God’s Protection Sustains His People

Summary and Goal
Daniel’s interaction with King Darius highlights the expansion of God’s kingdom in spite of the opposing political realities of the day. Through a remarkable demonstration of faith, Daniel not only received God’s protection, he also magnified God’s superiority over all false gods. This session reminds us that the world’s systems of power are subservient to God’s kingdom. Consequently, our primary allegiance, no matter the price, must be to the kingdom of God. The word of the Lord, not the laws of men, should cause our fervent obedience. Daniel provides a wonderful example of the civil disobedience that is sometimes necessary as we live out our faith and which always results in joy and reward that outweigh our sacrifices.

Session Outline
1. God’s servant faithfully prays to the Lord (Dan. 6:6-10).
2. God’s servant faithfully relies on the Lord for rescue (Dan. 6:13-23).
3. God uses His servant to advance His kingdom (Dan. 6:25-27).

Background Passage: Daniel 6

Session in a Sentence
God advances His kingdom through His people’s faith in Him, including when their faithfulness leads them into trials.

Christ Connection
Daniel faithfully trusted and obeyed God even at risk of his life. God rescued Daniel from death and used him to advance His kingdom. Like Daniel, Jesus faithfully trusted and obeyed God, but unlike Daniel, Jesus was not spared from death. Jesus died and was resurrected to establish the kingdom of God.

Missional Application
Because we are citizens of the kingdom of God through Christ, we obey God above the world’s governments and, if necessary, engage in civil disobedience to advance the gospel.
**Group Time**

**Introduction**

**EXPLAIN:** Share the account on page 29 in the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG) of Bulstrode Whitelock’s conversation with a servant to establish the rationale for trusting God during times of crisis.

In 1653, Bulstrode Whitelock traveled to Sweden as an ambassador from England on behalf of Oliver Cromwell. He had the difficult job of representing his country that was still dealing with the fallout of a civil war and tensions in the government and the church. The night before his departure, Whitelock anxiously paced the floor, when a trusted servant led in this exchange:

“Pray, sir, do you not think that God governed the world very well before you came into it?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“And pray, sir, do you not think that He will govern it quite as well when you are gone out of it?”

“Certainly.”

“Then, sir, pray excuse me, but do not you think you may trust Him to govern it quite as well as long as you live?”

Gripped by the correction, Whitelock went to bed and was soon fast asleep.

**SAY:** Resting in God’s protection of His people is as important today as ever before. The Lord is advancing His kingdom, and He is quite capable of handling whatever lies ahead. Even our trials are a tool in God’s sovereign hand to accomplish His work. God’s peace is available to us, but it will require great faith.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

How does our appetite for control forfeit the peace of God in our lives? (we think too highly of ourselves and believe mission success depends upon our ability; the peace of God is available only through faith in God to accomplish His will; our desire for control threatens our relationships with others, leading to tension and fighting)

**SUMMARIZE:** Through a remarkable demonstration of faith, Daniel not only received God’s protection but also magnified God’s superiority over all false gods. This session reminds us that the world’s systems of power are subservient to God’s kingdom. Consequently, our primary allegiance, no matter the price, must be to the kingdom of God.

*For session-by-session training videos, please visit MinistryGrid.com/GospelProject.*

*For additional teaching options and other resources, please visit GospelProject.com/additional-resources.*
Point 1: God’s servant faithfully prays to the Lord (Dan. 6:6-10).

READ Daniel 6:6-10 (DDG p. 30).

6 So the administrators and satraps went together to the king and said to him, “May King Darius live forever. 7 All the administrators of the kingdom, the prefects, satraps, advisers, and governors have agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an edict that for thirty days, anyone who petitions any god or man except you, the king, will be thrown into the lions’ den. 8 Therefore, Your Majesty, establish the edict and sign the document so that, as a law of the Medes and Persians, it is irrevocable and cannot be changed.” 9 So King Darius signed the written edict.

10 When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. The windows in its upstairs room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

EXPLAIN: Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 30) to explain the context for this passage and to highlight Daniel’s commitment to prayer.

Things were difficult for Daniel in exile. Though he enjoyed the esteem of each monarch he served, the officials serving with and below him resented his favor with King Darius. These wicked men conspired to discredit Daniel, but his impeccable integrity exposed no flaws (6:1-5). So they manipulated Darius to entrap him. Still, Daniel kept himself anchored to the kingdom of heaven through his daily petitions.

Voices from the Church

“Our lack of spiritual power in Christianity today is not due to the sermons we preach or the songs we sing. Rather, it is due to our lack of prayer. We do not pray like it matters.”

–Steve Gaines

• Daniel left his enemies no recourse but to use his faith against him, and his constancy in prayer to the Lord gave them the blueprint. They devised a plan, more political than religious, to make King Darius the focal recipient of all prayers for thirty days, knowing Daniel would defy the edict. The first prayer Daniel offered to his God would be his ticket to the lions’ den.

• We might be tempted to see Daniel’s commitment as a bit radical and unnecessary. Couldn’t he kneel in his heart to pray while keeping his body straight? If God knows our hearts, why was this conscious, visible defiance necessary? Maintaining his love for and dependence upon the Lord must have been difficult while living in a foreign land, but Daniel knew God’s prescribed remedy for their time in exile. Obeying the command of Solomon, Daniel fixed his heart on the Lord and prayed toward Jerusalem for the restoration of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 8:46-50).
**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 30).

**Sin’s Effects in the World:** Sin has infected and redirected the social structures of society, leading to **injustice** and oppression. The good news of the **gospel** is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of **Christ**.

**Essential Doctrine “Sin’s Effects in the World”:** Sin does not only impact our relationship with God; it is also the root of our broken relationships with the people around us. Human sinfulness is the reason the creation groans in anticipation for redemption and deliverance from its bondage to evil powers (Rom. 8:20-22). Sin has infected and redirected the social structures of society, leading to **injustice** and oppression. The distorting effects of sin are visible all around us, but the good news of the **gospel** is that the battle against these powers will be won through the work of **Christ**.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 30) to identify Daniel as an example of how our commitment to God should take priority over our obedience to governmental leaders and laws.

Daniel resolved to obey God rather than men. His refusal to comply with the king’s command was not an aggressive act of rebellion but a deep devotion to God’s higher law instead. So too, a Christian’s commitment to Christ must always take precedence.

- In a world that is subject to Satan’s influence (1 John 5:19), followers of Christ must choose to go against the currents of compromise, just like the apostles of Christ, who could not stop speaking about the resurrected Jesus (see Acts 4:17-20). Christians should work diligently to be good citizens who honor governmental leaders and laws, but our commitment to Christ must always take precedence.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

What are some ways it is difficult to be true to Scripture in our context? (standing up for God’s design for sex versus this world’s sexual ethic leads to rejection in our culture; sharing the gospel for others to hear and believe is often considered taboo; love for enemies in this world requires the miraculous work of faith and submission to the Holy Spirit in us)

**SAY:** Maintaining his faith while in exile was surely challenging for Daniel, yet he found the strength to do so through his prayer life. In a similar way, believers around the world today continue to find the courage to walk with God in their prayer closets. No amount of adversity or resistance should decrease our enthusiasm for praying and then obeying the true King of heaven and earth.
**Point 2: God’s servant faithfully relies on the Lord for rescue (Dan. 6:13-23).**

**READ** Daniel 6:13-23 (DDG p. 31).

13 Then they replied to the king, “Daniel, one of the Judean exiles, has ignored you, the king, and the edict you signed, for he prays three times a day.” 14 As soon as the king heard this, he was very displeased; he set his mind on rescuing Daniel and made every effort until sundown to deliver him.

15 Then these men went together to the king and said to him, “You know, Your Majesty, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no edict or ordinance the king establishes can be changed.”

16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you continually serve, rescue you!” 17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signet rings of his nobles, so that nothing in regard to Daniel could be changed.

18 Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting. No diversions were brought to him, and he could not sleep.

19 At the first light of dawn the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. 20 When he reached the den, he cried out in anguish to Daniel. “Daniel, servant of the living God,” the king said, “has your God, whom you continually serve, been able to rescue you from the lions?”

21 Then Daniel spoke with the king: “May the king live forever. 22 My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths; and they haven’t harmed me, for I was found innocent before him. And also before you, Your Majesty, I have not done harm.”

23 The king was overjoyed and gave orders to take Daniel out of the den. When Daniel was brought up from the den, he was found to be unharmed, for he trusted in his God.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 31) to contrasting King Darius’s demeanor with that of Daniel’s. Also explore how God remains trustworthy and faithful even when He doesn’t rescue us from adversity.

After placing his favorite Hebrew in the lions’ den, Darius could not eat or sleep that night. Daniel, however, had a much different experience. He had prayed willingly despite the hasty law that threatened him, and he enjoyed a peaceful evening despite his feline company. The Lord protected him and spared his life.

