing to lose his life over it. How much do you prioritize it?
 - My challenge: start a Bible reading and prayer time DAILY.
 - 40 DOP.
 - After that, we’re going to introduce a Summit Bible reading plan: a bookmark; a daily tweet.

⁵ See *John G. Paton: An Autobiography* (John Paton).

- Biggest game changer will be you praying daily. Me seeing my dad—I saw my dad’s faithfulness to pray and felt God’s faithfulness as he answered.

2. Daniel was willing to persist in prayer until God answered.

- The return from exile did not happen for some 70 years. Daniel prayed for 60 years before that answer was given. 60 years!
 - Would you pray for something for that long?
- Here’s another interesting piece: Daniel at one point was praying about something, and while he was praying out by the river, a man clothed in bright linen walked up to him and said: *[11] “O Daniel, man greatly loved... stand upright, for now I have been sent to you.” And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. [12] Then he said to me, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. (But) [13] The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me...”*
- This just drips with awesomeness... and confusion.
- So on the day that Daniel started to pray, his words were heard and this guy was sent with the answer to his prayer. But along the way a demonic force engaged this angel and they had a cage match for 21 days!
 - (You ever look up and think, “What’s going on up there?” If you and I had any idea of what is happening when we pray it would blow our minds.)
- **While he was held up**, Daniel kept praying, for 21 days.
- And then another angel, named **Michael, who is kind of the Jack Bauer** of angels, shows up around day 20 and helps this first angel.
- Now, it doesn’t say directly that this 2nd angel came because Daniel kept praying, but you have to wonder about the connection. What if Daniel had quit praying on day 20?
- I don’t know. There’s so much mystery here it is unwise to speculate. But I know the uniform teaching in Scripture, as I

shared with you last week, is that some answers are only given in response to persistent prayer.

- **You’ve prayed for 20 days, no answer. Keep praying. You’ve prayed for 60 years, no answer. Keep praying.**
- I struggle with this. How do you know when to persist and when to rest in the sovereignty to God.
 - Paul in 2 Cor 12:9 prayed 3 times for God to change something in his life and finally God sent back word, “Paul, I’m not going to change that. But I will give you my grace in it.”
 - Jesus once told his disciples that they shouldn’t pray like pagans who think God will hear them because they talk a lot, and that our Heavenly Father knows what we need before we even ask him.
 - So some things that we pray for—even good things that we think are the will of God—we are not going to get no matter how long we pray.
- But the Bible tells us to **knock and keep on knocking**. (Think about the imagery of **knocking**)
- To be like the **persistent widow** we discussed last week. To be like **Jacob who wrestled** with God and **Daniel who pressed through** for 21 days and 60 years.
 - The early church prayed all night for Peter’s release, Acts 12.
- The Bible presents both sides.
 - Honestly, I can’t tell you which is which but there is a tension and the Holy Spirit has to guide you. **I’d say a general rule is to keep pressing through until God makes it clear for you to stop.**
- And **when it is something you are sure** from God’s word, that you are interpreting correctly, that God wants—never give up. Press through until you get it.
- So that thing God has put in your heart—that place you know God wants you to work. Has God told you to stop praying about it? Then don’t.
- I can’t help but think here of **Joan and Tommy Swain** in our church.

- Tommy was for many years unsaved. Joan prayed and prayed for him. She stayed with him. He eventually just moved out—for 20 years—and she kept praying.
- In 2009, through some pretty remarkable circumstances, God saved him, brought him back—we baptized him around Easter 2009, if I remember right—they are now reunited to God and each other and serve in our church every weekend.
- Because a woman prayed faithfully for 20 years.

Let me conclude this message with the conclusion of the story.

Daniel gets thrown into the den of lions.

- King Darius never wanted this to happen, he was just gullible and weak-willed, so he stayed up all night worrying about Daniel.
- King Darius had been up all night worrying; Daniel’s enemies had been up all night partying; Daniel appears to be the only one who got a good night’s sleep!
- At daybreak, Darius rushed down to the den to check and see if somehow Daniel had made it, and Daniel was in there, cup of coffee in hand, reading between the lions.

God kept Daniel safe through his prayer, and the plot of the wicked men was overturned and God was glorified.

But don’t conclude that the message of this story is simply: “If you pray and trust God he’ll always keep you safe and deliver you from harm.” No, we know that’s not true. Lots of God’s people die in the lions’ dens.

The message of this story points beyond itself, like all Old Testament stories. Daniel points you to someone much more impressive and heroic than Daniel.

- Daniel was innocent yet sentenced to death. We know someone even more innocent than Daniel—Jesus.
- Daniel trusted God in pretty impressive ways. There was one who trusted God more than Daniel—Jesus.

- Daniel came out of the lion’s den without a scratch; Jesus came out of his trial filled with wounds.⁶

What that tells me is that whatever trial I am in, I am safe. I know that much God loves me. I know his presence is with me and he will never leave me or forsake me.

So therefore I can pray for 60 years, because I know God cares and he hears. I can handle it when I cry out for deliverance from the lions and it doesn’t come, because Jesus has proven his love and commitment for me at the cross.

The name “Daniel” means “God is my judge.” The gospel is that God was judged for me, so now I have no judgment to fear. In all situations I can say, “God is for me! Who can be against me? Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of life.”

And I can press through in prayer, I can persist and not be discouraged, because the cross shows me how much he cares about me and that he has made the power of his healing and salvation fully available to me in prayer because it was purchased for me by the blood of Christ.

Conclusion:

We want to end our service with another time of prayer...

⁶ List inspired by Tim Keller, message on Daniel 6 at Redeemer Presbyterian, NYC, “The Lions of Daniel.”