

# MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

**AMONG LIONS | AMONG LIONS**

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Alright, so good to be with you on this Labor Day weekend. And I want to welcome everybody gathered across all of our locations and those of you who may be joining us online worshipping the lake, or at the lake is what I mean. Totally joking. That's a bad preacher joke.

Good to be with you guys today. If you have a Bible go ahead and find Daniel, chapter 6. That's where we are going to be. And as you are turning there and getting settled, just a couple of things to announce and to give you a heads up on.

First of all, if you've been with us during this series, we've been talking about our fall *Rooted* session. And we've just been encouraging you to sign up for that. We could only host so many people in the fall semester of *Rooted*, depending upon how many facilitators we recruited and trained to lead the groups.

So we were honestly thinking that we could only do 700 or so people. And our team was thinking that maybe we would only have four or five hundred people sign up. We had 715 people sign up across all of our campuses. So way to go. Super excited about that. Really encouraged by that number.

And if you tried to get into a group and you couldn't or maybe you couldn't swing it this fall, we're going to run that back in January. So just tuck that away. Maybe something to do at the beginning of the year. What a great way to kick off a brand-new year by jumping into a *Rooted* group.

The second thing that I want you to know is that we have our *Among Lions* hoodies and t-shirts that are going to be—I think we have a picture of them—these are going to be available next weekend and next weekend only in the lobbies of all of our campuses. They will not be available online, at least initially. So if you want a hoodie or a t-shirt, show up next weekend to get those.

Let me remind you why we do that. We don't do that to be the cool church. We do that because hopefully, over the course of this eight weeks God said something and did something in your life. I want you to be reminded of that. And I want you to share it. And so when you wear a hoodie or a t-shirt and somebody goes, "Man, what is that all about?" You've got an opportunity to actually talk to them about the book of Daniel and what God did and invite them to church. So come back next weekend to get a hoodie or a t-shirt.

Today we are in Daniel, chapter 6, which if you read ahead or you know the story, then you know that this is kind of the climax or the highlight reel of the book of Daniel because it contains the story that he is most often known for, Daniel in the lions' den. And there is a reason for that. It is a phenomenal story. What I want to do today as we walk through this text is to see that it is certainly more than just a story.

Now, for those of you who are like me, you grew up in church, I remember the Sunday school lessons and the Vacation Bible School illustrations of Daniel in the lions' den. And somehow I didn't necessarily get the whole context of the story, we just kind of jumped into the story of Daniel and the lions' den.

So what I took away, as a kid, was if I could remain faithful to God (and as a kid I kind of interpreted that as keeping my room clean, eating my veggies, trying not to hit my sister very much)—if I could do that, then God would come through for me, He'd deliver me. He'd give me what I want. Or, in the awful event that I accidentally fell into a lions' cage while visiting the zoo, God would protect me. Alright? That's kind of what I took away from it.

What I want us to see today is that there is a lot more to the story than that. So if you've been tracking with us during this series, this is the last of the fast-paced, action-packed sparing matches between Daniel and the Babylonian authorities. It is often where we stop studying or reading the book of Daniel as well.

So we get to chapter 6, and we kind of stop. Because if you've ever read ahead, it gets kind of weird. Some of you have even come up to me and you're like, "Hey, are we going to cover the weird chapters?" That's how you say it. And there is a reason why. Admittedly it is a little strange because after chapter 6 we dive into a prophetic style of literature called apocalyptic literature, very similar to the book of Revelation, which is what that is written in.

In the remaining three weeks of this series we're going to cover chapters 7, 8, and 9. So we are going to venture into this. And hopefully, if we do our job right, we'll see that it is not as weird as you think, that it does make a lot of rational sense.

So remember, I said this a few weeks ago, that the first chapters of Daniel and then the last chapters of Daniel are written in Hebrew, which is the language that they spoke in Israel. The middle chapters are written in Aramaic because that is the language that they spoke in Babylon. And it represents the years that Daniel is in exile in Babylon.

So, chapter 6, this is the last chapter written in Aramaic it is Daniel's final demonstration and illustration for those of us who are seeking to live for God within a very godless culture. And it is like an epic story.

If any of you saw Michael Jordan's *The Last Dance* documentary on Netflix, that I highly recommend, this is Daniel's last dance. This is Daniel coming out of retirement, putting

on the jersey, lacing up the high tops and he's going to tomahawk dunk on the Babylonian authorities. (Not very many basketball fans, that's interesting.)