**Commentary:** The story of Daniel’s peace in his circumstances is reminiscent of the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were willing to obey God even if it cost them their lives (3:17-18). And just as the Hebrews were called out of the fire and found to be unsinged, Daniel was called out of the lions’ den and was found to be unscathed.
INTERACT: Ask group members the following question.

How have you experienced God’s peace through faith in the midst of your obedience and its results? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

SAY: We celebrate Daniel’s survival, and rightly so, but how should we view God’s protection of His people when their outcomes are less desirable? Does God remove every threat we face? Does He always free us from our prisons of adversity? Are we foolish to trust God through the worst circumstances?

EXPLAIN: Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 31) to raise the issue of how we should view God’s faithfulness when dire circumstances lead to less desirable outcomes.

A different result in the lions’ den would not have been a failure by Yahweh. Daniel knew what the Lord could do, but he was at peace no matter what his God chose to do. His obedience was settled whether he lived or died. We do not obey God to avoid death; we obey Him without fear because we understand death does not have the last word.

- Whether God rescues us from our earthly dilemmas or He walks through them with us to increase our eternal reward, He actively and compassionately protects His own. We can trust God to do what is best for us even if it is not immediately obvious how He will do it.

PACK ITEM 5: GREATER DELIVERANCE: Use the Vines quote on this poster and the leader content below to show how Daniel’s circumstances compared with Christ’s on the cross. Emphasize how Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins should be the basis for our faith.

- Like Daniel, Jesus lived with a passion to obey His heavenly Father without conditions. Unlike Daniel, however, our Savior tasted death by way of a cross before He experienced God’s rescue. For three days it seemed as if hell’s roaring lion had devoured the Son of God. Yet through Christ’s resurrection from the dead, God made it possible for all who call upon Jesus’ name to be part of God’s kingdom. God the Father rescued Him just as He promises to save us when we believe on Jesus’ name.
**Point 3:** God uses His servant to advance His kingdom (Dan. 6:25-27).

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Daniel 6:25-27 (DDG p. 32).

25 Then King Darius wrote to those of every people, nation, and language who live on the whole earth:

“May your prosperity abound. 26 I issue a decree that in all my royal dominion, people must tremble in fear before the God of Daniel: For he is the living God, and he endures forever; his kingdom will never be destroyed, and his dominion has no end. 27 He rescues and delivers; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth, for he has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.”

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 32) to establish how Daniel’s faithfulness bore witness to God’s attributes. Then apply this opportunity for faithfulness and worship to your group members’ lives.

Through the opportunity afforded by Daniel’s faithfulness, God revealed to a pagan king His strength, eternality, and sovereignty. Certainly, the Lord’s character would not have been in jeopardy had Daniel capitulated to the evil around him, but His divine attributes may have remained hidden from those around Daniel apart from his steady endurance through an extremely frightening trial.

**Application:** Today, we have similar opportunities to Daniel’s when adversity interrupts our lives. Obviously, miraculous intervention can still draw the attention of unbelievers. If God spares your life, heals your body, or reorders your steps, people might praise the Lord if you point them back to Him. But most of our stories are not as dramatic as Daniel’s. Yet even when God calls us to endure through tragedy rather than removing it from us, His glory comes bursting forth when our faith is unshakable, and this might actually communicate more than when we are delivered. Each heartbreaking burden we face, whether it is removed in short order or weathered with an unwavering commitment to Christ, presents unique opportunities to glorify our Savior.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

How has God used your faithfulness in the past week to make Himself known to others in your spheres of influence? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)
**EXPLAIN:** Reference the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 32) as you show how God used Daniel to spread His fame and expand His kingdom among the nations.

What was the significance of Daniel’s life? The kingdom of heaven would march forward with or without this godly man. Yet the lifelong commitment of this individual resulted in repeated acknowledgments throughout the known world that Yahweh is the true God. Despite his pagan surroundings, Daniel pointed both Jews and Gentiles to the only kingdom that really matters, and both Jews and Gentiles will benefit from this kingdom for all eternity through the coming of the Messiah.

- God advanced His agenda of redeeming the whole world through the means of Daniel’s life. It is likely that Daniel’s favor with the kings he served over his lifetime positioned the Jews for their future return home to Jerusalem. Perhaps Daniel had the opportunity to put this part of God’s plan in Cyrus the Persian’s ear (6:28; see 2 Chron. 36:22-23). In ways that Daniel never imagined, God used his faithful commitment to the Lord for the benefit of Jews and Gentiles alike. By God’s grace, our spiritual dedication and obedience to Him will result in that which is exceedingly, abundantly above anything we could ever think of or ask for (Eph. 3:20).

