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Our Family Tree: Daniel

Daniel 6

I met Jill when I was a sophomore in high school. Jill was kind, respectful, sweet, attractive, *incredibly* intelligent, and a talented ballerina. She seemed to do *everything* well with ease.

I immediately felt intimidated by her. I wasn't sure if I could be friends with a "perfect" person. I couldn't help but be both jealous of her *and* drawn to her.

Jill and I became best friends, and we started our own social group of unusual suspects. Jill, the genius ballerina; me, the runner and military brat; Jaspreet, a beautiful, outspoken Indian girl; and all other girls who needed a place to simply be.

Jill shared that she had once been friends with some girls who were a bit higher on the social ladder than we were. They had been friends since childhood. They grew up in the same small town, went to church together, and were good friends. Well, sort of good friends. They would tease Jill about silly things, like the fact that her scrunci didn't match her shirt.

When she was 10, Jill was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis, an inflammatory bowel disease. To reduce the inflammation in her bowels, she took steroids. These steroids caused Jill to gain weight. The most visible weight gain was in her face; it looked like her face was swollen. She continued to live a normal life, dancing and going to school, but her friendships were *not* normal. The friends who once teased her for wearing the wrong scrunci now teased her about her face. The teasing escalated, and Jill never retaliated. She remained kind to the mean girls, but eventually needed to be homeschooled for her physical and emotional well-being.

The mystery of their meanness was never explained, but *I* was confident of one thing. Jill had no flaws and was extremely gifted. They were jealous, and they knew that they could exploit her kindness. They could let their jealousy run wild and say whatever they wanted, because they knew that Jill would never retaliate. Their jealousy hurt my friend so greatly, that she had to leave school and start over. To her credit, Jill continued to be kind to them when she returned to school, and she wisely formed new friendships. We need people in our lives like Jill, people who remind us that character in the face of hardship is *everything*.

This story of character is the story of our spiritual cousin Daniel. Daniel lived a few hundred years after King Solomon, after the kingdom split, and the northern kingdom was destroyed. Daniel lived during a time when the southern kingdom was captured and many were deported to Babylon. According to Daniel 1:4, he was deported to Babylon because he was from the royal family and nobility, and he was a “young [man] without defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace.” Daniel was taken to live in a foreign land to serve foreign kings because he had status, was young, handsome, and smart. And Daniel continued to impress the kings. He and his friends refused to eat the king’s food, and ate a vegetarian diet instead. They were found to look healthier and better nourished than all the other young men, so they continued to eat their different diet. “To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds” (Dan 1:17). Daniel

interpreted dreams, writing on the wall, and his friends were spared from a fiery furnace. He continued to earn favor in the eyes of the kings.

When a new king, Darius, came to power, Daniel was appointed “administrator.” Daniel was in a position of greatest power, shared with two others. He so distinguished himself among all the leaders “by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom” (Dan 6:3). Daniel would be second only to the king.

Naturally, the other leaders were jealous and did *not* like this plan. Verse 4 says that when they heard the king’s plans, they “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. 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’” (Dan 6:4 – 5).

The other leaders could find *no* wrongdoing or laziness in Daniel. They knew that his only “flaw” was his faithfulness to God. So, they proposed a law to the king wherein no one could pray to a god other than the king. If they prayed to another god, they would be thrown into the lion’s den.

The king is unaware of their plan to destroy Daniel, so he agrees to it.

And Daniel continues to pray, just as he had before. He prays three times a day to his God, in a visible place. And he is caught.

The king desperately tries to do everything in his power to save Daniel, but in the end, he can’t save him. The king tells Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve

continually, rescue you!” (Dan 6:16b). He goes home that night, without eating or sleeping. He doesn’t have any entertainment either.

At the first sign of light, the king goes as fast as he can to the lion’s den. He calls out to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?” (Dan 6:20b).

A voice returns, “O king, live forever! 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, O king” (Dan 6:21 – 22).