So he is well over 80 or 90 years old at this moment. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, his close friends, they do not seem to be in this picture. We don't know where they are. Maybe they retired to the countryside. Maybe they passed away. We don't know. But they are not in the picture.

The Kingdom of Babylon had fallen. Last week we got to the end of chapter 5. We saw that Belshazzar throws this big party, and Medes and the Persians are 50 miles away ready to attack. They did. And they conquered Babylon.

So when we get to chapter 6, we are in the Medo-Persian Empire with somebody brand new in office, a guy by the name of Darius. Now Darius, new face, new name, same heart. We see the kind of tug-of-war that has been going on between Nebuchadnezzar and God. And the same thing is going to carry over with Darius.

Daniel, by this time, is one of the highest-ranking government officials in the empire. He's come a long way. When we met Daniel, he was a 14- or 15-year-old kid in exile. Now, he's maybe an 80- or 90-year-old man. He is super powerful. He's come up through the ranks.

What I want you to see about this is that kings have come and gone, administrations have changed, and yet Daniel has remained the same. His character and competency set him apart. And by this time in his life, Daniel has had no scandals, he has no corruption, he has not accusations made against him. It is amazing, after six decades of public service. And as a result, Darius keeps Daniel on the royal payroll.

And what we see go down in chapter 6, I want you to see this, this is the sermon, what I'm getting ready to say next, Daniel and the lions' den is the result of years and years of faithful service. It wasn't that Daniel just stumbled into this. Daniel didn't just, all of a sudden, rise to the occasion in the face of adversity. This shows us that Daniel has been putting in the work day after day in what we might call those normal, mundane, routine experiences of the day.

What I want you to know is it is never too late in your life (or in mine) no matter what you've been through, no matter what you're going through right now, to begin building in daily rhythms that foster emotional and spiritual strength and resolve in the face of adversity.

I think sometimes we kind of wonder, at least this is true for me, I wonder how I would react or, I wonder how I would respond in the face of some big challenge, crises, or adversity. And I'm not just going to wait to know how I might respond; I want to begin building in these daily rhythms that foster this sort of strength in advance.

And what we know to be true physically.... I think all of us know that it would not be wise for us to say, "You know what? I think I'm going to run a marathon, 26.2 miles tomorrow."

I think we all know that that is not very wise. You've got to begin training and building up to that. But oftentimes, what we know physically, we forget spiritually and emotionally.

We need to begin building in these rhythms into our days so that when we find ourselves in a pit among lions, whatever that looks like for you—some sort of trial, challenge, adversity, crises, or temptation (and by the way it's coming if you haven't faced this in your life yet, you one day will, it is not a matter of if, it's simply a matter of when)—the question is, "Will I be ready?"

Or to explain it this way, you know how when you type in something in your Google search engine, and it will finish the statement before you've finished your search based upon previous search history? So you start a sentence like, let's just say you're searching for back-to-school clothes, and it auto-fills Back Street Boys. Or is that just me? Is that mine? My thing?

So autofill is based upon previous experiences and patterns. The same thing is true when it comes to how you respond to adversity, challenges, and pain. When you find yourself in that moment, your heart autofill is the response based upon the patterns that you've previously established.

Let me give you this definition of spiritual and emotional maturity:

**Spiritual and emotional maturity is not a decision you make but a habit you develop over time.**

It is not a result of the decision that you make in a moment. It is the result of habits that you have been developing over time. So how do you build a wall? Brick by brick. How do you run a marathon? Step by step. How do you build character that can handle adversity? Daily decision after daily decision.

So what we read in Daniel, chapter 6 is a result of this. I want to pick it up in verse 3. It says this:

*"Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers." This is nothing new. He's been doing this since he was a teenager. "Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire."*

What is truly impressive about this promotion that Daniel received as an 80- or 90-year-old man, is that he does this as an 80- or 90-year-old man. He hasn't retired. He hasn't checked out. He's still in it. He's still staying sharp. He's still working on himself.

You know, whenever I meet an older, wiser, more seasoned person—let's just over the age of 65 or so—who is joyful, thoughtful, humble, teachable, encouraging and kind I think two things. Number one I think, "I want to be him when I grow up."