- Returning to their home after exile was important for Jews living outside the promised land during this period. But the ramifications of their restoration went beyond personal satisfaction—returning to Jerusalem ultimately signaled that God’s plan to send the Messiah was progressing as He promised. Years later, Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, just outside their capital city.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

What priorities should we have so our lives have eternal significance for the sake of the Messiah and His kingdom? (we should make the glory of our Creator God and the praise of His Son, our Savior, Jesus, our highest priority; the mission to share the gospel throughout the world; Spirit-led and Spirit-empowered obedience from a joyful heart of faith; obedience to the Word of God even if it costs us our own lives)
My Mission

EXPLAIN: The presence of trials is not an indicator that God has abandoned us. To the contrary, the Lord often uses our adversities to demonstrate His power and advance His redemptive agenda as He works through us. Our sustained reliance upon Christ is a powerful tool in the hand of our Savior. Pointing others to Christ and becoming more like Christ, who faithfully obeyed the Father even to death, are just two of the potential results that accompany every problem we face. Christians are to work hard and live quiet lives while on mission for the gospel (1 Thess. 4:11), even as they obey the governing authorities God has placed over them (Rom. 13:1-6). We cannot, however, disobey the Lord; His commands must take precedence. We must remember that our primary citizenship is in heaven with Jesus, our Savior King (Phil. 3:20). Remember, God is often accomplishing much more through your character and obedience than you can know but which eternity will reveal.

READ the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 33), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God’s Word.

Because we are citizens of the kingdom of God through Christ, we obey God above the world’s governments and, if necessary, engage in civil disobedience to advance the gospel.

- How do you need to lay down your life in service to the Lord who laid His down for your salvation from sin and death?
- In what ways can your group support each other as you live distinct from the fallen culture around you?
- What radical commitment in your life might give you an opportunity to share your faith?

CLOSE IN PRAYER: Father, lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one so that we might display the goodness of Your kingdom. We do not deserve to belong in Your kingdom, but thanks to Your Son, Jesus, the true King, we have been brought into the kingdom of light. Through the Spirit of Christ, enable us to live as faithful citizens of Your kingdom even though it might cost us our lives. Amen.

INSTRUCT: As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the Daily Study devotions in their DDG (pp. 34-36), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use Encourage One Another (p. 37) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God’s Word.
Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The Daily Study devotions in the DDG (pp. 34-36) will help group members get into God’s Word and study it for themselves. Encourage One Another (p. 37) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 34-36) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.

- Share the following idea from the devotion for Day 2 as a part of point 1 in the session: Daniel’s example is a reminder that our obedience must not change though the world around us is changing.

Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God’s Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- Day 1: “Though God will use us to be a blessing to many, some enemies will resent and lash out at genuine faith.”

- Day 5: “Circumstances will sometimes force us to choose between misunderstood obedience or sinful compromise.”

Visit www.GospelProject.com/Blog for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God’s Word.

Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member’s DDG (p. 37) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using The Gospel Project in their groups.

- Encourage group members to help one another figure out how to better magnify God through whatever trials or suffering they are experiencing.

- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.
Additional Commentary

**Point 1:** God's servant faithfully prays to the Lord (Dan. 6:6-10).

“Critical scholars judge Darius the Mede (see 5:31) to be literary fiction, pointing out that no such name has been discovered in ancient texts. They claim the Jewish author conflated details about Cyrus (559-530 BC) and Darius I (522-486 BC) into his imaginary monarch. Such arguments from silence are notoriously precarious. Skeptics once confidently declared Belshazzar to be a fictional character as well. Scholars who accept the historicity of Daniel’s account usually identify Darius the Mede as a governor of Babylon (Gubaru=Gobryas) or as Cyrus himself. Lesser rulers were often spoken of as kings in ancient times, and dual names for kings were common. Either explanation is historically feasible. Ancient records vary in the exact number of Persian satrapies. ‘Satrap’ means ‘protector of the kingdom’; Xenophon and other Greek historians applied the term to lower officials. Daniel apparently used it in similar fashion.”

