

Daniel 6: Non-Prophet Dinner

INTRODUCTION

As we noted in the brief survey of the whole book, this chapter focuses on Daniel as he has to stand alone after he has become an elderly man. He had already been tested with his friends. Now he must stand alone. He had been tested as a young man. Now he must be tested as an elderly man. And yet we can see that he stands firm because he has his priorities straight. This is more than a chapter about divine deliverance. It is also a chapter with rich lessons on personal priorities.

THEOLOGICAL TOOLS

This chapter is more straightforward in its theological message. The comments are more or less restricted to the section on practical application.

There is one significant comment in response to certain questions that some have brought to Daniel 6. Note that the brutal punishment of the cunning princes was not related to the expressed wishes of Daniel. A pagan king, Darius, gave the command for the wives and children of these men to be thrown to the lions with their conniving husbands. But note that it was not necessarily all of the 120 princes who were involved in this fate. In much the same way as young people speak today, a number of these princes told the king, "Everybody wants to do this . . ." (Daniel 6:7) They were certainly exaggerating reality because we know that at least Daniel was not in agreement with them. There may have been a number of the men who wished they could rid themselves of Daniel, but who did not necessarily join in this devilish plot. In the end, these men, their wives and their children were fed to the lions (Daniel 6:24). It was only the accusers and their families that were involved in the punishment. We do not know how many people this included, but it would likely be a smaller group than the total of 120 men plus their family members.

SPIRITUAL INSIGHT / PRACTICAL APPLICATION

There are so many things we could highlight from the experiences described in Daniel 6. Only a few are listed here. One key point is that we need to be true to God when we are tempted to cut corners.¹ Another concept to ponder is that in many ways, the experience of Daniel recorded here has a number of parallels with the life of Jesus

¹Taken from a class presentation by Salome Byrtusova given on 8 January 2004.

Christ. For example, Daniel ended up in a cave (the den of lions) with the opening covered by a rock and an official seal. Jesus also ended up in a cave (the tomb) with the opening covered by a rock and an official seal. In each case, there was a coming forth from the cave in victory.²

Daniel is one of the few people in the Bible with no recorded sin (cf. Dan 6:4,5). He is an example of a person experiencing sanctification.³ Other prophets served in Israel or Judah, but Daniel served a series of pagan kings.

Daniel had influence over his friends. It is significant to note that even though Daniel was placed above his friends in authority, there is no mention of them resenting this (cf. Dan 6:2). His friends seemed content with his position.⁴ This is in contrast with the words and actions of Korah (Numbers 16). Korah was not content with Moses' position. Daniel's friends were supportive of Daniel. Korah and his friends were destructive in their influence. And they were destroyed by God. Daniel's friends grew by their association with God. Korah's friends died.

And Daniel's influence went beyond the point of influencing his friends. It is very possible that the new heathen king, Darius, may have heard of the three Hebrew boys and the deliverance they had received from God. This may be what gave him the confidence that God would deliver Daniel (Daniel 6:16). It is interesting to note that we sometimes cannot see through the "dark tunnel". But the heathen king knew that God would deliver Daniel. At times, others can gain confidence by what they have seen God doing in us.⁵

How are you today? When I ask this question, I can usually predict the answer. Most people say, "I'm fine." It seems to be a standard answer. It doesn't matter if the person is happy or sad. It doesn't matter if he is energetic or tired. It doesn't matter if he is healthy or sick. When I ask, "How are you today?" I get the same answer. "I'm fine." But if I ask a little more about a person, I can get a variety of answers. But even then, then answers usually move in one direction. Even after we are done with the formality of saying that we are fine, there is one basic answer.

²Taken from a class presentation by Melusch Ueki given on 8 January 2004.

³Taken from a class presentation by Keith Mosier given on 5 January 2006.

⁴This concept, and the related statements which follow are taken from a class presentation by Joshua Sunderland given on 5 January 2006.

⁵Taken from a class presentation by Rolando Williamson given on 8 January 2008.

What answer do you get when you ask, "How are you today?" Eventually, most people say something like, "I'm busy". "I have a lot to do today." Or they make similar comments.

Are you busy? Do you have time to do the things which you want to do? Do you have time to do the things which are really important? Sometimes people tell me, "I'm too busy to do this or that." "I'm too busy to pray." "I'm too busy to read my Bible." "I think it is enough to just tell God, 'I'm here, do what you want with me'".

