

Becoming a Person of Impact

SERIES: DANIEL: LIVING BY FAITH IN A FAITHLESS WORLD

In the summer of 1937, a young 17-year-old girl wrote this: "If I marry, he must be so tall when he is on his knees...he reaches all the way to heaven. His shoulders must be broad enough to bear the burden of a family. His lips must be strong enough to smile, firm enough to say no, and tender enough to kiss. Love must be so deep that it takes its stand in Christ and so wide that it takes the whole lost world in. He must be active enough to save souls...big enough to be gentle...great enough to be thoughtful." These words were written by Ruth Bell. A few years later, she met her future husband, Billy Graham, and wrote, "I watched his profile as he guided us through the Chicago traffic...I felt the masterful firmness of his hand beneath my arm as he guided me through the crowd at church. I was impressed by his unaffected thoughtfulness. Something big has happened."

Something big, indeed. For most of us, Billy Graham is the epitome of a man of impact. Not only has his preaching resulted in millions coming to Christ, but his life has been marked by humility, purity and honesty. There may never be another Billy Graham, but God wants each and every one of us to be people of impact. As we've been studying the book of Daniel, we have seen that he was also a man who made a difference. He made a difference in King Nebuchadnezzar's life. He made a difference in King Belshazzar's life. Today we will see how he made a difference in King Darius' life. The familiar story of Daniel in the lion's den ends with King Darius making a new law:

"I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God and enduring forever, and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion will be forever. He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has also delivered Daniel from the power of the lions."

That's impact. That's the kind of mark you and I would like to make on our family and friends. That's what we want to see people saying on the Peninsula. But this doesn't happen automatically. What kind of people will we have to be for this to happen? What kind of person was Daniel?

WHAT KIND OF PERSON MAKES THIS KIND OF IMPACT?

1. Competence: The first thing we see about Daniel is found in vv. 1-3,

"It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they should be in charge of the whole kingdom, and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the

king might not suffer loss. Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom."

In these verses we see Daniel rising to the top in the Persian government under King Darius. This is amazing when you consider the fact that this was an entirely new government; a new empire. Daniel had been captured by the Babylonians as a boy, and then schooled by the Babylonians as a teenager. During King Nebuchadnezzar's reign he eventually was made second in command, and then during Nabonidus' reign he was made third in command with only the king's son, Belshazzar, who was really the acting king, over him. Now, with the overthrow of the Babylonian empire, we might think Daniel would be finished, yet we see him rising to the top again. How do we explain this? What set him apart? The text tells us it was "because he possessed an extraordinary spirit." The NIV says he had "exceptional qualities." The NLT says he possessed "great ability." What is this telling us? We don't need to spiritualize this. This means Daniel was competent; he was a good at what he did; he possessed something, no doubt given to him by God, which allowed him to work in the realm of government with great skill. We might surmise that Daniel had gifts and talents in the areas of leadership and administration. Along with that he probably had a certain degree of charisma which caused him to stand out among his peers. It's ridiculous to think that Daniel could have risen to the top if he wasn't good at what he did.

It's safe to say that people of impact need to be good at what they do. We might think that goes without saying, but I'm afraid for many believers who tend to spiritualize everything, it doesn't. Jesus was a carpenter for most of his adult life. We don't really know if he made furniture or plows, but what kind of product in terms of quality do you think Jesus put out? Paul was a tentmaker by trade. Do you think Paul made leaky tents? I think it's safe to say that these guys were good at what they did.

The other day I was sitting around the dinner table with my family and we got to talking about when Lynn and I were first married. I was a bus boy in a restaurant, and then I got a job as a janitor. When we moved to the Bay Area I started my own janitorial business to get us through graduate school. My kids seemed surprised and even a little embarrassed by this. I think they thought I was born a pastor! Of course they would have been much more impressed if I had been a doctor or a lawyer. But you know what, I took pride in my work. The thing that set my company apart was that I did the work; I did the cleaning, and so I could control the quality of my product.

People loved it. I had more work than I could handle. When I accepted my first call to work in a church I was actually walking away from something that was taking off. I could have been a rich janitor!

