

# Explore: Never give up on prayer

August 4, 2014

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Aug. 17 focuses on Daniel 6:3-7, 10, 16-23.*

If the story of Daniel in the lions' den teaches any lesson at all, it teaches living a good, God-honoring life doesn't mean a person won't face great hardship and even persecution at the hands of dishonest people. It even can be argued that what got Daniel into trouble was his commitment to God-centered integrity.

Sometimes, doing the thing that most honors God actually can increase our pain and suffering. There is no biblical hero, in the Old or New Testament, who didn't bear witness to this. Christ himself was crucified specifically because he was obedient.

## **The example of Daniel's life**

When we wonder why bad things happen to good people, we should remember the Bible nowhere promises otherwise. Daniel's life is yet another example.

From the beginning, Daniel's good character put him at risk. People of lesser character set a trap Daniel could not possibly escape. Staying true to his own convictions, even when the king ordered otherwise, Daniel refused to stop calling on his God.

That landed Daniel in even greater trouble, at least for the moment. In order to maintain his position with his leaders, the king had to follow through on his threat to punish anyone who called on any god or human

other than the king.

That's when Daniel found himself in the lions' den. We're not told what Daniel did all night in the lions' den. Daniel told the king the next morning that an angel had come and shut the lions' mouths, but Daniel doesn't say how he occupied his time.

It's not hard to imagine, however, that Daniel spent the night in prayer. His character prior to the den was witness enough that the man whose prayer life got him in the den would be the man whose prayer life got him through the den.

### **George Washington struggled with discouragement**

In 1776, historian David McCullough's riveting account of the American Revolution, the character of one man finally tipped the scales in favor of those seeking independence from Great Britain. George Washington often was discouraged as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army.

There were shortages of everything from food to supplies to soldiers. Yet Washington was committed to a set of principles higher and greater than his momentary circumstances. He never let his men or his officers know how disheartened he was. He kept setting the pace and calling his men onward.

We live in a free nation today, in part, because of the example of one man who kept his principles in a time of trial. Centuries before, Daniel's unrelenting commitment to his God, even in the face of his very life being threatened, changed the course of a nation and the course of our faith history.

Every generation needs heroes. This generation is no exception. A true hero is someone willing to give his or her life for the sake of something or someone greater than his or her individual self.

Some of our heroes lived centuries before we were born. Daniel is one of those faith heroes. Through the pages of the Bible, we can find ourselves down in the den of lions with David, living faithfully, so the next thing that happens is that people give praise to God because we suffered despite our faithfulness and remained faithful anyway.

### **Jesus' view from the cross**

As C.S. Lewis once wrote, Jesus, on the cross, looked around upon a world from which all evidence of God seemed to have disappeared and believed anyway. Jesus would have known the story of Daniel. He read the same Scripture we now read.

We can only wonder if, while Jesus was on the cross, the memory of Daniel's faithfulness came to Jesus' mind and encouraged him in his moment of suffering. Even with his last breath, Jesus cried out to his Father in heaven only to surrender his soul to God.

Daniel is an ancient faith hero who teaches us—not with his words but with his very life—that we should never give up on prayer. It is when things make the least sense from a human perspective that we most need to turn to Holy God in prayer and surrender ourselves to him.

Then, others, watching our faith, will sing the same praise to God as recorded in Daniel 6:26-27: "For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth."