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I gather you enjoyed George's worship service last Sunday! Thank you George!

We have been going through the book of Daniel, trying not to get caught up in *Daniel, The Decoder of Dreams*, one can easily slip into crystal-ball gazing and imagining what could-be, would-be, might-be, which detracts us from knowing Daniel's character and how God used him.

A quick recap: The first challenge from Daniel's character was the **challenge of faith**: *How well do you know Me (God) to trust me? ... Well enough to stand up for Me?*

The second challenge from Daniel's character was the **challenge of witness**: *Do you know My promises and experienced them being fulfilled? ... Well enough to speak up for Me?*

The third challenge from Daniel's character was the **challenge of loyalty** (5:17) - *How loyal are you to God? We would naturally think of those who try to buy your loyalty in return for position, prestige, reputation and fame? The President of our Fan Club buys our loyalty with flattery!*

Or will you be loyal to God, even if it means living in the quiet backwaters of life?

To develop a God-centred character around **faith** in Him, **loyalty** to Him, and boldness in sharing what we have **witnessed** of Him in our lives, is to open the door to let God step in and shape our thoughts, attitudes and feelings, before He can work **through** us.

Today, we examine the fourth challenge from Daniel's character, which is **a challenge of trust** (12:9 & 13): *will God trust us with the knowledge of His plans, His purposes, His Words, His deeds? Will He trust us to work with Him, and not run ahead thinking, we know what needs to be done? Will God trust us with knowledge of what He wants done in the future? As you invest in*

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growing your relationship with Him, God will reveal the secrets of His heart to you.

At the time Daniel was written, the city of Babylon was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Babylonians had perfected building sky scrapers, engineering science in hydraulics and drainage, building platforms to observe the stars (in the process, mixing astronomy with astrology). The sciences and mathematics was nothing less than spectacular, overshadowing many civilisations.

Oxford's mathematics professor emeritus, John Lennox says that the Babylonians invented timekeeping having discovered the number 60 was divisible by many whole number factors!

Judah and its capital Jerusalem, was nothing in comparison to Babylon. Judah was Monotheistic, believed in One God, while Babylon was steeped in polytheistic idol worship, mysticism, astrology and magic (which is sorcery and *voodoo* type of stuff). Babylon boasted having 1,197 temples; Jerusalem had ONE!

Daniel and his friends are taken away from their world of the worship of One True God, into Babylon's polytheistic culture, where the focus was on self achievement: *If we can learn more and more about what God knows, then one day we will know as much as He does, to be one with Him!* What folly!

Many of us don't move from one culture to another, but I think we would all agree, the proof of the fact that culture changes around us, is the way we grumble, *things are not like what they used to be!*

Think of Daniel: forced to live in a culture vastly different from the one in which he was brought up, but he grew into a position in world history that is unique: he "ruled" under the **three** Emperors, over two consecutive empires: two emperors in the Babylonian empire (Nebuchadnezzar and

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Belshazaar) and the Medo-Persian empire. In both empires, he was second only to the King!

Not because he lobbied and debated and gave speeches and made promises, but because he excelled in wisdom, which was not his own, rather from the God He worshipped. Daniel was steadfast in his allegiance to God, not giving in to fine food and fine wine as incentive to switch loyalties.

But Daniel's relationship with God was much more.

When the commander of the King's Guard, Arioch informed Daniel of the king's order that *all wise men of Babylon should be killed*", Daniel went to see the king to request a respite of time. He then went home and urged his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, *to ask the God of Heaven, to show them His mercy by telling them the secret (of the King's dream), so they would not be executed, **along with the other wise men of Babylon!***

How many people would think of praying that? *Spare us, **AND all these others** who don't know you, nor do they trust you!* Knowing the God of Heaven as intimately as Daniel does, shapes Daniel's heart and mind to mirror God's compassion. Like God, Daniel sees the big picture, not limited to the unholy trinity of **I, Me and Myself**.

We are told, ***THAT VERY NIGHT, the secret of Nebuchadnezzar's dream was revealed to Daniel.*** Then Daniel praised the God of Heaven...

At that time, imagine the stress in Daniel's life. *First, I have to trust God that the dream he revealed to me, **is** this mad king's actual dream. Then I have to tell this mad king what it means. What if this mad king doesn't like what I say?*

In the dream, the king saw a huge shining statue of a man.. head made of gold, arms in silver, and abs and thighs made of bronze. Before you knew it,

¹ Daniel 2:18

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this mad king had made a 90 foot statue of himself in pure gold, and demanded that everyone bow down to the statue.