Do you know what I get concerned about? I get concerned when I hear folks say that some of their worst experiences in hiring people have been in hiring Christians. But I hear it all the time, and I've even experienced it. I don't use the Christian Yellow Pages. You see, the presence of Christ in our lives ought to make us better at what we do. It ought to make us more conscientious. Paul said, **"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men"** (Col. 3:23).

Do you know what I love about Daniel? I love the fact that he wasn't a religious professional. He wasn't a priest or a preacher. He didn't go to Bible School. He didn't get ordained. He went to the secular university and took a job in the public sector. And yet Daniel became God's primary tool for communicating and modeling the truth during the 70 years in which God's people were in exile. I doubt they would have survived that time without Daniel. Don't you think for one minute that God can't use you in a powerful, kingdom-building, world-changing kind of way just because you are not in full time Christian work.

2. Integrity: The second thing that made Daniel a person of impact is that he was a man of unimpeachable integrity. Look at vv. 4-5,

"Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or evidence of corruption, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was to be found in him. Then these men said, 'We shall not find any ground of accusation against this Daniel unless we find it against him with regard to the law of his God.'"

As so often happens, when a person rises to the top there are those who want to shoot him down. No doubt there was a measure of jealousy involved in this. Daniel had something they wanted. There was also a racial issue going on here. Later in v. 13, when they try to discredit Daniel before the king, they refer to him as "one of the exiles from Judah." But the biggest reason for their attack on Daniel is that darkness hates the light. When you put something real next to something fake that exposes the fake for what it is. Jesus said, **"Everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed"** (Jn. 3:20). This kind of thing has been going on since the beginning of time. This is Cain killing Abel. This is Joseph's brother's throwing him into a pit. This is Saul chasing David through the countryside. This is the Jewish Sanhedrin trumping up false charges against Jesus.

We can see these guys spying on Daniel, trying to find some ground of accusation: "Let's see, did he fool around on his wife? Did he flirt with his secretary? Did he cheat on his taxes? We can see their growing frustration as nothing was

there to be found; no skeletons in this man's closet. He was what the NT says an elder should be: above reproach. As a result, they conclude that the only thing they will ever be able to get him on is something to do with his religion. It's interesting, they knew where Daniel stood in regard to his faith, didn't they? Daniel didn't hide his commitment to his God. Everyone knew where he stood.

Would that a watching world could say this (v. 7) about you and me: **"We can't find any ground of accusation against him unless we find it in regard to the law of his God."** Daniel reminds me again of Billy Graham. He's been a public figure for well over 50 years. His life has been scrutinized by those in and out of the church. The media would have loved to find something on that guy, but there was nothing there. And so, when he is criticized, he is criticized for something in regard to his faith. Those outside the church have said he's too narrow. Those within the church have said he's too broad. But these are things that regard his walk with God, not his integrity as a person. Now is Billy Graham perfect? No. Is he above reproach? Absolutely.

Daniel shows us that you can work in a secular world; you can work in an environment that is shot through with immorality, dishonesty and materialism, and still keep your hands clean. Some of you work in that kind of environment and it grates on you. You wonder if you should even be contributing to such a place. Since the standards of conduct are so low you might even be tempted to lower your own standards. I mean, you could lower them and still be viewed as a Boy Scout. I mean, to work in this system you have to bend a bit, right? Daniel's life says no. The key of course is that his standards were set not by his environment but by the word of God. His plumb line was the law of God, not the culture of the workplace.

This issue of law becomes central in vv. 6-9. Daniel's rivals come up with a little plan. They approach King Darius and say, "Hey King, we all have agreed on a wonderful idea. For 30 days let's make a law that says anyone who asks any god or man beside you for anything will be thrown into the lion's den. And by the way, king, we have a little document right here, and if you just sign it this law will become irrevocable." King Darius thought about it and I'm sure he was flattered. He may have also thought this would be a great way to bring some unity to an empire which had 120 governors. After all, it was only for 30 days. After 30 days everyone could go back to saying their prayers to whatever god they chose. He signed the document. The question is, whose law will Daniel obey?