The second thing that I think is that that is evidence that they have so clearly done a lot of hard work (remember the work analogy we gave a couple of weeks ago?), they've

been doing the heart work in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s that has set this time up, the twilight season of their life to be some of the most fruitful, joyful time experiences in their lives.

Daniel has clearly been doing this. And in verse 4 we meet a group of people who have not been doing it. Look at verse 4:

*"Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs,"* they were jealous of him. They didn't like him. They were threatened by him. So they said, "Man, we've got to find some sort of dirt on this guy to cancel him," *"but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn."*

That's an amazing statement. Daniel is close to 90, 60 years of public service and they couldn't find anything to criticize and condemn. And it says, *"He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy."*

So these guys come together, they don't like the power and authority that Daniel has, so they say, "We've got to find some sort of dirt on this guy. We've got to find some skeletons in his closet." So they hire a private investigator, and they are like, "Man, find out if Daniel has said anything carelessly at a party 30 years ago. Search his Twitter feed to see if he ever posted 140 characters that were hateful and negative.

"Interview all college classmates, roommates, or former employees to find out if he has ever used plastic straws and taken candy away from babies. We've got to find out if this guy has done anything wrong and cancel him."

And they searched and they searched and they searched—they cannot find a single thing on him. And that is just incredibly impressive in and of itself. And in verse 5 it says:

*"... they concluded, 'Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion.'"*

In other words, "We are not going to find anything on this guy character wise, so let's go after his convictions." Would that be true of any one of us? I don't know if that would be true of me. I don't know that my character is that spotless where people go, "We just have to go after his convictions."

They said, "Let's go after his convictions and put pressure on him there and let's squeeze." So verse 6 says:

*"So the administrators and high officers went to the king and said, 'Long live King Darius!'"* I want you to remember that phrase because it's going to become pertinent as we study this in just a minute. It is so clear that these guys are trying to butter him up. And they say:

*“We are all in agreement—we administrators, officials, high officers, advisers, and governors— that the king should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions. And now, Your Majesty, issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked.’ So King Darius signed the law.” Daniel 6:6-9 (NLT)*

Now you’ve got to hand it to these guys. This was a brilliant move on their part. What they are doing is they are trying to exploit Danie’s faith and they trying to leverage Darius’ ego. So what just happened here? Well, they come to the king, and they introduce a law that wasn’t meant to be permanent, just 30 days. That’s brilliant because what they are doing is they are playing off the king’s ego and his paranoia.

I said this two weeks ago in relation to Nebuchadnezzar. Kings were paranoid. They were always looking because somebody was trying to take their throne. And they come to Darius, and they say, “Hey, for the next 30 days if anybody prays to anyone other than you, we will throw them into this lions’ den. So, King, this is going to show who is loyal to you and who isn’t.” That’s brilliant.

And the Medes and the Persians had established that once a law was passed, signed off on, that it could not be changed for any reason. The reason why was to keep mood swinging, emotionally unstable, inebriated kings from making arbitrary laws without fully thinking them through, which they did all of the time.

So a king would go out for a jog, and he twisted his ankle wearing Nikes. So he would say, “I outlaw all Nike shoes because that’s how I twisted my ankle.” Or he goes out and he eats a cheeseburger, and he finds a hair in it, and he says, “I’m going to outlaw all cheeseburgers.” They would make rules like that based upon personal experiences and emotions. And then when the emotion of the moment subsided and they calmed down, they realized that they made a mistake.

So the Medes and the Persians put this rule into place to keep them from doing that as well as to reinforce the power of the king because to change a law meant that he had to admit that he made a mistake. And kings didn’t like admitting that they made a mistake ever.

So Darius plays into this big time. And they get him to do this. Keep in mind, Darius really liked Daniel a lot. So now he has put Daniel in this difficult position. And Daniel was faced with a decision that every single one of us.... If you are a follower of Christ, you’re going to have to face this at some time in your life, “When I am in this position, when I’m in this adversarial position, will I choose to cave in and give in or will I choose to stand on my convictions. And how will I do so?”

Now, if you wait until you are in that moment before you begin developing the spiritual muscles to do that, you won’t be ready. You will either cave or you will come across in

this adversarial, combative way that we've been talking about that defames the name of Jesus and is actually the exact opposite of the gospel.

