

# Daniel:

Finding God's Purpose  
Through Trials

A Sermon Series Devotional Guide

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*Trial (n) - adversity, difficulty, grief, hardship, pain, suffering, trouble*

***Used and Abused But God Had a Purpose***

Daniel 1  
May 15, 2011

***Unfairly Treated But God Had A Purpose***

Daniel 2  
May 22, 2011

***Though Faith Was Assaulted, God Had a Purpose***

Daniel 3  
May 29, 2011

***It Was a Trial of His Own Making, But God Had A Purpose***

Daniel 4  
June 5, 2011

***They Were a Nation Built from Hubris, But God Had A Purpose***

Daniel 5  
June 12, 2011

***He Suffered, But God Had A Purpose***

Daniel 6  
June 19, 2011

***God's Purpose (n) - His intention, meaning or aim***

## *Used and Abused But God Had A Purpose*

Daniel 1  
May 15, 2011

### *Background to Daniel 1*

Daniel and his friends were devastated. They were Israelites and they were extraordinarily faithful to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Joseph. They went to church every day. They prayed. They tithed. They used their gifts to serve the Lord. That all changed in 587 BC. Nebuchadnezzar invaded Israel and destroyed all that was familiar and important to them. He destroyed their country. Their church. Their way of life. He also wanted to destroy their convictions and reshape their consciences. Why would he do this? Nebuchadnezzar thought he could use them to further the Kingdom of Babylon because they had a lot to offer him. God, however, had plans to shape them through their use and abuse at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

### *Reflection Questions*

1. Why do bad experiences in which you have felt used and abused by others stay with you for the rest of your life? Did you grow from the experience? How?
2. Nebuchadnezzar's plan to destroy Israel and her people's way of life was very well orchestrated. What did he do first (1:1-2) and how would that have made Daniel, his friends, and all of the Israelites who worshipped at the temple feel?
3. After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Israel and her temple, he did something else that was very well orchestrated. He essentially kidnapped the best young people of Israel and put them right in the midst of Babylon. He absolutely despised everything about the faith of Daniel and His friends. As a result, he tried to strip them of their faith and culture and indoctrinate them with his agenda for his own benefit. How did he do that (1:3-5)?
4. The narrator of the story says that Nebuchadnezzar assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table (1:5). Daniel and his friends had a very strict diet that was directly related to what God told them to eat. It was called a kosher diet that excluded foods like pork. In essence, the king wanted them to go directly against their conscience. He wanted them to eat a ham sandwich! Why did he want them to do this?
5. Daniel and his friends chose not to honor the king's request on the grounds that it would violate their conscience. How did they voice their disapproval (1:8)? What did the manner in which they showed their disapproval reveal about their Christian character?

6. Three times in the book, Daniel is described as “esteemed” by God (9:23; 10:11, 19). He had extraordinary character traits because of his godly behavior. List some of those traits from chapter one.
7. If you were faced with similar circumstances, what Christian character traits would you display?
8. When you are stressed, going through a hard time and/or used by other people, your character and what you believe about God and faith will be demonstrated. What character traits shine when you are tested? What character traits that you don't like, also come out in pressure? Commit those things to the Lord.
9. Read 1:18-20. Nebuchadnezzar schemed to use Daniel and his friends for his own benefit. They faced several trials because of it. But God had his own purposes in it. What were some of those?
10. How can evil things like facing trials because people use you for their own benefit actually become beneficial for God's purpose in your life?

## *Unfairly Treated But God Had A Purpose*

Daniel 2

May 22, 2011

### *Background to Daniel 2*

God works in spite of people's wicked schemes. Nebuchadnezzar tried to strip Daniel and his friends of their identity and use them for his own purposes; yet, God used the king's evil to shape Daniel and his friends. Now they find themselves threatened with their lives. Here is why: Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, but unlike Martin Luther King's dream of hope, it was a dream of destruction. It scared him so much that he summoned the spiritual people of Babylon to interpret his dream, including Daniel. If they failed, then death was sure to follow. This was hardly fair! Yet God is going to use Nebuchadnezzar's mistreatment of Daniel to His own advantage. He is going to give Daniel the wisdom to interpret the dream and show the king that *no one* is mightier than He is. He is going to reveal to Daniel that the statute Nebuchadnezzar saw represented his empire, Babylon, as well as three empires that would come after his: The Medo-Persian Empire; The Greek Empire; The Roman Empire. God is going to reveal to Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar's reign is going to come to an end.

### *Questions to Ponder*

1. **How** do you usually respond to people who treat you unfairly?
2. **Read** 2:1-13. How was Daniel treated unfairly by Nebuchadnezzar?
3. **How** did he respond to his unfair treatment in 2:14-20? Why is responding like Daniel so difficult?
4. **Being** treated unfairly as Daniel was would force you to your knees, especially if your life would hang in the balance. **Read** 2:24-49. What did Daniel learn from God that, assumedly, he wouldn't have learned had he not faced this trial?
5. **What** was the lesson for Nebuchadnezzar that God gave him through the prophetic voice of Daniel? What traits do you think Daniel developed from his experience?
6. **How** did God work in this situation for his own glory and for Daniel's benefit according to 2:48-49?
7. **How** can God work through situations in which you have been treated unjustly for His own glory and for your benefit?

