



Consistent Connection

Daniel 6:1-15

Speaker: Sergio Chavez

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Father in heaven, thank you for this day, Lord. May my words be your words, Lord. May we connect with your Holy Spirit today, Lord. May we learn from you, Lord. May you be with us as you are here, I'm soaking into our souls, in your beautiful and your glorious name. And together we all said, amen.

Well, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Sergio Chavez. I'm the cultural diversity advocate here, which again is just a fancy way of saying I love being with people. So I work with all the groups here, the English speaking and non-English speaking groups, and I connect obviously very much with the non-English speaking groups as I am an immigrant myself.

Now, not all immigrant stories are the same. Some people come as refugees, some people come as asylum seekers, some people come on work visas or exchange students, and some people win the lottery to come here. Like my buddy from Romania, he won like a lottery to come here after communism fell in Romania, and now he's here. I still don't know how that works, but that's how it works. I've had him explain it to me and I still don't get it.

And then others just come here to this country looking for a better future for their family. And that's what my family did. And I've shared plenty of times here just how poor we were and how much struggles that my family faced being here in the United States coming from Mexico.

And it wasn't too long ago that I was sitting with my mom reflecting on some of the experiences that we had in coming here and asking her about some of the things that I was too young to remember because I came so young. And some of the stories seemed so impossible. And so I asked her, I'm like, how did we survive? How did we make it?

And she had a very simple response and she said, I don't know, mijo. Mijo is a word for son. She continues, she says, sometimes when I think back on it, I can't even remember how we did it. We faced so many struggles and I'm not sure how we made it. All I know is that I cried out to God a lot. So the only answer that I have is that God delivered us. Some way, somehow, God delivered us.

A consistent life of prayer. That is the gift that my mother gave me.

Now, currently, we're in the sermon series with Daniel where we ask these two questions. How do we follow God in a culture that is hostile to said God? And secondly, how do we have courage and hope in troubling times or as senior pastor, Dr. Biddley has said, in stormy seas?

Well, let's dive in.

Now, first of all, I want to make sure we build a framework for ourselves. We need to put ourselves in Daniel's shoes because most of us have not been in the situation that Daniel's in. And so we have to get his, Daniel's mentality, put ourselves in the framework of Daniel. So just bear with me for a little bit here.

So first, his homeland is destroyed, Jerusalem is destroyed, and the people are forcibly moved and taken to Babylon. So they're now essentially political refugees in Babylon. Daniel and his homies, Hananiah, and Michelle Nazariah are teenagers, and also chosen and trained to serve the king. They're stripped of their Jewish names and given Babylonian names, Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

And according to Daniel 9.2, later on in the book, Daniel knew the prophecy from Jeremiah that the Israelites would be in exile for 70 years. And there's even part of it where like, it might be more than 70 years, it's kind of iffy there at the end. But he understood and knew that at least they're going to be in Babylon for 70 years.

So most likely in the back of his mind, he was going to die in Babylon. The likelihood of him surviving Babylon, it's possible, but it was going to be pretty low. He was either going to get executed there, or he was going to die of old age. We just learned last week, they already tried to barbecue his homies. So the likelihood of him being in the same situation is pretty high.

And last but not least, despite of Daniel's circumstances, is he was going to follow God. So this is the situation that Daniel is in. It is essentially, we can think of it as a mentality of life in prison. There's no escape, and he did nothing to deserve this treatment.

So I ask myself the question, I'm asking you the question, so how would you go about your life knowing this, being in this frame of mind, this mentality?

Well, the most important part of all of this is that Daniel was going to serve God no matter what. Because of this commitment, Daniel had an essence about him, an aura

about him, or how the young kids say today, he had a vibe about him, a holy vibe about him. That shows you how old I am.

In scripture, it uses this term instead, though, a spirit or spirit of gods, because they didn't believe in the one true god, so they believed in many gods, so they're like, he had a spirit of the gods. They just knew that there was something about Daniel. He had an essence, he had a spirit about him.

We read in chapter four, quoting King Nebuchadnezzar, it says in Daniel 4:9, O Bel Shazar, which is Daniel, chief of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and that no mystery is too difficult for you, tell me the visions of my dream that I saw in their interpretations.

