

Opening

- Daniel 6:1-10//

Darius the Mede decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a high officer to rule over each province. 2 The king also chose Daniel and two others as administrators to supervise the high officers and protect the king's interests. 3 Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire.

4 Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. 5 So they concluded, "Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion."

6 So the administrators and high officers went to the king and said, "Long live King Darius! 7 We are all in agreement—we administrators, officials, high officers, advisers, and governors—that the king should make a law that will be strictly enforced. Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions. 8 And now, Your Majesty, issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked." 9 So King Darius signed the law.

10 But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God.

- Pray

Intro

- Participation Moment: What are some common habits?

- Defining Habits

- Habits are automatic

- "An acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary." Dictionary.com

- All of us have involuntary habits that we never knew about until we got married... Popping gum.

- Habits are pervasive

- What's Water? story

- According to a study done at Duke University, 40% of our daily actions are habits.

- Our brains rely on habits to function optimally... It's part of being human. None of us are exempt.

- Habits are not neutral

- Romans 6:16//

Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living.

- It's not an accident that when we think about habits, we tend to think about the bad ones we want to break. It's because we know that **bad habits, if they persist, will result in bad consequences.**
 - Paul wrestles with the consequence that his bad habits are making him a *slave* to sin.
- Habits are liturgies (worship), Justin Whitmel Earley (The Common Rule: Habits of Purpose for an Age of Distraction)
 - Liturgy - "a pattern of words or actions repeated regularly as a way of worship. The goal of a liturgy is for the participant to be formed in a certain way."
 - The only difference between a liturgy and a habit, he argues, is that a liturgy admits it's worship.
 - Liturgy of Bad Belief chart (p. 9)
 - There's no such thing as a neutral habit. The reality is that our habits are either leading us to God (and life in Him), or they're leading us to death.

Daniel: A Story of Resisting

- v. 4-5// "They couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was **faithful**, always **responsible**, and completely **trustworthy**. Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion."
 - The king's advisors knew they could do nothing about Daniel's character, why? Because character is fruit, and you can't prove anything against fruit.
 - You cannot convince someone that an apple tree is not an apple tree if it is producing apples.
 - So, the advisors asked themselves this all important question... "What produces this fruit of character in Daniel's life and how can we disrupt it?" What they find is this principle: **Good character is the fruit reaped of good habits sown.**
 - "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." (Stephen Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People)
 - This is why they come after the "rules of his religion."
 - Within our context, the word "rules" or "laws" carries a different connotation to us than this text implies. A rule is not just a list of right/ wrong, or of things you can or cannot do. In this context, Daniel's "rules of religion" were more like a "rule of life."
- Rule of Life
 - Definitions:
 - Spiritual, relational, vocational rhythms.
 - "An intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do." Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*
 - Habits that keep you conscious of Christ throughout your day.

- There's a rich history in the Christian tradition dating back to the monastic movement of the 4th century.
 - Monasteries would set up "rules of life" that determined when and how people prayed, or ate, or communed with one another... Not as moral commandments, but as suggested rhythms of life.
 - Monasticism was a response to cultural permissiveness and secularism within the church as Christianity was normalized and Christians were no longer persecuted.
 - **The idea of a "rule of life" in the monastic movement was a rejection of the cultural habits of the day.**
 - In Daniel's context...
 - The Babylonian and Persian empires (in which Daniel lived) did persecute believers of God. They forced the Jews to privatize their faith (which meant they could go on believing whatever they wanted to believe behind closed doors) but in the public squares they had to assimilate to the culture around them. In other words, they had to add the many gods of the empire to their one God.
 - **"You can believe however you want to believe, but out here you've got to live like us."**
 - The pressure of pluralism. - Tim Keller
 - In the modern day American context, our political laws afford us the freedom of religion, but our culture shouts at us constantly... "You must live like how we live!" And it attempts to assimilate us by replacing the "rules of our religion" with other rules... other habits.
- The rule of life that our secular culture would try to feed us is not neutral. Just like the king's advisors, they are intentionally after your time & your attention to make a profit for themselves.
 - In *Digital Minimalism*, Cal Newport argues that social media is the new smoking... not just in the way that we are all addicting to the apps, but also in the way they've been intentionally engineered to make us that way.
 - The rise of popularity of FB happened when likes, shares, mentions, and tags were put into motion... social approval indicators that we now rely on for daily approval.
- Like Daniel, we have a very intentional enemy, who is after our habits... and habits are not neutral. If you've never resisted the pressure of cultural habits that means you've most likely given into it. **The story of Daniel is a reminder that we've got to actively resist.**
- **Daniel demonstrates what it looks like to resist the force of habit dictated to us by culture.**