You've got to begin to think through, "What am I going to do in those moments when I'm the only Christian in the classroom, or the office, and I'm mocked for my faith? What am I going to do? What's my disposition? What am I going to say? How am I going to stand?"

When you're pressured to have sex with the guy or the girl you just met on a dating app, what are you going to do in that moment? When you're asked to lie to cover somebody at work, how will you respond? If you wait, and just think, "Well, I think I'll rise to the occasion in that moment rather than preparing yourself each and every moment, you won't be ready.

So it says in verse 10—here's how Daniel responded to this:

*"But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed,"* so there is no going back on this. Here's what he does, *"he went home and knelt down,"* now notice these next two words, *"as usual,"* This was no different of a day for Daniel. He prayed *"in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem,"* which is where he is from, *"He prayed three times a day,"* once again, *"just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God."*

So when this document gets signed into law in the Oval Office, Daniel would have been standing right there with everybody else on the payroll. And when the press is taking pictures and interviewing staff, what's going on in the back of Daniel's mind is, "Okay, how am I going to respond to this?"

You realize that this is a personal attack on him. This is designed to trap him. And Daniel, in that moment, could have responded in a variety of ways.

I just want you to ask yourself, right now, as you read this story, as you listen to what is going on, to place yourself in the narrative. Find yourself in Daniel's sandals, so to speak. And just think, "Okay. What would I do? Would I just pray silently to myself and hope that nobody notices? Would I just try to escape away and make sure I am behind closed doors and just try to keep this private? Or would I rise up and get angry?"

Daniel doesn't lawyer up in this moment. Daniel doesn't get angry and turn over tables and flip everybody double birds on the way out of the door. He doesn't do that. Here's what Daniel does. He goes to his house, opens the windows—they can see in, he's not hiding anything—he opens the windows, and he prays. But what I really want you to notice, it's just as he had always done. This was no different of a day. Daniel didn't break routine because he found himself in this moment of adversity. Daniel was unshaken, and I love that.

The second thing I want you to notice is that he prayed, not asking God to get him out of it. I've got to be honest, man. If I was Daniel, that is the first thing I would say, "God,



we've got a big issue here. God, would you please get me out of this? God, would you please protect me?" But instead, it says that Daniel does what? He gives thanks. He expresses his gratitude to God.

You've got to sit there and think, "Well, what is he giving thanks for?" "Thank you, God, that the lions are going to get their share of protein today." No, he's thanking God. And this shows us that there is no moment of trial, temptation, or adversity in which we cannot express gratitude before we begin to ask God to come through for us.

And so a significant tell, I think, in all of our lives is our immediate emotional response in the midst of adversity. That will show you not only who you really are, that will show you where you've been investing your time.

So, when it comes to daily living, when we talk about the Christian life.... Those of you who have been tracking for a while, following Jesus, you've heard all of this before. Whether it's early morning, during the day, late at night, whenever it is—that time of quiet time, whatever that looks like for you: Daily Bible Reading, prayer, journalling, spiritual practices and disciplines—I think that it is easy at times to either do those things and to get somewhat arrogant about them. And you start comparing your quiet time to other people's or you begin to feel really ashamed because you mean well, you start off, and then it trails off and you are not doing it with any regular routine.

Now I want you to know that when you do those things it's certainly not because those things can make you a Christian, you can't make yourself a Christian. That's the finished work that Jesus did on your behalf on a cross. He got out of a grave so you wouldn't have to, alright? So He did all of that stuff on our behalf. No, we incorporate those things in our life not to be a better Christian, or even a growing Christian, certainly not to compare our faith to others. God's not up in heaven saying, "Well, you know what. Give him a gold star." That's not why we do it.

I want you to begin thinking of those things like gym sessions for your soul. Adversity is tough. Challenge is tough. And in those moments, will you be ready to be faithful with the kind of resolve that Daniel faced them?

I've got a really good friend who is an executive pastor at a church in another state. I was recently having breakfast with him. And he told me that he recently began changing the way that he interviews potential people for staff. And I said, "Well, tell me about that."

And he said, "Well, one of the questions that I ask, usually toward the end, is I just ask them to explain the greatest crisis that they've ever experienced in their life and how they handled it." And he said, "If they are married, what I like to do is just say, 'Tell me about the biggest fight that you and your spouse got into.'" And he said, "The way that they choose to answer that question tells me a lot about their honesty, their willingness to get vulnerable, and how they handled it."