And then later in chapter five, Bel Shazar, the second king, after the handwriting on the wall, that they don't understand, his queen speaks up and says this in Daniel 5:11-12, There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the spirit of the holy gods, in the days of our father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods were found in him. And King Nebuchadnezzar, your father, made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans and astrologers, because an excellent spirit, knowledge and understanding to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve problems, were found in this Daniel.

Which brings us to our scripture today, Daniel 6:3-4. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him. It's from the ESV.

So we can see, everyone sees it, everyone feels it, everyone knows that there is a spirit about Daniel. For all you Star Wars fans, you could put it this way, the force is strong with this one. For those of you who are too young and don't know anything about Star Wars, just ask somebody. Figure it out, one way or the other. I'm sure there's other ways to describe that. He had holy vibes.

But how did he have this spirit? How did he gain this spirit? Well, I want you to hold on to that for now. We're going to come back to that. So just hold on to it for now.

The second thing I want to point out is control. In looking over the situation of Daniel he is in, he has little to no control of what is happening. He didn't get them into exile. He didn't choose to work for the king. And his current situation wasn't something he was seeking either.

Let's go back to scripture, Daniel 5-7. Then these men said, We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God. Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to king, Oh, King Darius, live forever.

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I love how they butter them up real quick. Oh, King Darius, live forever. All the high officials, all of us, everybody's saying it, all of us agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction that whoever makes petitions to any god or man for 30 days, except you, oh, King Darius, live forever, shall be cast into the den of lions.

I don't want to sound too political, don't say this, but these are just politicians being politicians and kings being kings. They're just doing what they're doing. They're jealous, they see something, and they use their power in order to react and do something. So Daniel is simply following God and staying faithful, and it's about to get them in trouble. Or as we would say when I was young, they're about to give them the business.

Which brings me to my major point that I want you to reflect on. We are not in control. Let me say it again. You and I are not in control.

I know this may be difficult for some of us to swallow, but I hate to break it to you as a fellow believer in Jesus Christ, you are not in control of much. You simply have the illusion of control. Now, you have control of what you do, but you don't have control over much.

We didn't decide when the sun came up or the sun came down. We didn't decide when rain falls.

Now, being the multicultural diversity advocate here, I deal with a lot of multiculturalism. That is my job, so I tend to read up on these things. And there's this cat that I really like. His name is L. Robert Coles, and he was recognized as one of the five most important intercultural authors in the—most of you probably remember this—the 1991 SATAR survey. You guys remember that. And has been referred to as America's leading interculturalist. He was an intercultural trainer and a trainer of other trainers. He would help people who were coming to America how to engage in American culture because it's different from other places.

And in his writing, he wrote *The Values Americans Live By*—not the values that Americans say they live by, but the *actual* values they live by. He wasn't pulling any punches. You gotta catch these hands. I got one. The top of the list. One, this first. So if you're a US American, you've been here your whole life, you're from here, gird your loins now. Fair trigger warning. I'm just warning you now.

Number one: Personal control over the environment. Americans—US Americans—no longer believe in the power of fate, and they have come to look at people who do as backward and primitive or hopelessly naïve. To be called fatalistic is one of the worst criticisms one can receive in the US American context. To a US American, it means one is superstitious and lazy, unwilling to take initiative to bringing about improvements. In the United States, people consider it normal and right that man should control nature rather than the other way around. More US Americans find it impossible to accept that there are some things which lie beyond the power of humans to achieve. US Americans seem to be

challenged—even compelled—to do by one means or another, and often at great cost, what seven-eighths of the world is certain cannot be done.

This principle, this value of control over environment—now, some of that has led to good things—but the idea that we are in control? Being a leader in the church, I found how this has faltered so many people. Because what happens when your illusion of control is broken and you realize you don't have control over the situations? You don't have control over that health diagnosis. When you don't have control over your company downsizing and you lose your job. Or the market crashes and you can't afford your mortgage. Or famines or floods, or death in the family—and you realize you don't have as much control as you did. And we struggle with that.