But is this really enough? I think that many of us are making a terrible mistake. Let's look at the experience of someone who made sure that he spent daily time with God.

Please turn with me to Daniel Chapter 6.

We have already looked at some of the experiences of Daniel in the first five chapters of his book. We saw what happened to him when he was a young man. We saw how he acted as an elderly man (in Chapter 5). Now, in Daniel 6, we find that he is quite elderly. He was about 84 years old at this time.

Read Daniel 6:1,2

Daniel had a lot of responsibility. Directing 120 satraps and two other presidents must have been a very busy job. Any job in administration can be time consuming. Notice what the king thought about Daniel.

Read Daniel 6:3

As can be imagined, this caused the others to be jealous. People are like that. When one person has more authority, the others want to tear him down. Have you ever watched crabs in a bucket? I have heard that you never need a lid on a bucket of crabs. If one tries to crawl out, the others will drag him back down. That is what many people do too.

Read Daniel 6:4

Just like the crabs, these people were trying to drag Daniel down. But they couldn't find anything wrong with him. This is hard to comprehend. Daniel was a government leader. But, at the same time, he was pure and honest. How many government leaders have you observed who were like this? It seems that when people get power, it messes them up. It has been said that power corrupts and that absolute power corrupts absolutely. But it didn't corrupt Daniel. How could he be so pure in such a wicked place?

Read Daniel 6:5

The satraps finally realized that they would not be able to catch Daniel doing something wrong. The only thing they could see him doing was good. Then they realized what they could do. They could trick the king into making good things bad.

With trickery, they approached the king in a way that would reach his pride. They convinced him to pass a new law. This law would bring government authority against religious practice. It would use civil power to force people to act against conscience.

Read Daniel 6:7

I don't know how many of them actually worked on this plan. But they claimed that everyone wanted it to happen. This was certainly an exaggeration. We know that at least Daniel was not in favor of this plan. People are like that. When they want to get you to do something wrong, they claim that everyone is doing it. If so many people are in favor of something, it must be ok. Or is it?

Now, what could Daniel do? He had only two choices: Disobey God and obey the king. Or Disobey the king and obey God.

Read Daniel 6:10

This is one of the most powerful verses in the Bible. Daniel knew that this could get him in trouble. But he still put God first. It was his habit to pray three times every day. Is this your habit? Daniel was the second leader of the country. He was terribly busy. But he took time to speak with God three times a day. This was his secret. This is how he could be pure in a corrupt environment.

Do you have time to pray? Do you have time to spend with God? Do you have time to watch television? Do you have time to go shopping? Do you have time to talk with friends? We somehow manage to find time for the things which are most important to us. Other things get crowded out. But we still make time for what we think is important.

Notice what Daniel was praying about. It says that he gave thanks to God. He knew that the penalty for his actions would be death. And yet he didn't complain to God. He thanked God. That takes real faith and courage.

Nothing could prevent Daniel from spending his special time with God. Threats of death didn't stop him. Human jealousy didn't stop him. A busy schedule didn't stop him. The potential loss of his job didn't stop him.

Do any of these things stop you? If you are not sure of the answer, here is a simple test: Think back over this last week. Where was God in your life? When did you take time with Him? Did other things crowd Him out?

But take heart. If God was crowded out of your life, there is still hope. You are still alive. You can make the commitment to spend that time with Him. He will give you the strength and the courage to do it.

Daniel could have prayed in secret that month. He would still have time with God. But no one would see him. Why didn't he do it that way? I believe that the answer is very clear. He always prayed in the open. If he suddenly changed his habit now, it would look like he had stopped praying.

Did you catch that point. Doing what is right is not the only thing. We need to be careful not to hide our faith. Don't be embarrassed to pray when others might see you. It can give them a chance to find out about God. This doesn't mean we should show off. It just means that we can be open about our faith.

The satraps were so excited. Their plan had worked. They were eager to tell the king that Daniel would have to sleep with the lions that night. Somehow, they must have tried to pretend that they were sorry about Daniel's fate. After all, Daniel was the king's favorite worker. But the king could see through their plot.