He said, "So, for example, I ask them that question and they say, 'Well,' they choose to phone it in, they are like, 'Well, last big fight we were on vacation in Tahiti,'" right there that's automatically tells you something, right? "And they are like, 'We got into an argument over sunscreen. She wanted to use SPF 15 because she's careless, and I wanted to use SPF 100 because I'm careful that way. We got into a real pickle over that one. But then we went on a walk, and we kissed and made up and then we had margaritas later that night with a little salt ring.'"

And he goes, "If they give that kind of response, I'm not hiring them." He's like, "For all kinds of reasons. But the big one is like, 'Are you willing to get honest in that moment about some of those greatest moments of adversity and crisis and challenge in your life?'" It's a big tell how you face this as to whether or not you've been incorporating those daily practices in your life.

Can I just ask you this today? What's your autofill response to crisis? Just like that Google search. Do you get angry? Do you get jaded? Do you start worrying? Do you panic? Or does your resolve look anything at all like Daniel's?

Well, of course, if these guys are going to spend all of this time rigging this up, they are going to follow through. Check it out in verse 11:

*"Then the officials went together to Daniel's house," clearly they are trying to catch him in this, and they did, they "... found him praying and asking for God's help. So they went straight to the king and reminded him about his law. Then they told the king, 'That man Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is ignoring you and your law. He still prays to his God three times a day.'"*

Now, *"Hearing this, the king was deeply troubled,"* he knew what he had done, and he knew what this meant for Daniel, *"and he tried to think of a way to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day looking for a way to get Daniel out of this predicament."* Daniel 6:11-14 (NLT)

But he can't and he knows it. Verse 16:

*"So at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions."* I just want to point this out, the king thought, or that they thought, the most difficult thing that they could do to Daniel in this moment was to lock him into a room full of cats, which is just evidence that cats are demon animals, alright?

I had to throw that in there because it's been a while since I've given you cat lovers a hard time. And I only give the people I love a hard time. Actually, I've made cat jokes in the past and many of you email me and write me letters and tell me that you've been praying for me.

And I just want you to know that it must be working because the week of Christmas last year a little kitten showed up on our front doorstep and we brought that little kitten into

our house, not because I like cats but because I love my daughters. He's black. His name is Onyx.

And I have to say that after nine months, I'm a cat person. I really like this cat. I really do. I like this cat. So your prayers are powerful and effective, and they are shaming, by the way, just very powerful. And the only reason I like this cat is because he acts like a dog. So that's the only reason.

*"The king said to him, 'May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you.'"* A pagan king is saying this to Daniel. Verse 17:

*"A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den."* Does that remind you of anything? It has to do with Easter. *"The king sealed the stone with his own royal seal and the seals of his nobles, so that no one could rescue Daniel."*

*"Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night fasting. He refused his usual entertainment and couldn't sleep at all that night."* The guy is not getting a wink of sleep. Verse 19:

*"Very early the next morning, the king got up and hurried out to the lions' den. When he got there, he called out in anguish, 'Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you serve so faithfully, able to rescue you from the lions?'"*

Now, check out Daniel's response in verse 21:

*"Daniel answered, 'Long live the king!'"* Remember who else said that? Yeah, all the administrators and officials who were trying to trap him. It's as if Daniel is taunting. He's talking some serious trash, and I love it so much. Verse 22:

*"My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty."*

So Daniel makes it through the whole night in a den among lions. I've often heard it said that almost nobody got any sleep that night. The schemers were up celebrating. Darius was up worrying. Daniel's friends were up praying. The angels were up protecting. Ironically, Daniel is the only one who gets a good night's sleep. In verse 23 it says:

*"The king was overjoyed and ordered that Daniel be lifted from the den. Not a scratch was found on him, for he had trusted in his God."*

This is like where you just wish the story would have stopped right there. You're like, "Oh, okay. Chapter 6 should stop right there, and we go right into chapter 7. That would be amazing." But it does not.

And I thought about saying, "Well, we're about out of time." But I knew that you would read ahead, because the very next verse, honestly, is quite frankly very disturbing. And it's pretty brutal. And I need to speak to that. I wouldn't be doing a very good job if I

didn't. So let me go ahead and read it and just a heads up, it's hard to read. But I want to explain it. So it says in verse 24:

*"Then the king gave orders to arrest the men who had maliciously accused Daniel. He had them thrown into the lions' den," here's the disturbing part, "along with their wives and children. The lions leaped on them and tore them apart before they even hit the floor of the den."*

So, let me make an observation and then let me offer an explanation. The observation is you cannot say that the reason why Daniel was spared in the lions' den was because the lions weren't hungry. They were clearly starving. We see that as an observation.

