

The One Decision That Can Bring You Divine Favor

Behind every great story there's always another story. Rarely does success come without time, discipline and hard work.

Successful people often joke that they spent years becoming an overnight success. What many don't realize is it's the things no one sees that result in the things everyone wants. It's the faithfulness to do mundane things well, to develop productive habits and to remain faithful that eventually leads to success.

Old Testament prophet Daniel is a great example of this. Whether you know a lot or a little about Daniel, when you hear his name, you probably think, *Oh, yeah . . . Daniel in the lions' den*. Any kid who grew up attending Sunday school or visiting vacation Bible school has heard the amazing story of Daniel surviving the night in a cave filled with hungry felines.

Let me refresh your memory, and then we'll go back to the part many overlook. King Darius was the reigning king of Persia. As his kingdom grew, he appointed 120 satraps (similar to our present-day state governors) to handle regional matters and help govern the people. The king then chose three administrators to oversee those 120 satraps. Daniel was one of the chosen leaders. Over time, by consistently serving the king with an excellent spirit, Daniel stood out among all the other satraps and administrators. Eventually the king decided to place Daniel in charge of the entire kingdom.

So Daniel was an overnight success, right? Actually, nothing could be farther from the truth. Don't forget, there's a story behind every story. Why was Daniel successful? Why was he favored above others? Why did the king respect him so much?

Promote him so quickly? Believe in his leadership? Why did God look favorably on Daniel? Why did God close the mouths of the meat-eating lions?

We find our answers in a part of Daniel's story many people skim over. His divine favor was the result of one small decision he made at some point in his life. We don't know when Daniel made this decision or why. We don't know whether someone helped him or he decided it on his own. All we know is that Daniel made one decision, starting one habit that changed his story.

As you might expect, the other leaders were fuming with jealousy of Daniel. The story continues, "Then the presidents and officials sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom, but they could find no occasion or fault because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, 'We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.'" (Dan. 6:4-5).

Let's consider for a moment some of the great qualities of our hero, Daniel. Even though the other guys did everything they could to find something wrong with him, they couldn't find anything. Daniel was honest, trustworthy and dependable in all that he did. He was exactly the type of person the king was looking to promote. So his opponents decided there was only one way they could trap Daniel into doing something worthy of punishment. They had to devise a plan that involved his faith in God. They knew he wouldn't do anything wrong. They would have to back him into a spiritual corner.

"So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said, "'King Darius, live forever! All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the officials, the counselors, and the captains have consulted together to establish a royal statute and to make a firm decree, that whoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty

days, save of you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions" (Dan. 6:6b-7). The king apparently liked the sound of their plan, because he agreed to their proposal. No one could pray to anyone but him for the next month. And so the plan to trap Daniel was set in motion.

When Daniel heard about the new 30-day restriction on prayer, he did the same thing he'd done three times a day for months, maybe years, possibly decades. Daniel went to his house and prayed to God.

As a result, Dan the Man was arrested and had to stare down the big cats and prove God was his one and only. But think for a minute. It wasn't just that Daniel wasn't afraid of lions or had some super-courage mere mortals can never hope to attain. No, Daniel had started a regular practice much earlier in his life that helped him face this impossible situation. To others, prayer might have seemed insignificant. But to Daniel, it was a discipline that shaped his story.

We don't know how many years Daniel had been practicing this habit, but three times a day, every day, Daniel stopped and looked toward heaven. He worshipped God. He aligned his heart with God's heart. He sought God's will to be done through his life. Because of Daniel's consistent and prayerful focus, he grew as a God-follower, as a person and as a leader.

Daniel wasn't an overnight success. He was able to stand tall because he'd faithfully knelt before the one true king. The small, daily discipline of prayer equipped him to face the big, scary test of those hungry lions, both the peers who were attempting to destroy him as well as the big cats in the arena. Starting something small and faithfully continuing it made his story so rich that it's been told for thousands of years now, and still counting. {eoa}

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