Read Daniel 6:14

This is truly amazing. I'm sure that the king was angry with the people who had tricked him. But he was very angry with himself as well. Can you imagine how he felt. After trying everything he could to save Daniel, he had to admit that there was no way out. He had to face the awful responsibility of his wrong action. His hasty decree would now lead his friend to death's door. I can imagine the pain in his eyes as he looked at Daniel for what might be the last time. I can almost hear him saying: "I have done all I can to save you." "I can do no more." (YI Nov. 1, 1900, EGW)

But then he makes an amazing statement.

Read Daniel 6:16b

The king realized that he was helpless. But he sensed that God could do something. This was a turning point in his life. It was an important turning point. As long as we have all of the answers, we don't realize how much we need God. But when we come to the end of our ability, God can demonstrate His power. It was time for God to act.

Daniel was thrown into the den of lions. Only a miracle could save him. The king was beside himself with worry. He couldn't sleep. He couldn't eat. He couldn't listen to music. His busy, selfish life suddenly had focus. Nothing else mattered. He could only think about what might be happening in that den of lions.

Read Daniel 6:19,20

There was a glimmer of hope in the king's voice. And yet he feared the worst. The overwhelming sorrow over his lost friendship came into his voice.

Read Daniel 6:21,22

What a powerful statement! God was in control. No matter what humans could think about or do, God was in control. God had chosen to honor His faithful servant.

Daniel had time for God. God had time for Daniel. Do you have time for God? Nothing could make Daniel miss that special time he spent with God. It was important to him. Is it important to you? You are very important to God. He wants to have at least one appointment with you every day.

This special time with God can give us what nothing else can give. It can make us live pure lives. It can give us confidence to face any obstacle. It can make us calm in the face of angry enemies. It can make us great men and women for God.

Would you like to make a commitment today? Would you like to pledge to spend regular time with God? He will help you to honor your pledge. And in doing this, you will discover that you have tuned into the greatest Power of the universe.

Daniel had time for God. And God had time for Daniel. I believe that our main problem with temptation is not the actual temptation. It is before the actual temptation comes. We struggle to be strong because we often fail to take enough time with God to make us become strong.

Following are some tips on time management. They only "touch the tip of the iceberg" so to speak. But if these tips are implemented, they can make a radical change in a person's life. I would urge the reader to consider taking time to investigate the primary documents in relation to this section.

TIME MANAGEMENT⁶

Matthew 4:1-11--This chapter contains insights into how Jesus was able to be strong in the face of temptation. In the *Life and Teachings of Jesus* class we can develop the theme of how these temptations operate on multiple dimensions (concerning the Bible, concerning salvation, and concerning the way we deal with opportunities). But the bottom line is that Jesus could be strong because He had hidden God's word in His heart.

⁶These concepts are taken from two books. The first one is by Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989). This has been one of the most pivotal books in my experience of trying to tame the time dragon, or the "tyranny of the beans". The other book gets into some more of the nitty-gritty details of time management. It is by Stephen R. Covey and A. Roger Merrill, *First Things First* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

He quoted scripture in order to be strong. But where did He have the time to store so much scripture in His heart? He had to organize His time to include that.

Illustration: Tyranny of the beans

In this illustration, beans and ping pong balls are put in a jar. The beans represent the things that are "not worth a hill of beans" in our lives. These things are not bad. Nor are they good, as such. They are basically morally neutral. But they take up time. These things might include phone conversations with friends, bathing, reading newspapers, spending time on the Internet, etc.

The ping pong balls represent the major things in our lives. These are the important things like Bible study, prayer, exercise, eating properly, spending time with family, study for school, etc.

If you put the beans in the jar first, the ping pong balls cannot all fit into the jar. The beans crowded them out. In the same way, if you let life happen as it comes, the little things will crowd out the important things. The only way to get the important things to happen is to plan ahead when they will happen. This does not necessarily mean that you do the important things first in the day. It means that you plan first when they will happen. Then, the little things can squeeze in between the more important things.

Grid for Important versus Urgent matters

- Moving from top to bottom, items become less important.
- Moving from left to right, items become less urgent.

	<i>Urgent</i>	<i>Not Urgent</i>
<i>Important</i>	Quadrant One: Urgent and Important	Quadrant two: Not Urgent but Important
<i>Not Important</i>	Quadrant Three: Urgent but Not Important	Quadrant four: Not Urgent and Not Important

The challenge for most people is that they spend so much time in quadrant three that they do not have time for quadrant four activities (the terms are the ones used by Stephen Covey). Urgent things consume our time, while important things that are not urgent may never get done. Quadrant two activities include Bible Study, Prayer, etc. (the ping pong balls in the illustration).