Now the next part is really, really brutal, and maybe you read this, and it sort of triggers an emotional response within you where you are like, "This is the problem I have with the Old Testament. I just don't understand why God would allow this."

So let me just say that what we just read was a very common practice in the ancient Near East. If anyone made a false accusation against somebody else, and it was proven that it was a false accusation, then they, themselves, would be punished by receiving the same fate sought for the victim. And we actually see that this happened rampantly throughout pagan empires. You would see people make false accusations.

Why the women and the children? Well, that's a good question. I don't know that I have the full answer to that, but I will say this. Sin, pride, and rebellion always affect innocent people. Your sin and mine always gets on other people who didn't have anything to do with it.

Here's the thing that I want you to hear. Just because this is in the narrative does not mean that God is condoning it. The Bible isn't condoning this behavior, it is simply telling us that it happened within a very pagan empire. It is describing what happened when sin, pride, and rebellion reign. It is not prescribing that that's what God wants.

In fact, if you look at the book of Ezekiel, God speaks out very clearly against this type of behavior. It happened all of the time. Innocent people would be taken because of very pagan kings and their paranoia. There would be kings who would wipe out whole families, young children of their enemies because they didn't want the kids to grow up and go all Jason Bourne on them later. So they would wipe them out. And God speaks very clearly against this.

Let me finish out the chapter:

*"Then King Darius sent this message to the people of every race and nation and language throughout the world: 'Peace and prosperity to you! I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel For he is the living God, and he will endure forever.'*

*“His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end. He rescues and saves his people; he performs miraculous signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.” Daniel 6:25-27 (NLT)*

It's pretty impressive. This chapter starts off with a prohibition on prayer and it ends with the king declaring that God loves the nations, will endure forever, and He rescues and saves even though not in ways that we always want Him to or anticipate. Not a bad little sermon. What convinced him of this is Daniel's ability to trust God when he found himself in a pit among lions.

So here's where I just want to land the plane. I just want to ask you to chew on these few things and apply them to your own lives. Here's the first one:

### **Decide ahead of time who I'm going to be**

Before we find ourselves in a moment of adversity we need to decide ahead of time who we are going to be.

And this is that moment right now. “I just want to decide ahead of time before I find myself in crisis, trial, or temptation, who am I going to be in the moment?” And then you've got to ask yourself, “Am I developing the kind of daily routines and practices to reinforce that?”

So, when you are faced with trials and temptations, you don't just sweep them away. And Daniel didn't all of a sudden just rise to the occasion and muster up the courage to go face to face with a group of hungry lions, this was the result of decades of faithfulness in his life. And if you wait until you are in a pit among lions to decide how you are going to respond, you will not be ready.

So that is why, young people, if you wait until college to figure out what you're going to believe and how you're going to live, you will not be ready when everyone around you doesn't make wise decisions and you're away from your family.

If you wait for the resolve to withstand temptation when you're on the road, in the hotel room, or on the couch all alone, you will not be ready. If you wait to stand on your convictions when the people around you are telling you that you are crazy, you won't be ready. Don't wait for the moment, develop each and every moment to facilitate who you are going to be.

Here's the second thought:

### **Develop spiritual rhythms that build “grit”**

You need to develop spiritual rhythms that help you build grit. I've already alluded to this. I want to call it spiritual rhythms of your day. So, “What are the daily practices that I'm going to do to build intimacy with God, to build up my character and my resolve so that when I find myself in adversity, I can stand?”

A couple of these things that I would just mention are: don't underestimate the gathering of people. What we are doing right now, and I want to be very clear about what we're doing right now and what we are not. What we are not doing right now.... Hopefully you didn't just gather into the room where you are sitting today to see professional Christians sing and teach on stage while you watch.

Now, there is an element of that. But what this is meant to do is this is meant to be mutual encouragement because, I don't know about you, but Monday through Saturday I can kind of get worn down. I actually had a pretty good week this last week, but I'm still a little bit tired and I was looking forward to this gathering where we can fill each other up and mutually encourage each other so that we could go back out and live faithfully the next Monday through Saturday.

