

## Making Time

**Scripture:** Daniel 6:1-23

**Faith Link:** We can make time for God each day.<sup>1</sup>

I realized this week that during my 13 years as a pastor I've never preached from the book of Daniel. Readings from Daniel appear only two times in the lectionary. Either we weren't using lectionary scriptures on those occasions, or I chose a different scripture for my sermon. You may recall that we surveyed the entire Bible during 2017 and 2018, however I was on sabbatical when we covered this part of the Old Testament so, once again, I didn't preach on Daniel.

I'm a bit surprised that the writers of our summer worship series on seeking God together chose this story when focusing on making time for God. If I would have approached Daniel's story on its own, without it being part of a series, I probably would have talked about what it's like to live in exile or how to live as holy people in the midst of an unholy culture or how to take a stand and not compromise on the non-negotiables of life or what it means to be brave or how God can keep people safe. I can't imagine that I would have used this story to illustrate the point that we can make time for God each day. Let's see how the writers make the connection.

Daniel is a Jewish exile living in the court of King Darius. He was deported from Jerusalem to Babylon after the fall of the kingdom of Judah. He along with some other young men were chosen to receive training in Babylonian culture and be groomed for service in the royal court. Daniel has proven himself to be wise and trustworthy, so much so that Darius appoints him to be one of three ministers to rule the country. Indeed, the king is so pleased with Daniel that he wants to put him in charge of the entire kingdom. This doesn't sit well with the other ministers, and they conspire to get rid of him. Knowing Daniel's religious practices and the king's ego, the ministers convince Darius to ban offering prayers to anyone but the king. Those who disobey the king's edict are to be thrown into a den of lions. It wasn't unusual in those days for rulers to declare themselves to be gods and require that their subjects worship them.

Despite the edict, Daniel doesn't forsake his daily practice of praying to God. He prays three times each day, just as he had before. He doesn't hide but prays before an open window where he is seen by those conspiring against him. Darius cannot rescind the edict to save his favored minister and has Daniel sealed in the lions' den. God sends an angel to "shut the lions' mouths," and Daniel exits the den unscathed the next morning.

We assume that before his exile, Daniel committed to making time for God by praying to God three times a day. Even as an exile in a foreign land, he kept the practice of prayer that he had learned long before. Even in the face of grave danger, Daniel continued to make time for God. It was so much a part of his routine that he couldn't do something else even when the stakes were high.

We are busy people. Work, church, family time, hobbies, activities, commitments, and so much more fill our schedules to overflowing. While we may not face kingly edicts banning prayer, we can be sidetracked by the distractions and pressures of daily life that upend our routines and keep us from making time for God.

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<sup>1</sup> The sermon and responsive reading are drawn from Week 2 of "Seeking God Together" from *Current*, a curriculum from MennoMedia, [Current - Menno Media](#).

We're also creatures of habit. We wake up, dress, brush our teeth, and do a myriad of other tasks before undressing, brushing our teeth, and climbing back into bed at the end of the day. The story of Daniel turns our attention to the practice of prayer and its place within our daily routine. It illustrates how a daily habit of prayer can ground us when life gets tough.

Perhaps the story of Daniel can also change the way we think about time. We can divide time into two categories: temporal and divine. In the first category – temporal – time is viewed as a commodity. It's gauged by clocks, watches and calendars. It's divided into seconds, minutes, hours, and days. Ancient Greeks referred to this as *chronos* – sequential or chronological time.

In the second category – divine – time is viewed as a gift. It is gauged with an eye toward eternity and divided into seasons, experiences, and opportunities. A related Greek word for this is *kairos* – the right, critical, or opportune moment.

What would happen if we paid as much attention to the things that are eternal as we do to events gauged by watches and calendars? How would our decisions of what is truly important be any different if we lived each day tuned into God's eternal time frame? How would our daily "to-do list" look different if we included a column for those things that impact the lives of others beyond the here and now?

Crises of various kinds – illness, death, and other losses – often force people to realize the importance of divine time rather than the temporal time our culture runs on. We do well to think about this before crisis hits. For me, the events of the past several years have helped me think about the activities I was involved in. I've left some of them go even when it was possible to participate in them again. One activity I began during the pandemic that I plan to keep the rest of my life is a weekly Zoom call with three close friends. These conversations feed my soul and help me process what's happening in my life. They are important.

How do we separate those things in life that may feel urgent but may not be important from those things that are important but not necessarily urgent? Sometimes the urgent activities are the important ones. But often the "urgent" are those things that call for our immediate attention but may not have long-term significance. In contrast, what is truly important may not always seem as pressing in the moment.

Since I'm asking a lot of questions, I'll add one more. In keeping with the topic of the day, how do we make sure that maintaining a healthy spiritual life is one of the important activities, one that has long-term significance? For this, and other important activities, we may never have the time unless we make the time.

As I did last week and plan to continue through the summer, I want to hear from you about this Bible story and topic.

First, let's think about the story from Daniel 6. What stands out to you? What piques your interest? What questions do you have? What did you find helpful?

Next, I'd like to hear from you about the topic of making time for God. Another way to think of it would be making time for the eternal, for what's important rather than what's urgent. What are your experiences – positive or negative – with making time for the important? How have you made time for the important? How has that helped you? On the other hand, what prevents you from making time for the important? What pressures and distractions crowd your time?

The practice I suggest regarding making time for God is to think about your daily and weekly activities. Use a chart of some kind to list what you do most days and how much time you spend with each activity. Of course, there are changes from day to day, week to week, and season to season.

As you look at your chart, think about which activities are necessary or urgent and which are important. Look for things you could let go of. Look for things you could add to your routine that would benefit you personally or benefit your relationship with God or with the people in your life.

We can make time for God each day. I encourage you do to so.