

A Hunger for God and the Lion's Den Daniel 5

Introduction

What is the worst Mother's Day gift you ever received? I did a google search to see what I could find, and here is what I discovered:

1. **A Garbage-Picked Lamp.** "My husband got me a really beautiful lamp one year. It had a vintage look to it, was colorful – which I love – and seemed like a really thoughtful gift. Yeah...he garbage picked it. I'm not snobby when it comes to spending money on gifts, but I kind of draw the line at garbage. It seemed like he just drove by a pile in someone's driveway and thought, 'This'll do.' It didn't even work! He didn't bother to test it before he gave it to me, which showed me that he was too busy or too dumb to care." – *Anna, 37, Wisconsin*
2. **Food Poisoning.** "He and the kids made me breakfast in bed. It gave me food poisoning. We think it was the spinach they used. At the time, I was in agonizing pain, and stuck in the bathroom for hours at a time, so I just kept cursing them out to myself. But, it was a sweet gesture. Breakfast in bed is a pretty standard Mother's Day gift, so at least they made theirs stand out." – *Lisa, 42, California*
3. **A Gift Card From Him, For Him.** "A gift card to his favorite restaurant, which is a steakhouse. I'm a vegetarian! His response was, 'They have salads.' I told him to keep it and get me something more thoughtful. Luckily, the gift from my kids that year was awesome. They made a cookbook using all of my homemade recipes. It was so adorable. My husband definitely rode their momentum that year." – *Ann Marie, 35, Connecticut*
4. **"A Wii Fit — 12 days after having my first baby. It's been nine years, still bitter."** – *Andrea, New York*

Some other terrible gifts given to moms on Mother's Day include: Deodorant, cleaning supplies, a fire extinguisher, a screwdriver, toilet paper, car parts, a dustpan with a broom, an Ironing board, and a half-eaten cake.

By design, women are givers of life. You are nurturers. A beautiful picture of this is just after a child has been born and brought up to his/her mother's chest, everything that baby needs for love, peace, and life in that moment is right before that child.

The imagery of a nursing mother is a picture of the way God sustains his people. Let me explain what I mean. There is a name used of God in the Old Testament. It is first used in Genesis 17:1 when God reassured an aging Abraham that he would be blessed with a son through his wife

menopausal wife, Sara. God first promised Abraham in Genesis 12 when He said: **“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you”** (Genesis 12:2–3, NIV). When it seemed to Abraham and Sarah that God’s promise was impossible, God reminded Abraham of His promise in Genesis by first stating: **“I am God Almighty...”** (v. 1), which in Hebrew is *El Shaddai*.

El is the root for Elohim (God), the root for word for *Shad* can mean “to overpower” or “to destroy.” The Hebrew word *dai* also suggests *sustenance* and *blessing*. When *El* and *Shaddai* are used together, it is not only translated “God Almighty” but it can mean the, “One mighty to nourish, supply, or satisfy. The word *shaddai* elicits a picture of a loving mother who supplies her child with love, warmth, and nourishment when she brings that child to her breast. God alone is the “All-Sufficient Sustainer” who cannot only do the impossible, but has the good of his children at heart. In Psalm 91:1, *El Shaddai* is used: **“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty”** (Psalm 91:1, NIV). In the book of Job it is used again: **“The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life”** (Job 33:4).

Although *El Shaddai* is not literally used in the book of Daniel, but God’s name is evident all throughout Daniel’s life. What was Daniel’s secret? How was it that he was able to weather the storms of his life without his faith being capsized as a result? I will tell you! The all-satisfying, all-nourishing, and all-sufficient God is the one who kept Daniel, and it is in Daniel 6 that we discover what it was that kept his eyes on God Almighty. I want to give you four reasons for Daniel’s unshakable faith.

Daniel Dependently Sought God

What was it that shaped Daniel’s character? It was his relationship with God. Throughout Daniel we learn that what kings appreciated about the man was that he had an **“excellent spirit in him”** (v. 3). Daniel’s reputation was that he was completely free from corruption and carelessness that when the high officials and satraps sought to find fault with Daniel, **“they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him”** (v. 4). This is one of the reasons why he was promoted as one of the three officials who oversaw the 120 satraps who served in various governmental positions under King Darius.

Based on what we have seen so far in the first five chapters of Daniel is that the Most High God was life to him. What liberated Daniel from wanting the applause of kings or feeling the need to manipulate his way to success was that God, for him, was enough in the same way that God was enough for the Prophet Habakkuk:

Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places. (Habakkuk 3:17–19)

The New Testament equivalent to Habakkuk 3:17-19 is Colossians 3:23-24, “**Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ**” (Colossians 3:23–24). Daniel lived his life for an audience of One because it was what El Shaddai thought of him was the only thing that mattered to the prophet, and this is what shaped the way he treated those around him and it is what motivated his work ethic. When no one is looking or noticing, it is God who sustains and satisfies who sees!

Daniel was Unapologetically Satisfied in God

The only way the high officials and satraps could find fault with Daniel was if they found it in connection with the “**law of his God**” (v. 5). Daniel had a reputation of being unapologetically devoted and satisfied in his God. By the time we come to chapter 6, Daniel was at least 80 years old and his worship was the culture of his life. Even the pagans who surrounded Daniel were aware of the man’s faith and how he practiced his faith. Therefore the “high officials and satraps” approached King Darius and manipulated him into making a petition that would directly affect Daniel by prohibiting anyone from worshiping their god other than the worship of the king himself for 30 days (vv. 7-8).