3. Discipline: In vv. 10-11 the spotlight comes on Daniel once again,

"Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house (now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously; then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God."

Here we see that not only was Daniel a man of competence and a man of integrity, he was also a man of discipline, namely in the area of prayer. I want you to notice a few things about Daniel's

prayer life.

a. Resolution: Notice his resolution. Daniel knew full well that this document was signed and the consequences for disregarding it. I wonder what he thought when he heard it. I wonder if he thought of some way he could get around this. "You know, prayer is a very personal thing. I could just pray in my heart as I go about my business. It's only for 30 days." But instead, Daniel chose to keep praying. He ignored the law. Prayer was more than a convenience for him. It's interesting, back in chapter 3 when Nebuchadnezzar set up the idol and issued a law saying that everyone must bow down to it, the temptation was to DO something they were told not to do. But here it's different. Here the temptation is to NOT DO something they are told to do. Either way, the law had to be disobeyed. There are things which get in the way of our prayer life, aren't there? Maybe it's a wife or a husband who doesn't want prayer to be a part of your home. What do you do? You do what God says to do. You pray.

b. Regularity: But notice also that this was not something which Daniel did in order to make a public protest about the new law. He wasn't flaunting his disobedience. He wasn't saying, "I'll show them. I'll pray outloud and in public." The last six words of v. 10 are key: "**as he had been doing previously.**" Daniel was just doing what he always did. The crisis did not create the discipline but rather it revealed the discipline that was there all along. We can imagine that for years Daniel had retired to his room three times a day to pray. Perhaps he took literally Psalm 55:16-17, "**As for me, I shall call upon God, and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I will complain and murmur, and he will hear my voice.**" We can imagine that there were times when he was blessed beyond measure, when he felt the presence of God as thick as gravy. But there had to also be times when God seemed far and distant and he wondered if he was being heard at all. But either way, Daniel kept at it. We can imagine that there were times that Daniel was tempted to skip one of these sessions. He was a busy man. He had an important job. He had stuff to do. But apparently he didn't let this habit slip. As a new believer in college I couldn't imagine a single day gone by without a time in the word and in prayer. I still have a stack of journals from that time in my life. I had my place. I had my time. I had my routine. Then I got married and it wasn't so easy. Then we had kids and it got even harder. Somehow Daniel was able to negotiate all that. His prayer life was regular; it was habitual.

c. Disposition: My third observation about Daniel's prayer life has to do with his disposition. Notice he knelt facing towards Jerusalem. Here was a man who was used to having people kneel before him, but he was not above kneeling before his God. His facing the Holy City was a recollection of the words of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple who said that if the Jews were ever taken into exile because of their sin they should face Jerusalem and confess their sins so that God might forgive their sin and restore them to the land (1 Kings 8:46-53). Here was a man of unimpeachable integrity who recognized his own sin as well as the sin of the nation, and confessed it, and believed God's promise of forgiveness and restoration. His disposition was one of humility and brokenness. But also there was

thankfulness. Daniel's life was in danger, yet he still found things to thank God for. And mixed with thanksgiving were requests which must have included begging for God's hand of protection through this current trial.

I wonder if we look at Daniel's example here as a rather unreal example for us. Three times a day, kneeling down, facing Jerusalem. I wonder if we look at this and think of it as a rather legalistic thing that we would try to match this kind of prayer life today. And yet, I wonder if this is not the secret of everything else we admire about Daniel. Would he have been the man he was without this discipline of prayer in his life? I really don't think so. Shouldn't prayer be more than just a lifeline you use in case of an emergency? Shouldn't prayer be fundamental to your walk with Christ rather than supplemental? Shouldn't we establish a holy habit of prayer that we will stick to regardless of how busy our schedule gets or how barren our spirit feels?