“When these corrupt officials approached the king, they falsely claimed that all government officials supported the proposal that for thirty days, anyone who petitioned any god or man except the king would be thrown into the lions’ den. By agreeing to this law, Darius probably had not claimed deity but rather adopted the role of a priestly mediator [see 3:4-5]. His goal was to unite the Babylonian realm under the authority of the new Persian Empire … Even though the law prohibiting prayer had gone into effect, Daniel still prayed with his windows opened toward Jerusalem. Jewish people in exile always pray toward Jerusalem—even today—just as Solomon had instructed in his prayer of dedication for the temple (1 Kings 8:44-49). Daniel prayed not out of rebellion toward the king but out of obedience to the greater command of God. As the apostles would later say, ‘We must obey God rather than people’ (Acts 5:29). So great was Daniel’s reputation for spiritual commitment that even his enemies knew he would obey God rather than bow to the king’s edict.”

**Point 2:** God’s servant faithfully relies on the Lord for rescue (Dan. 6:13-23).

“When the conspirators burst in upon Daniel while he was praying, we are told that they found him ‘asking God for help’ (v. 11). This means that Daniel was not oblivious to his danger, even though his outward calm might have suggested that he was not taking the threat of execution seriously. Actually, Daniel was acutely aware of his danger. He knew that he stood to lose his life. He was asking God to help him. But, of course, that is exactly what God did. God stopped the lions’ mouths so they could not attack Daniel, and while Daniel was with them he was kept from harm not only from the lions but from his enemies too. They could not get to him. He was in the safest place in all Babylon, and that night (I am sure) Daniel slept marvelously. It was the king who could not sleep.”
“When the king learned that he had been tricked, he was not angry with Daniel but with himself. Having tried all he could do within the law to rescue Daniel and failed, he reluctantly gave the order for Daniel to be thrown into the lions’ den (6:16). (Unlike the Babylonians, the Persians were Zoroastrians by religion. Because they regarded fire as sacred they would not use it to execute offenders.) Saying farewell to Daniel, the king prayed, ‘May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!’ (6:16). Was this merely a wish by a frustrated pagan king? Given Daniel’s influence on the king (shown by his behavior—6:18), it seems likely that it was a genuine prayer. Daniel had made a deep impact on the arrogant Nebuchadnezzar, and also, it appears, on Darius … That night the king fasted: he had no food, no music, no entertainment, and no sleep (6:18). He may well have prayed all night, for what else explains his rush to the den early in the morning to see whether Daniel was still alive (6:19).”

Point 3: God uses His servant to advance His kingdom (Dan. 6:25-27).

“After Daniel’s release, those who had schemed against him were thrown to the same lions. This was in accord with the common principle in the ancient Near East that anyone who made a false charge against someone else should be punished by receiving the same fate they had sought for their victim (cf. Deut. 19:16-21). In line with the ruthless practice of the Persians, the sentence was also carried out on the families of the guilty men: their children, and their wives. The experience of the conspirators in the den was the exact opposite of Daniel’s: they were seized and killed by the lions before they even hit the bottom of the den.”

“The king from yet another nation honors the God of Daniel (cf. 4:34-35). The ‘nations’ are bowing before Israel’s God, as prophesied (Gen. 27:29). And, as prophesied, Israel will return to her homeland and the birthplace of the coming Messiah due to the influence of Daniel on Babylon’s rulers (Dan. 6:28). Cyrus the Persian, the last ruler under whom Daniel served, will begin to return the people of Israel to their homeland. Thus, the account of the lions’ den ends with a poignant reminder that events have been set in motion for the coming of a Savior who will defeat forever the Enemy who prowls the earth ‘like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour’ (1 Pet. 5:8).”

References
Think about the encouragement people often share to help others through times of adversity. We might hear someone speak of how pressure is required to transform coal into a diamond; thus, pressure can be good for us, transforming us into someone better. Or we might be told of the hatchling that has to work to break through its eggshell, and that struggle is good for this creature—even necessary—so that it grows strong. Likewise, adversity strengthens us and positions us to be who we were meant to be.

While these illustrations might provide encouragement, they reveal something quite important about the world’s view of adversity. The world sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to dig deep, gaze within their soul, and discover who he or she truly is. But the gospel tells a different story—a better story. The gospel sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to look high above, gaze upon Christ, and see who He truly is. For it is Christ, not ourselves, who carries us through all trials and suffering. Adversity positions us to rely on Christ’s power, not an inner human strength that has been lying dormant.

In this volume we pick up the story of Scripture with the Jews living in bondage in a foreign land, the result of their rebellion against God. But even in the midst of judgment, God’s faithful love still shines forth brightly. We will witness God continuing to guide, strengthen, and protect His people in their time of great adversity, not to help them discover who they were but rather to understand who He is. At the same time, we will see God continue to drive the events of history toward the fulfillment of His ancient promise to provide the Rescuer, the One who would free people from an even greater bondage, that of sin and death.