Imagine the stress in Daniel's life growing, when his three friends refused to bow down to the statue, and the king ordered they be bound hand and foot and thrown into a fiery furnace, made so hot, the soldiers who took them to the fire, died in the heat of the flames!

As Nebuchadnezzar watched this, he saw **FOUR** people in the furnace, the fourth looked like the Son of God! The king is so frightened, he orders them out, and on examination found not a hair was singed, their clothing was not scorched, and they did not smell of smoke!

Nebuchadnezzar then has a second dream, which Daniel interprets as a time when the king would lose his sanity, and live literally like a cow in the fields, eating grass, until he learns humility and is then restored to society.

We are witnessing something similar these days, when a world leader is so obsessed with his own agenda, he will not listen to reason! I shudder to think how God will bring him down from his pedestal of high hubris!

Leaders change as they must, and Belshazaar succeeds Nebuchadnezzar. He has no fear of God and commits sacrilege by using at a grand party, the Holy silver and gold worship-ware his predecessor had stolen from the Temple at Jerusalem and placed in the temples of his own gods.

When we mess with things that are Holy in the sight of God, we invite retribution and that is what happened. Belshazaar sees a human hand writing on the plaster of his palace wall and is so terrified, the Queen Mother intervenes, remembering Daniel, *a man with exceptional ability, and filled with divine knowledge and understanding*. Daniel who is about 80 years old, has to tell this king, the writing says, his days are numbered, as he has not measured up to God's standard, and his kingdom will be handed over to the Medes and Persians.

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That very night King Belshazaar was killed and Darius the Mede took over and appointed Daniel to *supervise high officers and protect the king!*²

You have to ask yourself, *how many more trials does Daniel have to face? Has he not proved his loyalty to the God of Heaven? Has his character not developed enough for God to trust him, completely and totally, without conditions?*

If our view of life is that it is a struggle, always trying to prove to God that we are doing our best, hoping that another "test" won't come our way, then the next logical question would be, *What next does God want from me?*

But we need to ask ourselves, *What is God's view of life?*

From the start of human history, it is God who first trusts us. He created this earth and placed us in charge of it; we are the ones who betrayed His trust! God does not want us to prove our loyalty to Him, and reward us for trusting Him. That's what the rulers of this world want - prove your loyalty first, then ***maybe*** I will trust you.

The Psalmist says,³ ... *You put us in charge of your handcrafted world, repeated to us your Genesis-charge, made us lords over sheep and cattle, even animals out in the wild, birds flying and fish swimming, whales singing in the ocean deeps. Yet, for a little while, you made them (us) a little lower than the angels and crowned them (us) with glory and honour. You gave them (us) authority over all things.*

God wants us to know, we are very special to Him, and He wants a special relationship with us, like that of a father and child. We trust Him, because He first trusted us!

² Daniel 5:30 and 6:1-3

³ Psalm 8:3-8

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Imagine the impact of Daniel's life that King Darius decreed, *everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel...*

Having allowed God to strengthen his faith, his loyalty and his boldness to declare Him, God then trusts Daniel with several dreams and visions, of the future. Daniel is terrified because the images are beyond his imagination! While struggling to understand the meaning of a vision, Daniel hears a human voice say, *Gabriel! Tell this man the meaning of this vision.*⁴

Later, when Daniel prayed and fasted, pleading with God for Jerusalem, Gabriel returns. *Daniel, I have come to make things plain to you. The moment you started praying, a command was given. I'm here to tell you what it was, for you are very precious to God! This is what is revealed:*

At the end of the book, Daniel asks two men dressed in white, *How will all this finally end, my Lord?*, and he is told, *What I have said is kept secret and sealed until the time of the end ... Only those who are wise (have God's wisdom) will know what it means ... as for you, go your way until the end (of your life). You will rest at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive your inheritance set aside for you.*⁵

What makes Daniel's character so very special? He is so secure in his relationship with God, he can be trusted with the secrets of God's heart.

This is the pinnacle, the ultimate relationship we can have with God, which starts with implicit faith in God, enduring loyalty, and a boldness to share our experience of God. Having worked these three attributes in our lives, God builds His trust in us, that He can, with assurance, work through us.

AMEN.

⁴ Daniel 8:15

⁵ Daniel 12:8-10 and 13