Daniel prayed three times a day; when he prayed, he prayed towards Jerusalem because he was convinced that the God who promised Abraham and Moses that out of Jerusalem would come a King through whom God would fulfill all of his promises (2 Cor. 1:21). Even though Daniel understood that to continue in his worship of God during the thirty days of king Darius worship, could result in his death, he didn’t change a thing. Why? I believe that Daniel was more satisfied in God than he was in the comforts his position as a high official afforded him. In light of the life Daniel found in God, the priority of his safety was a distant second. Iain Duguid, in his commentary on Daniel, makes the very good case that Daniel was able to worship God in the face of danger because he understood that God is not committed to our present comforts in this life. Listen to what Duguid observes from Daniel 6,

God is not committed to our comfort. He is not committed to making our path through life smooth. He *is* committed to sanctifying us and demonstrating his own glory in and through us; and, very often, that commitment means he will subject our earthen vessels to pressures that would certainly shatter us, were his grace not sufficient for us. The Lord will take you into the eye of the storm, to show that he is the storm’s master and that he can make your fragile vessel float safely through to the other side. His wonderful plan for your life is to sanctify you through trials and tribulations (1 Peter 1:6-7).¹

Daniel was satisfied in God because he understood that unlike the world around him, God was for him and not against him. Everything that entered Daniel’s life, was understood by the prophet to be for his good and God’s glory.

Daniel Prayed Regularly to God

Because God was Daniel’s El Shaddai, he prayed. We have seen this through his life; his only hope of success was in what God was able to do. Remember when Nebuchadnezzar II had a dream that he demanded an interpretation of, while refusing to tell anyone what it was that he dreamt? We are told that Daniel went to his house and asked his friends to, “**seek mercy from**

¹ Iain M. Duguid, *Daniel: Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing; 2008), p. 97.

the God of heaven...” (2:17) so that he could interpret the dream. When God revealed the dream to Daniel, guess what he did? He prayed a prayer of praise: **“Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding; he reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him”** (2:20-22).

If wisdom and might belong to our God, why in the world would anyone who knows him not first seek him? Oh how often we lean into our own impotent, weak, and fickle selves for solutions to problems while we claim to know and worship El Shaddai. One person adequately put it: “A prayerless Christian is like a bus driver trying alone to push his bus out of a rut because he doesn’t know Clark Kent is on board.”² What did Daniel do after he found out that the king signed the document enforcing an injunction, **“that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to the king, shall be case into the den of lions”** (see vv. 6-9), Daniel went to his house and prayed even though he knew that he might be seen, caught, and punished. Even though he was threatened, Daniel’s devotion to worship his God and his commitment to pray three times a day remained unchanged.

The secret to Daniel’s success was not his religion, but in his dependance upon God through prayer. The power and ability to transform nations was not in the skill or ability of his people, but the power of the Almighty!

Daniel Confidently Trusted God

When the document was signed by King Darius, Daniel had the option to obey the order for only 30 days. Daniel could have left Babylon and gone into hiding. Daniel could have faked obedience to the king by pretending to worship Darius for 30 days while at the same time worshiping God. Maybe the easiest thing for Daniel to do was make his prayer life private for at least 30 days. Instead, Daniel decided to confidently trust in the God he understood to be eternally, paternally, and benevolently sovereign.

Because the high officials and satraps manipulated the king into a binding decree, their plan to get rid of Daniel seemed to be a success. Daniel understood the risks when he got on his knees to pray three times a day, yet he trusted that whatever the outcome, God was bigger than the threat and danger he faced. We are told that after the king discovered that Daniel did not nor could not obey the king’s orders, that Darius, **“labored till the sun went down to rescue him”** (v. 14). Those seeking to kill Daniel, however, could not have been more satisfied, and to be sure that the king followed through with his signed document, they reminded him, **“Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed”** (v. 15).

Even though Daniel prayed and demonstrated a lifetime of unflinching faithfulness to his God, he was cast into the den of lions (v. 16). King Darius went to his palace and spent the night fearfully and restlessly fasting for Daniel, while those responsible for manipulating the king rested in their plan with pride and confidence. Unknown to everyone else but God, Daniel rested in his faith that El Shaddai was enough regardless of what the lions might do to him. Daniel

² John Piper, *Desiring God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books; 2011), p. 162.

entered the lion's den with little assurance that he would live to see the light of day. What was it that enabled Daniel to pray and to live out his faith publicly while it was unsafe? If epitaphs were a thing to be written on tombstones and sepulchers, I think something like Romans 12:11-12 would be found on Daniel's: "**Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.**" Daniel rejoiced in the hope of a coming day when all that was wrong with his world would one day be made right; he lived his life in light of the promises of Almighty God.

Conclusion

Daniel was delivered from the lions and his life was spared; we will explore Daniel's deliverance next week. What I want to leave you with this morning and what I hope you find to be encouraging is that regardless of what you have gone through, what you may be experiencing presently, or what trials may meet you in the days to come... If you are a Christian, God is your El Shaddai. God is for you and not against you. When he does call you into seasons that include suffering, know that he is working all things out for your good because he loves you too much to leave you as you are. Charles Spurgeon said that, "they who dive into the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls."³

Daniel was faithful to God when he was young and he was faithful to God when he was old because of the God who kept him and sustained him. Throughout his life, Daniel was known for four things: 1. He dependently sought God, 2. He was unapologetically satisfied in God, 3. He prayed regularly, and 4. He confidently trusted in a God who was always bigger than his circumstances.

³ *Ibid*, p. 266.