

- There is a nautical term called "Doldrums." Most of you have heard of it. It refers to an area near the equator where there can be a gap between the winds from the north and the winds from the south. This windless area was particularly treacherous for those ships many years ago reliant on the wind. If you got caught, it could result in running out of food, water and lead to terrible ends.
- When we speak of being in the doldrums in our lives, we are usually referring to an emotional or spiritual place in life. A place where we are stuck, stagnant, exhausted, like being a hamster wheel. It might lead to depression, lack of motivation, feelings listless and uncaring
- It happens when . . .
- . . . we are caught in routine. No change. Same all the time.
- . . . the things we are doing seem to be pointless or not effective.
- . . . when what used to excite us is now boring.
- Life is going by. Day after day. Week after week. Month after month and year after year.
- It can happen at any age, but often is more noticeable as you get a little older and more settled in your life.
- There can be a sense of feeling adrift, of not really sure where I'm going and feeling like the wind has been taken out of my sails.
- This can lead to all kinds of things, many of them destructive.
- We do whatever we can to have fun. To feel good. To enjoy life.
- We make purchases we probably shouldn't make. We do things we know we probably shouldn't do. We get frustrated and so we make drastic and dramatic changes.
- Or it's often where we sit back, put things on cruise control, and accept that this is all there is.
- What should we do? How should we see these times in life? In our faith journey? As Jesus followers?
- Daniel is a famous character in the bible and his story is found in the book of that name.
- Israel as a nation split into two, the north and the south.
- The northern kingdom was eventually conquered by Assyria and ceased to be a nation.
- The southern kingdom was conquered later by Babylon. When they conquered any nation, the Babylonian process was to take the best and brightest and all the nobles and influencers back to Babylon and train them up in the ways of Babylon, and so keep them from influencing and causing rebellion against the crown.
- When they conquered Judah, they followed this practice. About a dozen years later, the king of Judah who had been left as a "puppet king" to Babylon tried to revolt against Babylon and was absolutely crushed and Jerusalem was destroyed and more captives carried off.
- Daniel was deported during the first wave of captives. He was a member of royalty, he was good looking and he was smart.
- The Babylonians wanted their captives to change, to think like their world, to accept its way of doing things and forget their origins. They wanted to assimilate these young men into their world, so that they became one of them.
- They practiced religious assimilation, intellectual assimilation and cultural assimilation.
- King Nebuchadnezzar was after the heart, soul and mind of the people in the nations he conquered. This is what Daniel was working with and against. This is the summary of how he assimilated.

1:19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. 20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians

and enchanters in his whole kingdom. 21 And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

- The key events in Daniel's life covered 80 years, 4 kingdoms and Daniel himself lived to be around 90 years old, almost all of it in the service of a foreign power. We will come back to this later.
- The first part of Daniel is primarily autobiographical, talking about the key events in Daniel's life. The second contains significant dreams and visions that Daniel had about the future.
- We are going to pick up the story of Daniel in chapter 6

6:1 It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2 with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. 6:3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom.

- There has been yet another kingdom change and another reorg.
- Daniel is one of three that are over 120 key leaders. Daniel's integrity, hard work, smarts and abilities cause Darius to put him in charge of a lot.
- This caused no small amount of jealousy and envy among his peers, many of who were either new from the Medeo-Persian empire, or those in the previous Babylonian empire who sought to get ahead.
- The story that follows is a familiar one.

4 At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

- They wanted Daniel ousted. Jealousy. Ambition. They hatched a plan and conspired against him. They make a plan and tell the king,

6 So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever! 7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. 8 Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered – in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing.

- Daniel does not have a long history with the new ruler. Even though he is well thought of, he is still relatively new to the new ruler.
- Before we read Daniel's response to this edict, remember two things.
- Daniel is an older man at this point – no longer in the prime of his life. He has been around the block.
- Daniel is smart and he understands the implication of this decree. If he prays and is caught, it is a death sentence. His response is amazing.

*6:10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, **just as he had done before.***

- Daniel was not all of a sudden talking to God because there was a crisis.
- We are getting a window into something so important, so critical, to the life of a Christ-follower. Something that should both encourage and make us pause.
- **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IS THE RESULT OF SMALL PRACTICES REPEATED OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME.**

I. Spiritual development is never an accident.

- Daniel has developed and practiced pursuing God for an entire lifetime.
- In fact, if you read through the entire book of Daniel, you will see this pattern over and over.
- When he was young and needed an answer from God, he and his friends together sought God and were answered during the night.
- Once, when reading Scripture and praying something got his attention and we read that he prayed, pleaded and fasted. (9:3)
- Another time he had a vision that so bothered him that he fasted and mourned for three weeks. (10:2)
- He practiced confession and repentance (9:20)
- The whole reason these men could even manipulate the king into this decision to get Daniel is that he consistently, predictably, sought out God.

