

“No Compromise”

In the Face of Opposition, part 1

Daniel 6:1-10

[title slide] Welcome. Prayer.

[NU homecoming] Have you ever attended a class reunion or homecoming? I love going back to my college. It’s fun to relive my early twenties. I’ve marched in the alumni band, which is a lot harder now. I’ve visited my old classrooms, my old fraternity house. I still chuckle at the other alumni who look so old to me...and then realize, that’s exactly how the current students see me!

I admit, not all of my college memories were pleasant ones. I loved college, but my lifestyle was different than a lot of my classmates. A few of them used to call me “Flanders,” after the overly-religious character in “The Simpsons,” because I let my Christian faith show. I intentionally chose not to party and not to sleep around. I led a Bible study. I attended worship on Sundays. I watched my language. And others noticed.

[College students] Many young people are overwhelmed by the sudden independence and freedom of college. No one tells you what to do anymore. You can experiment, indulge, and procrastinate, often without immediate consequences. Yet I chose to honor God, and I lived a moral life as best as I knew. Of course, I made mistakes. I can tell you about those another time. But my choices were specifically made because of my relationship with Jesus Christ, and they cost me, in the short term, in popularity.

[title slide] I’m not looking for pity, nor am I pointing the finger at anyone. What I am saying is, I can relate to the story of Daniel. Maybe you can, too. Maybe you have been in a position where it was really, really hard to be faithful to God. Maybe you once told the truth and it cost you. Maybe you made an unpopular but moral decision, and people mocked you. That’s what happened to Daniel.

[Daniel praying] Daniel is one of our most beloved children stories. It has everything: conspiracy, action, drama, suspense, and the all-important happy ending. Everything works out. Today I want us to look at this story again with a fresh mind, remembering Daniel had a choice. Daniel faced opposition, and he

was tempted to compromise his faith. Would he serve God or the king? Would he follow his calling or his career?

So let me tell you the story in my own words, completing the part we didn't read just now, all the way to the end of chapter 6.

[king and advisors] Darius set up his kingdom to run itself. He had over 120 governors working for him, with three top brass, including Daniel, to help him prosper.

[plotting against Daniel] Daniel as so smart and so good, the king was going to promote him, so the others tried to dig up some dirt on him to exploit. They found nothing. Finally, they realized, if they were going to get to him, it would have to be through his faith.

[king signing a law] They hatched a plan, and went to the king. They said, “All hail, King Darius. Live forever! All of your administrators [*cough, cough, except Daniel*] recommend you sign a law stating that everyone agree how cool you are...much cooler than any other god or human. In fact, for the next 30 days, everyone will just pray to you. If they don't, they are lion chow. Here, we've drawn up the papers. Just sign them and put them into effect. Our own laws will make this unchangeable.” And King Darius signed without hesitation.

[Daniel prays] Daniel heard about it and did nothing to change his prayer practice. Three times a day, at his window facing Jerusalem, he prayed, thanked God, and offered his requests on his knees.

[tattling on Daniel] The others, of course, were watching, and ran back to the king, yelling, “King, you signed a law, didn't you?” “Of course, and it cannot be changed,” he said. “Well, Daniel is ignoring it and you. He prays three times a day to his God.”

[king upset] The king went pale. He thought all day long how to get Daniel out of this mess, but came up empty. The governors pestered him at sundown. “You know the law cannot be changed! Your reputation is at stake.” The king reluctantly agreed. He ordered the soldiers to lower Daniel into the lions' pit. “May your God save you!” he cried.

[King at the den] All night long, the king couldn't eat, sleep, or smile. At dawn, he raced to the den, fearing the worse. “Daniel, are you still there?”

[Daniel safe inside] Daniel cried out, “Of course! God’s angels clamped their mouths shut all night. Nobody could hurt me, because you and God both know that I am innocent.”

[others throw into the den] The king leaped for joy and had Daniel brought up. In his place, they threw the governors, and their wives and children, into the pit for the lions to snack on. That is one part a lot of children bibles leave out. At the end, the rivals were the ones destroyed by the lions. The Bible says their bones were broken before they even reached the bottom of the pit. I hope that illustration is not in your picture bible! (But I did find it on Free Bible Images!) Anyway, that’s the whole story in my words.

[King Darius] There are a few things that leap out at me, and I’m not talking about lions. First: how naïve was the king? Come on! He thought Daniel was great, and he never suspected that these 120 other governors weren’t trying plot a conspiracy? That seems rather silly to me. But I also notice that at the end of the story, King Darius was on Daniel’s side. Darius didn’t eat, he didn’t sleep; as one translation puts it, “He didn’t even send for his dancers.” Daniel’s faithfulness won the admiration of a king, even if 120 other governors hated Daniel. After God rescued Daniel, the king came through for him.