The king has Daniel lifted from the den, and Daniel is found without a wound, “because he had trusted in his God” (Dan 6:23b). The king has Daniel’s accusers and their families thrown into the lion’s den, and they don’t survive. He writes to all the peoples in the land a *new* decree, “that in every part of [his] 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. 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” (Dan 6:26b – 27).

Because of Daniel’s uprightness of character and trust in God, a *foreign* king praises God. This foreign king had no previous experience with Daniel’s God. He had no *reason* to worship any god other than himself. Yet, because of Daniel, he worships God and calls others to worship Him too.

Some, or many, of you may feel that you are living in Babylon, like Daniel. You are away from your family, and you work for someone who serves a foreign god. You don’t know how *long* this will last or *why* God has you here. You feel alone, and

long for the day when you will be with people like you, with people who worship God.

God hears you. He *hears* your questions and *knows* your longings. He knows you are tired and that you wonder, *how long, o Lord? How long do you want me here?* He knows that you doubt yourself and doubt the good He can do through you. Perhaps your words sound like the prophet Isaiah, when God called him, “Woe [is] me!...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the king, the LORD Almighty” (Isa 6:5).

Though you may feel that you are in a foreign land, God is *here*. Just as God was with Daniel in Babylon, so He is here with you, in the Silicon Valley. Friends, this is *not* a God-forsaken place. God is here, and desires to speak through *you* so that those who *now* serve foreign gods will *one day* praise the only true God!

Henri Nouwen was once interviewed by a journalist from the New York Times, named Fred. Henri was a priest, and Fred a secular Jew. They became close friends. One day, Fred asked Henri to write something about the spiritual life for him and his friends. Henri didn't quite understand how he could do that, but he knew that his friend “was asking [him] to respond to the great spiritual hunger and thirst that exist in countless people who walk the streets of big cities. He was calling [Henri] to speak a word of hope to people who no longer came to churches or synagogues and for whom priests and rabbis were no longer the obvious counselors.”¹

¹ Henri Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, 21.

“You have something to say,’ Fred kept telling me, ‘but you keep saying it to people who least need to hear it...What about us young, ambitious, secular men and women wondering what life is all about after all? Can you speak to us with the same conviction as you speak to those who share your tradition, your language, and your vision?’”²

Nouwen writes, “Fred’s question became much more than the intriguing suggestion of a young New York intellectual. It became the plea that arose on all sides – wherever I was open to hear it. And, in the end, it became for me the most pertinent and the most urgent of all demands: ‘Speak to us about the deepest yearning of our hearts, about our many wishes, about hope; not about the many strategies for survival, but about trust; not about new methods of satisfying our emotional needs, but about love. Speak to us about a vision larger than our changing perspectives and about a voice deeper than the clamorings of our mass media. Yes, speak to us about something or *someone* greater than ourselves. Speak to us about...God.’” And when you listen to *us*, “you will discover a cry welling up from the depths of the human heart that has remained unheard because there was no one to listen.”³

Henri heard their cries, and in response to his friendship with Fred, he wrote *Life of the Beloved*.

Friends, you are loved by God, and He has not abandoned you. He has called you to *this* place at *this* time so that others will know the love of God and so that *He* will be glorified.

² Nouwen, 21.

³ Nouwen, 22 – 23.

Father, we love You
We worship and adore You
Glorify Thy name in all the earth
Glorify Thy name
Glorify Thy name
Glorify Thy name in all the earth

Jesus, we love You
We worship and adore You
Glorify Thy name in all the earth
Glorify Thy name
Glorify Thy name
Glorify Thy name in all the earth

Spirit, we love You
We worship and adore You
Glorify Thy name in all the earth
Glorify Thy name
Glorify Thy name
Glorify Thy name in all the earth⁴

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, glorify Your name in all the earth. Amen.

⁴ https://www.newreleasetoday.com/lyricsdetail.php?lyrics_id=10981