Fifteen years ago I began running on a regular basis. At first it was hard, but once it became a habit, it got easier. And so, four to five times a week, come rain or shine, I do my run. It's a habit that has come to be easy to stay in. Why not develop a holy habit of prayer? Some of us would never think of getting bumped out of our routine of multiple workouts a week. That's what keeps us going. Would that we become as committed to our prayer time as we are to our workouts, even when we don't feel like it. C.S. Lewis says there are times when our spiritual disciplines are more of a duty than a delight, but "the duty exists for the delight. When we carry out our disciplines we are like people digging channels in a waterless land, in order that when at last the water comes, it may find them ready...There are happy moments...when a trickle creeps along the dry beds; and happy souls to whom this happens often."

Right now in my notes I have the words written in red right over this section: "Be gentle." I know how easy it is to feel guilty about this area of our lives. I don't want to guilt you into prayer because over the long haul that motivation never lasts. I know that. I've tried it. I'm the king of guilt. But I am concerned. If you don't have this discipline built into your life, your walk with God will suffer. You won't have made an impact. Let us build holy habits into our life. Find a place, set aside the time, and get alone with God. Start slow. Maybe just ten minutes a day. Make a daily appointment with God and fight to keep it.

In v. 12 Daniel's rivals come before the king and tell him that Daniel has ignored his decree. They box the king into a corner, reminding him again that this law can't be revoked. Verse 14 says the king was "deeply distressed" by all of this. He obviously liked having Daniel around. So he spent the rest of the day trying to find a way to get Daniel off the hook. Perhaps he took it to the courts and tried to get some kind of legal ruling. Finally, in v. 16 the king gives orders for Daniel to be thrown into the lion's den. We can see a flicker of faith in the king as he says to Daniel, "**Your God whom you constantly serve will himself deliver you.**" A stone is laid over the mouth of the den and the king sealed it with own signet ring. And then in v. 18 we are told that the king went home and had a horrible night,

"Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him."

CONCLUSION

I think Daniel slept better in the lion's den than the king did in his palace! Early the next morning, the king ran to the den and cried out with a troubled voice, "**Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?**" I love the next line. The king expected to hear a growl, but instead he hears Daniel, "**O king, live forever!**" What a thing to say! "**O king live forever!**" Look what he says next,

"My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime.' Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God."

4. Trust: We see here another thing that made Daniel a man of impact. While Daniel mentions his innocence as the reason for his deliverance, the narrator adds something else in v. 23. He says, "**no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.**" Daniel was a man of faith. The writer of Hebrews points to this. In the Hall of Fame of faith he alludes to Daniel when he speaks of men who "**by faith...shut the mouths of lions**" (Heb. 11:33). We talk about faith, we talk about trusting God. How do we know when we're trusting in God? What does that look like? As with Daniel, our trust is seen in our obedience. It's seen in our prayer life. It's also felt within as we experience God's peace. The king was an emotional wreck, but Daniel appears to be at peace. When Daniel was dropped in the lion's den, I don't think he wasn't full of anxiety. One way or another, whether through death or through life, he trusted God would deliver him. Trust and worry just don't go together. When you give your kids to someone you trust for the weekend, you don't worry about them, do you? Why? Because they're people who have proven themselves trustworthy. You see, trust is rooted in the character of the One we trust. When we trust in God, we're saying, "God, you have proven yourself trustworthy. I can entrust my kids to you; I can entrust my finances to you; I can entrust my spouse to you; I can entrust my career to you; I can entrust my future to you." When you really do that, when you really release those things to God, you have his peace.

The story ends with Daniel's rivals being dropped in the lion's den, along with their families. This was a Persian custom. The writer says they were devoured before they even hit the ground. Of course, Daniel didn't approve of this. But it's a confirmation of Proverbs 28:10, "**He who leads the upright along an evil path will fall into his own pit.**" In v. 26 the king makes a new law that says everyone in his kingdom is to "**fear and tremble before the God of Daniel.**" And finally in v. 28 we are told that "**Daniel enjoyed success in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus.**"

That's impact. That doesn't come automatically. It comes because God gives us certain abilities that we work hard to cultivate, because integrity matters to us, because we're committed to prayer, and because we trust in a God who can shut the mouths of lions. Is there just one area that the Holy Spirit is dealing with you this morning? Let's take some time to bring that before the Lord.

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