So, when you come in here, this is not just you coming in to receive something. Now, I hope you do. I really hope you receive something, but it can't just end there. And the analogy that I have often used is that in order to kick start your spiritual metabolism and to really begin to grow as a follower, you can't just come and see, you also have to come and serve.

It's this idea of every weekend when we gather, come, figuratively speaking, with your spiritual bib on ready to eat, right? You've got your Bible, maybe something to write with. You're ready to go. I cannot guarantee that every message will be a good message, but I can guarantee that I put in the work and hopefully God will feed you through this because we're going to go through His Word, teach it, explain it, and illustrate and apply it. And I want you to be able to receive something.

I also want you to be able to put on a spiritual apron and go serve. And what happens is, if you are just always eating all of the time but you're never exercising, or if you are exercising all of the time and never eating you are not going to be healthy.

The same thing is true spiritually. And that's why we encourage you, man, come and serve an hour and worship an hour. And if you ever find yourself in a moment where, "I just don't feel like I'm getting anything out of this anymore," begin to serve. Begin to take your eyes off of yourself and begin to serve other people.

Can I just share this with you from my own life? This is even true for me in weekly preaching, people will often ask me, "Hey, do you still get nervous preaching?" And I just want to say, "Every single time." Every single time I get nervous. And most of the time when I get overly nervous, what's happening in my soul is that I'm trying too hard to do good.

I want to do a really, really good job. I want you to laugh in all of the right places. And I want you to say *amen* in all of the right places. And I want you to clap in all of the right places. And I want you to go, "Oh, man. This is really, really good." So I get overly nervous about that.

Oftentimes when I step up here to swing for the fences, that's usually when I foul it off. But what I've learned is that I can take a deep breath, calm down, and pray—usually I find myself doing this during worship over here.

And I say, “Hey, God. I’m not so concerned about how well I do. I know that there is somebody here today who needs to be encouraged and actually somebody’s eternity is on the balance. Thank You for this opportunity to just be a spokesperson. So can I just come up and just encourage, and can I forget about trying to impress with what I know and how to deliver it and actually say, ‘How can I encourage you in your next steps?’”

The same thing is true of you. If you just constantly come into church and be like, “What am I going to get out of this? What am I going to get out of this? Am I going to like that song, enjoy that sermon?” then it’s going to fall stale. But if you find yourself coming in, “Who can I encourage? Who can I serve?”—there is something to that. I want you to begin to develop those rhythms into your life.

Here's the third thing that goes along with it:

### **Determine to be available to God through every age and stage of my life**

Determine to be available, to be used by God, in every age and stage of your life. What I love about Daniel is that Daniel served God faithfully as a 14- or 15-year-old kid and he served God faithfully as an 85- or 90-year-old man. Nothing changed. And there is never a season or a time in your life when you are too young or too old to be use of God.

I want us to be a multi-generational church. Multi-generational does not mean, “Well, we’ve got a little something for everybody. Your preference over here and your preference over....” That is not what it means. What it means is every generation stepping up and being used of God to serve each other.

I’m going to show you a real quick video of one our student leaders and share just a glimpse into his story. So be encouraged by this.

#### **Video of Ryan**

In sixth grade I just felt that it was time to get baptized and make my faith my own, start my own journey. I felt called to start serving in Kids’ Ministry. I was a seventh grader leading first graders, trying to understand how the kids worked. How their home lives were just going everywhere. And it’s a really fun experience just being able to mentor them. And now they are in sixth grade. So I’ve been able to have a lot of close relationships with the students.

Sometimes you don’t know how serving is going to play out, like if you’re actually impacting the students’ lives. But very recently I was able to baptize one of the students. His name is Craig. And he was one of the students that I’ve had for a long time. Over time he’s just made his faith his own.

Understanding that all of the time that you've spent with the kids, it's worth something. I mean, that's kingdom work. That's basically what we're called to do.

The current series that the main church is on, as well as Kids' Ministry, is the story of Daniel and how he's been consistent in his faith. And that's the biggest thing for me right now going into college. It's figuring out where I fit in, continuing to have my faith. I don't know what it is going to look like but I'm hopeful that God's going to use me in some way to serve other people, whether that's encouraging people every day, having my door open to talk to people.