6:10 Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

- He prayed often and consistently
- He was thankful regardless of the circumstances he was in.
- Spiritual development is never an accident. **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IS THE RESULT OF SMALL PRACTICES REPEATED OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME.**

II. Your character is shaped over time.

- Crisis does not create character – it reveals character.
 - What makes the difference between two people, both who face cancer when one faces it with joy filled faith while the other falls apart?
 - Why, when facing financial crisis, does one sleep soundly while the other worries continually?
 - Why does one collapse and is ruined for life after the death of a loved while another fights hard to deal with their grief well?
 - What differs between two Christ-followers, who when faced with persecution over what they say they believe, has one denying they know Jesus or hiding it while another boldly steps into the opportunity?
 - It is what you do when life is normal.
 - It is the manner with which you approach your job.
 - It is what the habits are in your relationship with God. The time you put in.
 - It is how you obey or disobey Jesus in the small decisions you make every day.
 - It is the way you deal with your kids when they don't eat their dinner.
 - It is the way you do or don't turn to God in thankfulness and praise.
 - It is how you respond to people and Jesus in the small conflicts in your life.
 - It is how willing you are to examine yourself in light of Jesus on a regular basis or stay convinced you are in the right.
 - It is serving day-to-day, week-to-week when it is boring, tiring, and you don't see the impact or fruit that you would like.

 - It is not an accident that Daniel survived and prospered through FOUR regime changes.
- 6:4 They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.*
- He was honest in all his dealings
 - He faithfully did what he was supposed to do and did not shirk his duties
 - He did not have a spirit of laziness in him, but diligently worked as he was supposed to

- He wore his faith openly. Those around him knew that his God was the most important thing to him.
 - Where there was no law that Daniel was breaking, they made one up.
- 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12 So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree:*
- Hey king. Didn't YOU make a law. It's being broken . . . by Daniel, one of those Jews.
 - The king was caught. He was distressed. He wanted to rescue Daniel. He tried to find a way in the law to change things, but they had set the trap effectively and completely
- 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 serve continually, rescue you!" 17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.*
- **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IS THE RESULT OF SMALL PRACTICES REPEATED OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME.**

III. Consistent faithfulness in little things prepares you for big things.

- We're told the king couldn't sleep, he wouldn't eat and he rushed to the lion's den first thing the next morning.
- 6:20 When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" 21 Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! 22 My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty." 23 The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.*
- We read the highlights of Daniel's life.
 - First, Daniel resolves to not eat the king's food (basically defies the king) and ends up in a better place.
 - He interprets two different dreams for Nebechadnezzar.
 - He deciphers the handwriting of God on a wall the night the Babylonian empire fell.
 - Then finally he is thrown into a lion's den for his faith.
 - What a life of faith! Do you realize that these events happened over 75 years? The sum total of these amazing events took probably 1-2 months of time.
 - What happened for the other 74 years?
 - Daniel practiced the small things repeatedly over time that led to him being considered a giant in times of crisis.
 - When you get frustrated because nothing great seems to happen to or through you, when you wish you could have a greater impact, when you feel like the sand in the hour glass is falling and time is running out, when you are bored? When everything feels like a rut . . . don't check out! Don't give up. Lean in. Pray. Fast. Obey. Talk to God. Listen to him. Confess. Trust. Be generous. Do life well!
 - **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IS THE RESULT OF SMALL PRACTICES REPEATED OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME.**

IV. The depth of your relationship is determined by the long term.

- This amazing story of Daniel in the lion's den is simply one part of his life.
- But if you read the last few chapters of Daniel, you get a glimpse into what his relationship with God was really like. In the midst of all his visions and dreams, there is a term that appears three times that I am blown away by.

- The angel Gabriel (same one who would later come to Mary to tell her about Jesus) in response to Daniel's prayer said this:

9:23 *As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are **highly esteemed**.*

10:10 *A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. 11 He said, "Daniel, you who are **highly esteemed**, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you."*

10:17 *How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe." 18 Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. 19 "Do not be afraid, you who are **highly esteemed**," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong."*

- The word used here is a word that means delight, precious.
- God looks at Daniel and tells him, you are my delight. You are precious to me.
- We have developed the relationship that says I delight in speaking with you, in revealing things through you and to you.
- No we are already sons and daughters of the Father. He loves us. He delights in us.
- But this here is the difference between having children and loving them and having a child who over time has become a friend, a confidant, someone you tell things to that no one else knows. The one that you have an intimacy that is not elsewhere.
- It's not because God prefers them over another, but because they were willing to do the **SMALL PRACTICES REPEATED OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME.**
- "You can have as much of God as you want, but no more than you are willing to pay the price for." (Rob Reimer)
- Most life change occurs alone with God.

- **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IS THE RESULT OF SMALL PRACTICES REPEATED OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME.** A life like this glorifies God.

- The end of the story is that the very people who had accused Daniel were thrown into the lions' den along with their families and they were attacked and killed immediately.

25 *Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth:*

"May you prosper greatly! 26 "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. 27 He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

- This, from the mouth of a pagan king.
- "To reach port we must sail, sometimes with the wind, and sometimes against it. But we must not drift or lie at anchor." (Oliver Wendell Holmes)
- Warning. Your spiritual development will not happen by accident. You will not get there by focusing on yourself, disobedience, half-hearted following. And when crisis comes (and it will come), it will be disastrous.
- Encouragement. No matter how much your life feels like it is stuck, pointless, in a rut, boring or you question it, God is doing great work if you will simply cooperate with him. He is shaping your character. He is preparing you for bigger things. You and he are developing intimacy.
- **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IS THE RESULT OF SMALL PRACTICES REPEATED OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME.**
- Be patient. Lean in. Push through. Seek God daily. Humble yourself often. Pray regularly. Get to know him. Obey everything he tells you to do.
- Others won't see it. No one will know. But God will.