And for those outside of the US market, those from collective cultures like places and continents of Africa and China and Latin America, where we're more collective, the control that we know we have is in the community, in the family. As long as our families together are interdependent, we have some form of control. But then we struggle when we come to the state of the US, and our kids are raised in US American culture, and they want to start dating. You're like, wait a minute, we don't date in our culture, we get married. There's no dating. And we lose control of them. Or they want to move out from the house way before that is normal for a culture—like myself, when I broke my mother's heart when I moved out at 19. And we lose this control.

We're all seeking for this control, but then we find out we do not have as much control as we thought we did. Because you have this illusion—for those of you who may have enough resources, you get to decide which house you buy and which neighborhood you buy, what car you can buy, what food you can eat, what school your kids can go to. But you can't control if the neighborhood changes on you, although we try. You can't control whether your kid will actually pass in this school, or they even want to go to this school. For those of you who don't have, we don't have that type of control.

Now I want you to make sure that you don't hear what I'm not saying—not to just stand by and let things happen. "Oh, the Lord will save us." No, no, no, no. When we read Daniel, Daniel responded and didn't allow things to happen. When they said, "We want you to eat the king's food," he's like, "No, no, no, no," because his highest value was, "I serve the Lord." So I'm not going to allow this to happen, but I'm going to present an alternative to it. So I'm not just talking about just letting anything happen. No, we serve the Lord. That is the control we have—the response is the control we have.

So how did he have this spirit, though? How did he know this? How did he know to say this? Because he had this spirit. Well, how did he have that?

Well, it's all in Daniel 6:10: When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open towards Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God as he had done previously.

From this scripture, we can see that Daniel had a consistent connection to God. He prayed consistently.

Now, the word for prayer in Hebrew is *Tafila*, and which can be translated, like direct translation, as "judge oneself," but it can be supplications, desires of hearts. But I like how this cat described it—and I might say his name wrong—but Rabbi Yohshrael described it this way: *Prayer is to connect, to make a communion with God*. So when you are talking to God, you are making a connection with God.

Daniel didn't just start praying because the decree was signed. He was already doing it, as it says. He was doing it previously, three times a day. It was part of his ritual.

And it's interesting that today in Judaism, they also pray three times a day. They have a morning prayer called the *Shacharit*, the afternoon called the *Mecha*, and the evening the *Arvith* or the *Marif*. Now, this wasn't established in the time of Daniel yet, but you can see that Daniel kind of follows that same thing—these three times a day. I'm assuming he didn't do them back to back to back. I'm assuming he did one in the morning, one in the afternoon, one in the evening. Now, that's not in the scripture, so I might be wrong. He might have hit it three in once, who knows?

Which brings me to the idea of ritual prayers—not ritualistic prayers, but ritual prayers. Because in some denominations in the Christian world and our Christian sphere, we have looked—in some places—we have looked down on ritualistic prayers or ritual prayers. And there's good reasons for that in some ways, but I think there's times we've gone too far. In the US culture, we say that you threw the baby out—you threw the bathwater out and there was a baby in it. That's how the saying goes. Don't look at me, these US cats, they got their own thing. Meaning, we took it too far.

And I think we got that from Jesus when he says in Matthew 6:7, he says, *And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him*.

So we've gotten—I've heard this—we got an idea that God doesn't like any ritualistic prayer, doesn't like any of these scripted prayers. Should be all spontaneous and all organic. Of course, Jesus saying that, and right after that, he gives them the Lord's Prayer. So, I don't know how we got that far, because we repeat the Lord's Prayer often. In almost every church I've ever been, I've heard the Lord's Prayer.

What it means here, as he says, "the Father knows what you need before you ask him," meaning God knows your heart—and your heart is what needs to be in it. But some rituals help us develop this practice. Rituals help us get to a place that maybe we're not on our own. Maybe we don't have enough prayer life in our life—we can start rituals to help us get there. But our heart has to be in it. Otherwise, it's just kind of checking off a box, which is fairly useless to you, and apparently fairly useless to God. It must be from the heart.

For example, coming to church. This is a ritual. Once a week, you come back on a weekend and you come to church. Now some of us come a little more often, some of us live here, but you have a ritual every week that you come to church. But when it becomes a check-the-box so I don't go to hell—well, we're kind of missing the point. It's not fire insurance.

If your heart's not in it, it's not really much useful to you, nor is it much useful to God.