The key is to plan ahead where the main things will happen in your week, and let the other things fit in the spaces. Stephen Covey likes to say, "Plan the Work. Then Work The Plan."

Begin With The End In Mind.

This is the second of the seven habits discussed by Stephen Covey. If you are going to have any choice in the way things happen, you need to start with this. Take time

to think about how you would like to end. When you die, what would you like people to remember about you? Think very specifically about people at work, at school, at home, etc. If you want to be remembered in a certain way, what would it take to get there? Now is the time to start living in a way to leave those memories with other people. (The class discussion got into a lot more detail here. Please refer to the books by Stephen Covey for more detailed discussion on the matter.)

First Things First.

This is the nitty-gritty part of managing your life so that your time is wisely used. Remember, there is a big difference between being efficient (getting a lot done) and being effective (doing the things that really matter). Too many people discover that when they climb the ladder of success, it was leaning against the wrong wall. How many people on their deathbed have said, "Oh. I wish I had spent more time at the office."? It

just doesn't happen. We spend a great deal of time doing things which we do not believe are the most important in life.

But using time in an effective way involves some very specific planning and some serious decisions and commitments. Before that takes place we could think about a common mistake in modern thinking. People believe the secular humanistic lie that states that we as people move directly from STIMULUS to RESPONSE. This follows the teachings of Pavlov, the Russian researcher. But he was studying dogs. Humans should be able to put a gap in between the Stimulus and the response. In the gap there is the FREEDOM TO CHOOSE.

Humanistic View:

STIMULUS -----> RESPONSE

True Christian View:

STIMULUS -----> Freedom to Choose -----> RESPONSE

1. Self-Awareness

4. Independent Will

2. Conscience

3. Imagination

5. Sense of Humor

Under the FREEDOM TO CHOOSE there are four Human Endowments (in one book Stephen Covey adds a fifth human endowment--humor). These four human endowments are Self-Awareness, Conscience, Imagination, and Independent Will. These are the things that make it possible for us to choose a different outcome than what would normally follow a particular stimulus.

Self-Awareness is what enables us to see what is really going on in our lives. We can see what we are doing well and what should be different. We are able to step back from what is happening and to view our lives as if observing from the outside. This is a unique human capacity. By doing this, we are able to see what is really important to us (where are we spending our time and our money. . .).

Conscience is the unique endowment that tells us what is right and what is wrong. Every person, no matter what his or her religion, has the gift of conscience. There is an inner sense of what is right and what is wrong. But conscience can be trained. For example, Bible study and prayer can give a greater focus on what is right or wrong for the life of a person who seeks to follow God.

Imagination helps a person to see the future as it could be. We are able to make a different future than what would otherwise come to us if we let life just happen. But before we can create any kind of future in real life, it has to be created in our imagination. If we can see what might be, we have the chance to actually make it happen.

Independent Will gives us the strength to actually make happen the things which we have imagined. This is our God-given power to act, even when it might seem uncomfortable. It is not just human strength. For the Christian, it can be infused with the power of heaven.

And so there is a natural progression. Self-awareness tells us what is happening in our lives. Conscience tells us what should be happening. Imagination tells us the specifics of what we should aim for and how to get there. And the Independent will which comes as a gift from God can be exercised to make things actually happen.

In order to make this happen in the realm of managing time, there is a process which includes six basic steps.

SIX IMPORTANT STEPS:

1. Connect to Mission (Vision)
2. Review Roles
3. Identify Goals
4. Organize Weekly
5. Daily: Exercise Integrity in the Moment of Choice
6. Evaluate

1. Connect to Mission (Vision)

Before doing anything else, each person should create a mission statement. This is a statement of the basic reason to exist as a person. One person's mission statement will often overlap with another person's mission statement. The mission statement should be general enough to give some room for flexibility. But it should be specific enough to provide a very real sense of direction for the person.

My personal mission statement has been modified a little over the last three years. This reflects the fact that I have had changing roles. I used to be the academic dean of SDA Language Institute in Korea. Now I am a teacher at Weimar College. And so a few words changed here or there. Please do not consider this to be some kind of great example. It is merely listed here in order to give one idea of how a personal mission statement might appear.

