

The story of Daniel in the Old Testament is particularly relevant and instructive for us as modern-day Christians. The reason why? Because Daniel's story is much like that of all Christians—in reality and in potential. And that's surely no accident. In this series, we are looking at the highly instructive commonalities of Daniel's life in God to our lives in Christ. This is the eighth in that series—so let's briefly summarize the first seven.

First, Daniel was relevant to his *time and place*. Likewise, every serious Christian is, by God's providence, constantly in a time and place where God can very effectively use them for the purposes of His Kingdom.

Second, Daniel was *competent*. The Babylonian King was interested only in those who were competent. Likewise, Christians are best positioned to touch others for Christ in their work lives when very competent.

Third, Daniel was a *lifetime ambassador*. Daniel served pagan-kingdoms competently in very unique ways. But Daniel never stopped being a part of God's core economy: he was a lifetime ambassador for God.

Fourth, Daniel revealed his *relentlessly faithful dailiness*, which applies to every role we hold as believers.

Fifth, Daniel was great at *building bankable trust*. Our character and performance over a long period of time work to make our complete package “bankable”—and therefore transferable—to new opportunities.

Sixth, Daniel's *responses to calamities* were fantastic. We ourselves are making fresh acquaintances with calamities. And every one of Daniel's responses to calamities were amazingly perceptive and effective!

Seventh, Daniel expertly handled *unavoidable enemies and conflicts*. Jesus Himself promised that merely following Him creates enemies and conflicts! Daniel was superb at handling those very types of situations.

Now, to the eighth relevancy of Daniel: his *fearless steadfastness*.

Well, now, if we had to start with one word that rightly describes Daniel's condition in captivity after King Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem and defeated the southern Kingdom of Judah—well, that word would be “stripped.” That's right: *stripped*. In one fell swoop as a very young man—perhaps when he was still an adolescent—Daniel lost very key dimensions of his life, any one of which can easily be debilitating to even the strongest person. Let's build a quick list of crucial identity foundations that were stripped from Daniel.

- *Stripped of a specific rosy future*. A young man like Daniel who met the Babylonian King's high standards—yes, the standards of the ruler of a *very* large empire—well, then, Daniel surely would have had a stellar life of many high accomplishments in the much more smallish world of Judah! Daniel proved himself in Babylon according to Daniel 1:3-4a (ESV) from the beginning as a youth “without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace...” Undoubtedly, Daniel possessing such skill and gifting in his hometown would have ensured him of a rosy future in Judah—and of course, that rosy future was stripped away with the Babylonian conquest!
- *Stripped of enjoying Jews' autonomous rule in God's Promised Land*. It's pretty hard for us today to grasp how much Israel's promises, history, and heritage meant to God's people. God had promised the fulfillment of a special land to Abraham, a promise apparently fulfilled during the reign of Solomon. But the northern kingdom of Israel fell in the year 722 and then, in Daniel's time, the southern Kingdom of Judah fell in 588. It's hard to overstate how important this land promised to Abraham was to the identity of God's people there and then.

- Stripped of temple-centric worship. The glorious temple built by Solomon...the site of worship and the sacrificial system, the physical center of Jewish spiritual life...was defiled, unavailable, defunct.
- Stripped of a socio-religious cocoon. Beyond and deeper than the physical, Daniel lost significant social connection, surroundings, and context for the practice of his religion.
- Stripped of cultural identity and perceived national righteousness. A perception of worthy national righteousness was very important to the leaders of the Southern Kingdom of Judah that remained after the fall of the Northern Kingdom. The Babylonian king pretty much obliterated *that* notion.
- Stripped of sovereign citizenship status. Daniel no longer could point to citizenship of a sovereign nation as his anchor. Judah was absorbed in the empire. So, no meaningful, sovereign citizenship.
- Stripped of everyday family anchors. The book of Daniel is silent about Daniel's family structure. But suffice it to say, Daniel lost key everyday connection to family in his service to the pagan king.
- Stripped of any assumed expectancy regarding God's "automatic" protection of Israel. The prophet Jeremiah had bluntly warned the Jewish citizens of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. And the Babylonian king was only too willing to fulfill a key dimension of Jeremiah's prophecies and to blow away the notion that God would always provide key protections to God's people—cherished protections that God's people might have mistakenly considered permanent.

So. Stripped of any particular expected future, stripped of autonomy in the Promised Land, stripped of an amazing temple-located worship, stripped of a socio-religious cocoon, stripped of any cultural pretensions of national righteousness, stripped of sovereign citizenship status, stripped of everyday family anchors, and stripped of assumed expectancies of God's "automatic" protection of Israel. Quite a list, isn't it? How would we respond to that? Wow, now isn't that the question? I repeat, just how would you and I respond?

Well, we do know how *Daniel* responded. Daniel, this very young person who took a full body blow regarding each and every one of these key identities, moved ahead time and again with fearless steadfastness. For many decades. Daniel was steadfast in his trust...his actions...his responses...his expectations. He was fearless in the face of great penalties, including his very life. And, even after Daniel had fully established his own singular reputation, Daniel simply handled life-altering events with aplomb.

But how? How did Daniel do that? Well, that really is pretty simple. *He trusted God.* But here's the real key: he trusted *only* God! In our era of supposedly astute Christianity, Daniel's life can instruct us all, and to the shame of many public Christian leaders who may well perceive themselves as a model of steadfastness and faithfulness. How about God *as the one and only true anchor...today?* No, God's often diluted to a supposedly-biblical-worldview mix of other cherished things, dimensions that Daniel himself was stripped of—like culture, family, government, country. So, are we focused to become like Daniel, with steadfast faith in God alone? You see, Daniel *did* steadfastly just trust God, *only* God! And he was fearless in doing so. Here's the truth: God does not give Christians a spirit of fear, even regarding losing cherished things. That's because the battle has already been won by the finished work of Christ on the Cross!

In our era when many Christians have unwisely anchored their hopes on culture and family and the like, we would do well to return to the Source. Jesus said, "I am the vine and you are the branches." (John 15:5 ESV) No, culture is not the vine, family is not the vine, country is not the vine, a church building is not the vine. Indeed, Jesus—only Jesus—is the vine. And if we're unwisely depending on something or someone other than God, we will simply be unfruitful, *because we attached to the wrong vine.* So, you want to imitate Daniel's fearless steadfastness? Then here's the key question: *is Jesus your only vine?*

A&A: Application & Action

1. Paul says in Philippians 4:12-13: “I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” What about your current life context is plentiful and abundant, and what about it is more defined by hunger and need? In either context, are you truly finding your source in the vine of Christ? Should you adjust? If so, how?
2. Identify and rank the top three influences that may dilute your trust and faith in God—negative influences that themselves are consistently considered excellent in and of themselves by many Christians. Explain.
3. What worries or issues are inhibiting you from having a fearless steadfastness in the context of work at your organization? What area of your work life or organization’s success do you need to surrender afresh to God? Be specific.