Ritual prayers have been done though. In Judaism, they have a book of prayers that they recite. In scripture, because we use scripture from Judeo-Christian, there's this little thing called the Psalms, or some people call it the Psalms. They have prayers in them, they have songs in them that we recite. Psalms 23, anyone? The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Yes, because sometimes these help us get into the habit of prayer. And I don't know about you, but sometimes I'm so overwhelmed that I don't even have the words to pray to God. I don't even know what to say. And if we take the time and learn some of these Psalms or know where these are, that those times when we don't have the words to pray, God has already said them for us when we look in Psalms and realize that others have gone through this as well, not just us.

So they help us, they guide us, they give us a starting point. But these prayers recited are not a guarantee to salvation. You're not like, well, I did it, I'm good, I'm solid. No, no, no, it comes from the heart.

Even Jesus had a ritual of prayer. There's this little thing called the Garden of Gethsemane that he would go to quite often to go pray all night long. His homies would also fall asleep, so they weren't helpful sometimes. But when he was praying and he was pleading with God, may this cup pass before me, the difference is, I think, with Daniel and with Jesus is he was listening to God. Because when he said, may this cup pass before me, he said, but not my will, but what? Your will.

Which means he had to be listening. So these prayer of three times a day, I think Daniel was not just asking and pleading, but he was also listening. And Daniel had a place to pray. Maybe early on in his career he didn't, but now he's high enough where he has a place to pray. So he went to his place to pray.

Now, we have rituals today and we might not even know it. I'm just going to give you one. You do with it what you will. Ask yourselves, is the first thing that you do in the morning, pick up your phone? May have your alarm on it, I understand, but it's like, well, since I'm here, maybe a little social media, maybe a little news, maybe some e-mails, maybe texts. Have you done, do you do it every single day or three times a day? That's called a ritual.

That is a habit that you not even intended to do, but you have. When I realize this myself, I do my best to charge my phone outside of my bedroom so that the first thing that I do is

not my phone. So I try to give God two seconds to get through this thick skull to be like, hey, I have something for you today. Instead of like putting a screen right in my face and then blocking out God.

We have rituals. So knowing about praying, knowing about the sermon that I decided I would try this, praying three times a day. And I, you know what I discovered? And prayed three times a day. Can you guess what I discovered? I suck at it.

I'm so bad. Like my goodness, I chow to morning, afternoon and night, fifteen minutes I chose to think, which is funny that I'm not good at it because I pray and fast quite often. Probably I feel like more than many people. So I love prayer and I'm into prayer, but having to pray fifteen times, three times a day, first of all, it takes me fourteen minutes and fifty eight seconds just to get my brain in order out of distractions and everything. And then I only got two seconds left in my fifteen minutes.

And then I'm a busy cat. I got three kids. I got a wife. I work for this church. I also am the lay pastor at my church, 24-7 ministry center. So I don't sleep a lot. So when I decide to sit down, all of a sudden my body is like, oh, we're about to take a Sabbath. So for the last two seconds, I'm asleep.

Oh my goodness, I am not good at prayer. I'm not good at this three times a day prayer. But even in my incompetence or my lack of just rhythm with it, I can tell you it still had its benefits.

Now I come from a collective culture. My trust is built on relationship. So I want to be a little open with you cats today. Because that's the only way I can trust people is by getting to know people. So I want to share something with you today.

For the last seven months in my life and our life and our family, it has been a struggle. It has been so hard. Because my wife and I, we're the sandwich generation, where we have young kids, we got kids in elementary and high school, but we also have aging parents who have health problems.

And since November, one of our parents on either side has either been in and out of the hospital. We've been rushing to ICU, or committing them and bringing them out. My father had a heart attack in January. My father had heart attacks 20 years ago, but he had again heart attacks in January.

And then my father's open heart surgery, had to have open heart surgery, happened to be planned on the same day of my oldest daughter's graduation from high school. So there was so much going on.

There's times that I'd work and I'd rush from here to go and help one of our parents. Get them to the hospital, get them out of the hospital, get them to appointments, do whatever we can to help out my mother, help out my siblings. There was times that I come home and my wife is crying because of what's going on.