I seek to daily, consciously dwell in the presence of God, making His Word a significant focus of study and spending serious time in meaningful prayer.

I seek to create in my wife and sons a deep sense of worth and belonging fostered by daily, focused attention and weekly special time together.

I seek to empower others to be effective evangelists for Christ. This includes training and nurturing students and evangelizing our community.

I seek to continually develop my mind through ongoing study, and to strengthen my body by adhering to the principles of NEWSTART.

Notice how this takes in the basic categories of my life. It is rather general. But it does give some basic direction. But a mission statement must only be the beginning. Next, we move to the roles.

2. Review Roles

Roles have to be identified before they can be acted upon. Each person functions within a variety of roles. These may be many and varied. But in order to organize your life around roles, you should cluster them into related categories so that there are no more than seven basic roles. If there are more categories than seven, it becomes challenging to keep everything straight.

In my own life, I have organized around seven roles. As can be seen, several of these encompass a number of categories. They are as follows:

Individual (Christian, citizen, consumer, etc.)
Husband (Home management assistant, etc.)
Father
Extended (son, brother, cousin, friend, neighbor, etc.)
Pastor/Evangelist (Sabbath School teacher, Church member, etc.)
Student
Teacher

Being a husband and helping to manage a home are related, but different. And yet, in order to reduce the number of categories I have clustered these different roles together. Several other categories are clustered like this.

3. Identify Goals

Each week, a person should identify one or two major goals within each of the various roles. This will vary a lot from week to week. There will be some weeks where the various roles will all have some kind of tasks or goals to perform. There will be other weeks where one or two of these roles will crowd out some of the others. An example of this was the two-week time period when I was in Denver for Doctor of Ministry classes. At that time in my life, the role of student completely crowded out the role of teacher. But I still made contact with my wife and kids to keep alive the role of husband and father.

It can be tempting to plan more than two major items for each category. This is especially true for a very busy person. But the key is to think about what would be the one or two absolutely most important things for a particular category for that week, and write those things down. If there is time, other things can be done. But it is necessary to identify what the absolutely most important few items would be for each category.

If we do not follow such a plan, we will do more and more in a particular category, and other things which were more important--but not so urgent--will be crowded out.

4. Organize Weekly

This is one of the keys to planning the work and working the plan. Too many people try to organize on a daily basis. If the focus is on one day, there are things which come up once a week that could be missed. If the focus is on the month, it is too big of a time period for the normal human to effectively schedule in detail. But the week is a basic unit of time that is small enough for keeping the big picture in mind and yet large enough for clustering activities. If something does not happen on the first day of the week, it can be rescheduled for another day. Make sure that each day includes some preparation time and not only the actual time of performing what was planned.

5. Daily: Exercise Integrity in the Moment of Choice

This is where "the rubber meets the road" so to speak. There are so many times that we find ourselves following some kind of a schedule, but some sudden need or opportunity will pop up. At that moment, we often find ourselves taking one or another

action. Either we woodenly stick to a schedule that may crowd out something more important, or we are so flexible that the original plan was meaningless. What we need to do is to test each sudden opportunity with our goals and with our mission. What is more important? The thing originally planned? Or the thing which has come up just now? There will be times when we have to bravely (and yet simply and kindly) explain that we are not able to participate in certain opportunities. That is one of the secrets to making the plan work. We have to learn to say, "No."

But there are times when the new thing is more important. For example, I could be in the middle of typing notes for a class when I get a phone call from a friend. If the phone call is just for chatting, it would not be as important as the thing already in process. And yet, the friend may have a serious need at the moment. If that is the case, I have to judge whether or not to drop my present activity to focus on the need of this

friend, or to make a clear, definite plan for how and when to help the friend at another time.

The key point is that there is a choice involved. It does not just happen.

6. Evaluate

This is one of the often missed actions. We make plans. Then we follow parts of what we planned and we fail to follow other parts of what we planned. But that is not the end. Each week, it is necessary to look back on the previous week and to see what went well and what should have happened differently. This gives perspective on the week. It makes it possible to learn from what went well and what did not go well. We can learn from our mistakes. We can also learn from our successes. These suggestions are not just my personal opinion. They have been developed and tested over time by people who are more intelligent in these matters. But they will only help to the degree that they are implemented.