[Daniel] Another thing that stands out is Daniel’s coolness under pressure. There is not one mention, not even the merest suggestion, that Daniel ever thought of changing his prayer practice. He was that solid, faithful, and steadfast, even though his own life was at stake.

[Trust God] This wasn’t the first time that Daniel was tempted to compromise. You can read about the other times in the previous chapters. Yet every time Daniel faced opposition, every time he was tempted to neglect his God, Daniel chose to be faithful, no matter the risk. And God always saved him. When we read these stories, we are reminded that God vindicates us. The witness of Daniel can be summed up in two simple words: Trust God.

Can I just ask, do we really trust God to vindicate us? Do we stay on the right path? Every one of us needs to look deep in our hearts and ask, “Do I believe there is a higher power ready to help me? Will I persevere until the right moment?”

[man in street] Every one of us faces rivals in life. Every one of us faces lions. Not literal lions, unless you work for the zoo. But maybe you face things like: Dysfunctional families. Financial insecurity. Pressure at work. Past mistakes. Regrets. Hardened hearts. Compromise. Addiction. Sin.

Maybe you are doing your best to be faithful and true to God, but your friends ridicule you or lead you astray. It’s often subtle. You just feel like you should be a “little less Christian” around them.

[More like Daniel] I think every person here, if we are truly honest with ourselves, would say, “I’d like to have a little more Daniel in me.” Listen to how different bible translations describe Daniel: *Distinguished. Exceptional. Trustworthy. Innocent. Honest. Faithful. Reliable. Excellent. Attentive. Extraordinary.* These are the things I want to be, too.

[prayer] Friends, it is possible for us to be more like Daniel. We can learn to be faithful and not compromise in the face of opposition. How? The number one lesson from Daniel is this: we need to pray. We must take our prayers as seriously as he did. Maybe we should pray three times a day, or more! Daniel prayed, gave thanks, and asked for help. The times, locations, directions, and posture don’t matter. We simply should ask ourselves, “Do I regularly talk with God?”

[suffering for good] There is a second, less obvious lesson in this story. If you are sincerely suffering because of your faith, ironically, you are most likely doing something good. Don’t lose sight of that. Daniel was totally honest and upright; his enemies knew they could only attack him if it involved his relationship with God. They thought Daniel’s weakness was his faithfulness. Sometimes, the measure of our reliability and faithfulness to God is how much resistance we feel.

No good deed goes unpunished, and Daniel was squeaky clean. His enemies attacked him out of jealousy, even though the king wanted to reward him for his faithfulness and skill. Similarly, when we are doing good for the Lord, we can expect pushback. Someone will always be there to pour sand on your Fruit Loops. But take heart. The book of Daniel is just one of dozens of scriptures indicating God restores those who are unjustly attacked. The good news is, God has your back!

[title slide] The story of Daniel should be a gut check for all of us. Would you continue to live as a Christian if your life was at stake? Would you pray in a public restaurant? At a family gathering? What if someone dropped you in a country where Christianity was illegal? Would you be arrested for the way you currently practice your faith?

It's not about when, where, and how you pray. God is asking us, “Have you made a commitment to me no matter what? Is it ‘till death do us part’ with you and prayer?” If you say yes to that, get ready. There are jealous rivals out there, figurative lions on the prowl. And you can trust God to save you.

[scripture] One of my favorite verses, Galatians 6:9, says, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.” So don't give up! Your adversaries are about to be thrown into the lion's den. Hopefully not literally – that's gross. But figuratively. And there is a king or a queen out there, ready to support you when the time is right. Maybe that person is sitting in this very room. We must be persistent in prayer and continue to honor God with our lives. We must never compromise or give up hope.

[scripture] Jesus rewards his faithful disciples. He said so in Matthew 5:10-12. “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Rejoice and be glad, all you Daniels and Danielles. God is sending his angels to you right now, to shut the mouths of the lions. The king is coming at this very moment to support you and lift you out of the pit. Don't compromise. And don't give up. We are in this together.

[title slide] Let's pray.

Memory Verse:

Psalms 1:1-2 - “Blessed is the one...whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.”

Reflection questions:

1. What practices do you use to sustain your relationship with God? Do you have a certain rhythm to your prayer life, like Daniel?
2. When have you been persecuted or challenged because of your faith and character? Did you compromise? Why or why not?
3. In your life right now, who are your “rivals”? What “lions” are you facing? Who are your “kings”?
4. Describe a moment in your life similar to Daniel’s rescue. What rescue are you currently hoping for?