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And so we're trying to care for our parents while still trying to be parents to our kids. Although it's not a big milestone or a huge milestone, but my youngest daughter was graduated fifth grade, it's still a milestone for her. My oldest was graduated from high school, so we had to look at colleges. And because so much energy was going so many different places, the thing that suffered was our marriage.

Because when you got energy going everywhere else, how do you keep that energy for your own spouse? And my wife and I, we have things in place to help us with these things. We have our date days that we reserve. We go to marriage counseling in order to ensure us that we can be strong in our marriage. But the amount of stress that comes with this is just beyond anything that I've known.

In one situation, I had to be with my kids. We're going to go to the hospital to go see Tata. And I just want you guys to know, this might be the last time we see him, my father, their grandfather. And in that moment, I had to be a parent.

How to parent my kids the best? I told him, if you don't want to come, it's okay. We understand. But just so you know, we don't know if he's going to survive this. And at the same time, I have to be a husband and a spouse to my wife who's trying to care for me, but also get to the hospital and be there for my mother and my siblings.

Trying to do all this while still also being a son. He was afraid. It was the last time he was going to see his dad. So that amount of stress, that amount of emotion, just takes a toll.

And in these three times of praying, I didn't hear a voice from God, I didn't see a vision, but what I did receive in my broken up three times a day was the spirit of calmness. What I felt was the Lord looking down upon me saying it's okay. I'm here.

Now I know that I mostly do everything correct in my marriage, and it's mostly my wife's fault. But he also, I felt this spirit upon me saying like, Lord, help me be a better husband. Maybe I too need some direction, guidance and adjustments.

So even in not great circumstances, three times a day, and the Lord still delivered.

Now just to repeat, Daniel had a spirit about him because he was consistently connected with God through a ritual of praying three times a day. Daniel did not believe he had control over the situations, but trusted in God to protect and guide him.

So I got two action steps for you. I can't control you, so you decide whether you want to do this or not. But my action to you is to pray three times a day this week. Find a time and do it. And unadulterated, that sounds weird, no distraction.

So not while you're washing the dishes, while you're gardening, but you're spending time to pray. Now if you're on a walk or something where your mind is not something else, okay, spend those three times a day.

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Also, choose a spot to pray. In my office, I have my desk and I have my chair. That's my prayer chair and sometimes slash Sabbath nap chair. But when I'm sitting there, I pray. And at home in my little man cave, I also have a chair in the corner and that's my prayer chair. When I'm sitting there, I am praying with God.

Find what that is for you in your life. Whatever busyness is going on in your life, find a spot to pray. And in doing this, also don't give up your spontaneous prayer that you need to pray on the moment. You need to pray for things that have come up. But this is, in addition to that, spend some time in prayer.

And if you need help, you can always think about acts, like what do I do in prayer? Think about the term acts: adoration, confession, thanksgiving and supplications.

Daniel didn't have control over what was happening. But what he did have control over was how he responded. And it always had God in the center of his response.

This is the difference between a consumer Christian to a disciple. I pray and I hope that my response to the things that are happening in the world has God in the center.

Since I was a kid, Daniel was always my favorite story because he was a person who had no power like me as a kid. He never slayed a giant. He didn't fight an army. He didn't split a sea. He didn't call fire down from the sky. All that cat did was pray.

And he interpreted dreams. He faced kings. And eventually he survived a lion's den. If there's any testament that you need for the power of prayer, it is the Book of Daniel. It shows us an entire book, the real and true power of prayer.

May we respond and be like Daniel. Bow your heads with me.

Father in heaven, thank you so much for this day, Lord. Thank you so much for the Book of Daniel. Thank you so much for how you continually pursue us, Lord, so we can be more like you and share your mercy and your grace with others in the world.

And you're beautiful in your glorious name. And together we all said, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- In Daniel 6:1-5, others became jealous of Daniel because he had a good spirit about him, which led to a plan to bring him down. In life, we don't have control over what others do. What can we learn from Daniel's handling of this situation?
- When Daniel finds out about the decree, he goes and prays in his upper room. What does this say about Daniel? Do you have an "upper room," and how often do you spend time in it?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What helped Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stay faithful, even when they didn't know if God would rescue them? How does their faith challenge or inspire you?
- What is a "fire" you have faced, or are facing now, and how have you seen God's presence in it? If you are still in it, what helps you keep trusting Him?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.