## *Though Faith Was Assaulted, God Had a Purpose*

Daniel 3

May 29, 2011

### *Background to Daniel 3*

The Christian historian Os Guinness said “if it is an error for some Christians to make absolute what God has left relative, it is equally an error for some Christians to make relative what God has made absolute.” What does this mean? Well, think about it this way: there are Baptist Protestant Christians, Methodist Protestant Christians, and Presbyterian Protestant Christians and on and on. While there are many differences among these groups, there is one element of their faith that must be absolute and cannot be compromised under any circumstance, regardless of the cost. It is exclusive faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. God will never call his people to bow to a false God or to cultural influences and sensitivities that compromise this absolute. The same was true in Old Testament Times. Daniel and his friends are going to find themselves in a faith assault by Nebuchadnezzar because he wants them to bow to something they know to be false. He wants them to betray and compromise their convictions about their faith.

### *Questions to Ponder*

1. What cultural pressures are present in our world today which might tempt you to compromise your exclusive faith in Jesus? What about the pressures in your family? Friends?
2. Read 3:1-6. Nebuchadnezzar demanded Daniel and his friends do a number of things that directly violated their core convictions and God’s law. What were they?
3. What would have been the easiest and less threatening route for Daniel and his friends to take? Does always taking the path of least resistance develop courage and deepen faith or weaken courage and faith? Why?
4. Read 3:7-12. How did Daniel and his friends respond to King Nebuchadnezzar’s faith assault?
5. Now read 3:13-23. What trial did they experience as a result of their exclusive faith?
6. In the midst of a faith assault, Daniel and his friends had a firm grasp of who God is, what He is able to do, and who’s they belong to (3:17-18). How does knowing God and being known by Him help you when your faith is assaulted?
7. Read 3:24-30. What did Nebuchadnezzar realize as a result of their refusal to bow? How can standing up for your faith and remaining faithful to God witness to those

who try to assault and undermine your faith and try to get you to betray your core convictions?

8. **What happened to Daniel and his friends in 3:30 after their faith assault was over? How has maturity in your faith been developed through your trials? How did those trials better prepare you for greater tasks?**

## *It Was a Trial of His Own Making, But God Had A Purpose*

Daniel 4

June 5, 2011

### *Background to Daniel 4*

The most common question I receive from unbelievers is this: If God is so good, then why does He allow His people to go through trials, pain and suffering? Sometimes I respond in this manner: "who caused the trial?" You see, sometimes trials, pain and suffering are products of our own making. Nebuchadnezzar's certainly were. His trials were "a bed of his own making." They came as a result of his selfish behavior, attitude and lifestyle. You will see Nebuchadnezzar's self-induced trials and God's purpose in them in this chapter

### *Questions to Ponder*

1. Socrates said "the unexamined life is not worth living." What do you think he meant?
2. Summarize what the evil actions that Nebuchadnezzar had orchestrated against Daniel and his friends in chapters 1-4.
3. Chapter 4 is a testimonial. In it, Nebuchadnezzar surveys his own life in light of what he has learned about God from observing His providence over Daniel's life and from the testimony of Daniel himself. Read 4:1-3. How might have Nebuchadnezzar arrived at this conclusion about God through the witness of Daniel and his friends in the midst of their trials?
4. Some of the biggest trials we face in our lives are those of our own making. Nebuchadnezzar had another dream in which God revealed to him trials of his own making in 4:1-18. Daniel interprets them in 4:19-27. What was going on for Nebuchadnezzar going to suffer because of the trials of his own making?
5. Read 4:28-36. What did Nebuchadnezzar learn from his actions? Will you see Nebuchadnezzar in heaven?
6. In what ways can God discipline for ungodly behavior actually turn out to be beneficial in the long run?
7. In what ways can taking responsibility for your own actions, especially bad ones, be constructive for your own spiritual growth?

8. **Read Psalm 51.** David was a man after God's own heart, though not because of his successes. It was for how he responded when he examined his own life. In what way is God's discipline designed to teach us about his forgiveness as well?

## *They Were a Nation Built from Hubris, But God Had A Purpose*

Daniel 5

June 12, 2011

### *Background to Daniel 5*

Hubris (n) - extreme haughtiness, pride or arrogance. Hubris often denotes a loss of contact with reality and an overestimation in one's own competence or capabilities, especially when that individual is in a position of power. The "hubris" of Nebuchadnezzar's son, Belshazzar, as well as the hubris of his people, The Babylonians, is in view in chapter five. The chapter continues the "trials of a one's on making" theme of chapter four. Nebuchadnezzar repented from his "hubris" and received grace because of it. Belshazzar will not, as you will see. The Roman Empire fell, in part, because of Belshazzar-ish hubris. In fact, history is replete with examples of nations and empires falling because of hubris. Why? Because hubris usually leads to excess, this then leads to rampant immorality. In essence, the trials of the sins of the Babylonian people and their refusal to repent of them become the reason for their demise.