Daniel: A Story of Remaining

- So what do we do? How do we resist? We can't isolate ourselves from the secular world (like 4th century monks)... We're called to be apart of it!
 - John 17:16-17// "They do not belong to the world any more than I do... [and yet] I am sending them into the world."
- Daniel was very much a part of the world. He received an education from the world. He received the pagan name given to him by the world. Got a job in the world. Sat at the king's

table (where everyone around him ate what was prohibited for him to eat). Had friends, neighbors, colleagues who were polytheistic magicians, sorcerers, and seers. Even served within the Babylonian government to advance it.

- **But this is what Daniel knew... As much as he was in the world, even more so, he needed to remain in God.**

- v. 10// *But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down **as usual** in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, **just as he had always done**, giving thanks to his God.*
- Daniel demonstrates for us what it looks like to remain in God, even as you live in the world. And that requires good spiritual habits... a rule of life.
- John 15:3-4// *You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. **4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.***
- For us, the branches, God, the gardener, did something we could never do with our own actions, good deeds, or good character. He grafted us into the vine of Jesus. Into relationship and reconciliation with Him. BUT, once we are grafted to the vine, there's still work for us to do... We're called to do the work of remaining in Him and bearing fruit.

[Band]

I am not a gardener...

- What we learned is that in order grow big, delicious tomatoes, you need more than just a big pot, you need a stick, or trellis, or some sort of support system.
- "Rule" = regula (Old Latin) = a wooden stick, guide post, railing... support system.
 - **It is ultimately the vine that produces the fruit in and through you, but it's the spiritual disciplines that supports your relationship with him and causes you to keep him central to your life.**
- **If you look at your life and you do not see fruit that is reflective of Jesus (24 virtues), it could mean a few things...**
 - 1. You're not connected to the vine.
 - 2. You've not done your due diligence to resist the forces of cultural habits and to remain in Him.
 - Pick up a chart at the front altar or from an SLT member in the back.
 - Chart: 12 pathways...
- **Daniel demonstrates what it looks like to remain in Christ, even as you remain in the world.**

[Wrap Up]

Daniel: A Story of Redeeming

- This story starts with Daniel standing in his own glory, but it doesn't end that way.
 - Daniel 6: 25-27// *Then King Darius sent this message to the people of every race and nation and language throughout the world: "I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel.*

*For he is the living God,
and he will endure forever.
His kingdom will never be destroyed,
and his rule will never end.
He rescues and saves his people;
he performs miraculous signs and wonders
in the heavens and on earth.
**He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions."***

- In the end, the story is not about how good Daniel was, it's about how good God is. What makes that revelation possible to others in the world? Our persistent faith & dependence on Him!
 - **The power is not in your perfection, the power is in your testimony of trusting in God even in the face of lions.**
 - The power is in the fact that **your addictions, your circumstances, the world's persecution did not devour you!** But instead, it only strengthened your trust in the Lord.

Resources:

<https://www.thecommonrule.org>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/skip-resolutions-make-rule-life/>

<http://redchurch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Rule-of-Life-template.pdf?x68942>