If you're considering serving, go for it. Whether that's serving in Kids' Ministry. Whether that's greeting people outdoors—helping out in any way that you can. There are so many different ways that you can serve and help other people. God calls us to do that and that's an important piece of everyone's faith.

Aaron

Give it up for Ryan. Appreciate that.

You know, as we wrap up here, I recently read about all of these different perspectives that people often share whenever they find somebody who fell into a pit.

When this guy falls into a pit it says:

A subjective person came along and sees him and says, "Man, I really feel for you down there."

An objective person came along and said, "You know. Right on. Logically it's just a matter that you were going to fall down into a pit."

A philosophical person came along and said, "You only think that you are in that pit."

A Pharisee came along and said, "Only bad people fall into pits."

A mathematician came along and calculated how he fell into the pit.

A news reporter came along and wanted an exclusive story on his experience in the pit.

A charismatic came along and said, "Just declare that you are not in a pit."

A realist came along and said, "Now, that's a pit."

A geologist came along and told him to appreciate the rock strata in the pit.

An IRS agent came along and asked if he was paying taxes on the pit.

The county inspector came along and asked if he had a permit to dig that pit.

A passive person came along and avoided the subject all together.



A self-pitying person came along and said, "You haven't seen anything until you've seen my pit."

An optimist came along and said, "Well, that pit could be worse."

A pessimist came along and said, "A pit could always be worse."

Jesus, seeing the man in the pit, reached down and grabbed him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

See, I've been saying this throughout the series. The book of Daniel has Daniel's name on it, but it is not about Daniel. It is a foreshadowing of Jesus. You see, just like Daniel, men conspired against Jesus because of who He was. Just like Daniel traps were set for Jesus. Just like Daniel, Jesus was falsely accused by His enemies.

Just like Daniel, Jesus was brought in front of a ruler, Pontius Pilate, who tried to free Him, but he couldn't. Just like Daniel, Jesus was condemned to die a very violent death. Just like Daniel, Jesus was put in a cave that was sealed so that no human could intervene. And just like Daniel, Jesus walked out of that cave alive.

The only difference between Jesus and Daniel, is that Daniel didn't die, Jesus did. And He did so on your behalf and on mine. Jesus experienced the threat of death and experienced a brutal death because He knew that there was no way.... You and I don't have deep enough pockets to pay off the debt that we owe. And so He did it on our behalf.

Daniel is a picture of us. That because of our sin, which is our guilt before God, we are condemned to a final judgement of death. But Jesus paid the price and He set us free. Jesus is a better Daniel in every way.

So, today as we wrap up this time together, I want you to take a few moments to reflect right where you are. I can't imagine that every point in this message applied to you equally. It doesn't have to. What is the one thing that God is saying to you today? What is the one thing that you needed to hear? What's the one thing that you have been running from? What's the one thing that spoke so clearly to the stage of life that you are in right now?

I want you to spend a few moments thinking, praying, reflecting. And after I give you a few moments we are going to take communion together. I'm going to lead us through this. So hopefully on your way in you were able to grab a communion cup. Just take a few moments to pray, to reflect and then I'll lead us in communion as we close.

The final night before Jesus' crucifixion He took the disciples into a room, He broke some bread. He said, "This bread symbolizes my body broken for you on a cross. As often as you eat it remember." Let's take the bread together.

Then He poured some wine and He said, "The wine symbolizes the blood that I shed for you that covers over your sin and your transgressions to make you holy and spotless before God. So as often as you do this remember." Let's take the juice together.

Lord God, I ask that You would receive us right where we are and as we are and that we would allow the power of Your presence to change that, to make a change to who we are and where we are.

So, Father, I thank You for Your grace. But by the grace of God, none of us stand a chance. But by the grace of God, none of us has the ability to face our lives.

But today, we want to follow the example of Daniel and we want to express our gratitude. Thank You for who You are, for what You've done. If You never did another thing for us, You've done more than enough.

So, God, I just ask that You would change us from the inside out. What we see modeled for us, what we see happening in the world isn't working. And we need men and women who will be humble, fully surrendered, empty handed before You that You might use us.

God, give us the strength not to wait for the moment to show up but to take each and every moment to begin to develop and foster the spiritual muscles that will make us unflappable in the face any sort of adversity, trial, or crisis.

Thank You for making a way for us. We ask this in the spirit of gratitude. And everybody says: Amen.