### *Questions to Ponder*

1. What trials do we face as Americans that are of our own making? How, if at all, has national "hubris" lead to those trials?
2. King Belshazzar is the epitome of hubris. Daniel is the complete anti-thesis of it. Read 5: 1-16. What actions of King Belshazzar indicate hubris and trials of his own making? Now read 5:17. How is Daniel the complete anti-thesis of King Belshazzar?
3. Can you recall any character flaws in Daniel in any of the previous chapters? One of the reasons I enjoy reading the Scriptures so much is because it never hides the scars of its heroes. I can identify with them. At times I display great faith. At other times, I do not. What you see with Daniel is different than most of the other Old Testament heroes. You do not see any character flaws. We know he had them because he was human. But the writers, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, do not point them out. As such, Daniel serves as what some biblical scholars deem a "typological figure." In essence, his character, witness and lifestyle point readers to THE one who had absolutely no character flaws, Jesus Christ. Can you think of the other "typological figure" in the Old Testament (Hint: his story starts in Genesis 37)?
4. Daniel speaks prophetically to Belshazzar about "the writing on the wall" in 5:18-28. What is the primary reason for hubris and the spiritual results that will come from it without repentance according to 5:20-23?

5. What happened to Belshazzar and the Babylonians according to 5:30?
  
6. Belshazzar serves as a “cautionary tell” to nations and people that live without acknowledging that God is sovereign, in control and has mastery of their lives. Who is your master? You? Or Christ? Don’t just give a Sunday School answer here either because no one will read this but you. Daniel is a “typological figure” canonized to point you to the character of Christ. How does your character typify Christ? What aspects of your character do not? Commit those things to Him. He will forgive you and change them in you if you ask Him because He loves you.

## *He Suffered, But God Had A Purpose*

Daniel 6

June 19, 2011

### *Background to Daniel 6*

In his book *A Grief Observed*, C.S. Lewis writes “God whispers to us in our pleasures but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Daniel and his friends would shout “amen” to that statement in light of everything they had faced thus far. But every circumstance they faced had a greater purpose. Chapter 6 ends the first half of *The Book of Daniel* and contains arguably the greatest trials that Daniel himself faced yet. Some have even argued that all of the suffering Daniel faced in chs 1-4, he experiences in full force in chapter 6! Ouch! It is much similar in content to chapter 3 except that Babylon has fallen and, as Daniel predicted, Medo-Persia and her king, Darius, is in view here. I want you to observe three movements in this chapter as you read Daniel 6: 1) how Daniel responds to threats on his life 2) how God works through evil schemes 3) what Darius learned about the God whom Daniel serves at the chapter’s conclusion.

### *Questions to Ponder*

1. **How** has God shouted to you in the midst of the pains you have experienced in life?
2. Exit the Babylonians. Enter the Medo-Persians. Daniel will now suffer at the hands of a different empire. Read 6:1-5. What is the first way that Daniel suffered?
3. Read Daniel 6:6-8. What is the second way Daniel suffered?
4. **How** did Daniel respond in 6:10-11? How can prayer help bring peace to the Christian who suffers?
5. Daniel’s trust in the Lord is contrasted with Darius’ political mindset to play both sides in 6:12-16. How does he do this? Is this a good character trait? Why or why not?
6. What happens when Daniel is in the lions den in 6:17-22? What happens to the individuals who falsely accuse Daniel in 6:23-24?
7. What do you think this verse means: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows” (Gal. 6:7)? What does Daniel end up reaping at the end of the passage? How did Daniel’s faithfulness and God’s miracles witness to Darius at the end of the passage?

8. **How** can your faithfulness to God in your trials witness to others?
9. **We** have journeyed through six chapters of Daniel and have seen the following themes: (1) God is sovereign and the controller of history; (2) God has shaped Daniel's character through his trials in order to prepare Him for a greater purpose; (3) God will exalt the humble and humble the prideful. How can you apply these lessons to your life?
10. **If** you enjoy a challenge, read chapters 7-12. It is the greatest prophetic material in all of the Old Testament. It is prophetic material that Daniel has been shaped through trials to preach. He was "made" for it. Blessings to you as you read it. Though it is heavy, the same three themes permeate the prophecies.

Pastor Derrick's Top Six Devotional Books about God's Purpose in Trials

6. Lucado, Max. *Safe in the Shepherd's Arms. Hope and Encouragement from Psalm 23.* Thomas Nelson: 2010.
5. Yancey, Philip. *Where Is God When It Hurts?* Zondervan: 1990.
4. Ortberg, John. *Faith and Doubt.* Zondervan: 2008.
3. Willard, Dallas. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ.* NavPress: 2002.
2. Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed.* Harper Collins: 2001.
1. Lewis, C.S. *The Problem of Pain.* Harper Collins: 2001.