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SERIES: Choosing Faith Over Fear

Speaker: Nat Crawford (w/Arnie & Cara)

Title: Daniel and the Lion's Den

Have you ever done the right things in the right way, only to be ridiculed, abused, and felt like, but that's not what's supposed to happen? Maybe that's you right now. You've been loyal to your workplace for 10, 20 or 30 years. However, when it came time to cut back, loyalty mattered little.

Maybe you've been a faithful spouse. You've checked the boxes of a diligent helper, but that apparently wasn't good enough, so now you're single and raising your kids alone.

Or maybe you're a student. You've been responsible. You've been respectable. But because you told someone "no" to their advances, they've been spreading lies about you. You're being bullied, and you can't take any more.

Maybe you're single, but you feel you shouldn't be. You've been loyal to God. You've been pure in your decisions, but you're still alone.

You've been healthy, active, and proactive with social distancing, but you're now diagnosed with the Coronavirus. You're sick and don't know how this will pan out.

Regardless of what your unique situation is, we've all had those feelings of "That's not fair. I did my part, God. Why am I facing this disappointment, or this trial?"

Why do we experience these disappointments? How should we respond to life's biggest curveballs? That's what we're going to talk about over the next couple of days as we look at a familiar story: the story of Daniel and the Lion's den. To find this story, we'll be looking at Daniel Chapter 6, beginning in verse 1.

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; ²and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account so that the king might suffer no loss. ³Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. (ESV, Dan. 6:1-3)

So Daniel has been a faithful servant in Babylon and now in the Persian Empire. Last week, we talked about Daniel and his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These faithful four have followed God at considerable risk. But when the heat has been turned on, they've followed God no matter the cost. Well, Daniel has been faithful at serving God and being an honest worker for the leadership of Babylon. Daniel was made the president by King Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar, made Daniel the third ruler in the land in Chapter 5. Now, Daniel is in his 80's. And he's called again to lead for Darius.

There's no such thing as retirement for us as believers. Repurposement maybe, but no retirement in the mission of God.

About once every 6-8 weeks, I have lunch with a friend of mine. He's in his 80's. He's been president of a company, a pastor, and now he's in a season that at times can be difficult to navigate. He doesn't have the titles he once held. He doesn't receive the check from the earthly employer. But his value has not decreased one ounce. He's right where God wants him to be: Available for his children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and those whom he disciples, both formally and informally. I know this can be frustrating to him, that he doesn't have the title that declares his job description. But friends, I remind him, like I'm reminding you now. You, no matter what season you're in, you have the ultimate title: child of God. You are a masterpiece to our God and King.

You may be a stay-at-home mom. I celebrate that, and so should you. God has you right where He wants you. You might be an employee at a fast-food employer, God has you right where He wants you. You may be a student, a president of a company, or unemployed in a home that's not your dream, but friend, God has you right where He wants you. He has asked you to live a life on purpose and on mission. His mission. You're being called, just like Daniel was.

Discussion:

N: Well, my discussion partners, Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney have certainly been called into some interesting places in their lives. So I'd like to know from you two, how have you struggled with seasons in your own life and how did you come to terms with it? Cara, let's start with you.

C: My seasons usually involve my kids. We're going into the teen years. We homeschool. Once my kids start high school, that's going to end. And I'm sad about that because we just had such a good time doing that together as a family. But also, I'm excited about the future and that adventure, because you never know what God has up ahead of you. So I would say most of my seasons have to do, involve my kids getting older. And, you know, it's just sad - they're hard to let go, especially when they're little and you know, they're going to start making their own choices soon, and you just hope you've done the right things to help them navigate life. So just a whole new hot bed of worries coming up ahead of me.

N: Right. So you, Arnie, you've been through that season before. You're in a different season, but what about you? How have you come to terms with seasons and adjusted for them?

A: There's nothing like going through it. And I know a friend of mine, actually a Bible teacher here, Woodrow Kroll, he said, Arnie, when you turn 62, you're going to start noticing that you're going to have health problems and life is going to change a lot for you. And I thought, Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. And lo and behold, as you get older, you start having health issues like you've never had before. And those things can really be getting old. There's lots of sayings, you know: it's not for the weak of heart or faint of heart, but health problems can really, really challenge you like nothing else can, especially when they're your own.

N: Yeah. The reality is every one of us has seasons and the key is not to run from the seasons. Yes. There's sadness when seasons, and we've got younger kids right now, but we one of ours, like yours, is going into middle school, and they're turning into teenagers. And honestly, I'm kind of excited about it. Tiff and I, we love our kids, but we're really looking forward to being empty nesters as well. But the reality is, we all have seasons and we can lean into those, and God has you right where He wants you. He doesn't want you to sit on the sidelines idly. It doesn't matter if you're a youth or in high school or college, in the workforce, a young professional or retired. It

doesn't matter. God has you right where He wants you and He wants to leverage who you are, and His grace that he's given you, to become a grace bearer to those around you. And we're going to see how Daniel is going to leverage God's faithfulness to the people in his new season.

We're talking about the seasons of life, so back to Daniel 6. Daniel is in a new season. And Daniel is given a venue to live out His mission. All is well, right? Think again. Verse 4:

⁴Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. ⁵Then 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."

Well, that didn't last long. Daniel is called out to lead, and immediately, trouble begins. John Maxwell, in his book *Leadership Gold*, shares that people say that leadership is lonely. But if you're lonely as a leader, you're not doing something right, because no one is following. Generally speaking, his point is correct. However, when it comes to Christian leadership, it can be very lonely, especially when leading in the world and marketplace. Daniel was called into leadership again because of his character, his reliability, and his excellence in work. That character – that excellence - came from his perspective that he was working for God. He was working under the philosophy of whatever I do, I do it to glorify God. With that mindset, you will be reliable and respectable.

This is what Paul taught in Philippians 2:14-15. Paul said, "[Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.](#)"¹

This is how Daniel lived. That's how we should live as the people of God. Now, one thing is for sure, if you're a Christian, your life is under a microscope. People are always watching to see if you believe what you say you believe. But you'd better believe that if you're a person of authority or influence in the church, in politics in the marketplace, on social media, or wherever you find yourself, you are being watched. That's especially true if they're cynics or jealous people. If you're a Christian of influence, they'll despise your success, your promotion, and the grace you experience. So they'll be looking for those skeletons in your closet to trap you. That's precisely what these satraps did to Daniel. However, because Daniel lived such a clean life, they couldn't find anything. So they changed their strategy. If they can't find something wrong with Daniel, they'll turn to his faith. And you'd better believe this will happen to you today too. And you're seeing it everywhere. The media, social media, politics are going after Christian values. They know they may not be able to get you based on your godly lifestyle, but they surely can get you in your faith. How does this help these jealous leaders in Daniel 6? Listen to this:

⁶Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, "O King Darius, live forever! ⁷All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. ⁸Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Php 2:14–15). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.”⁹ Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.

There you have it. Daniel is in place. He’s favored by King Darius, but he’s put into a trap without the King knowing it. What we can tell from history is that Darius was a good king. But just like all of us, we’re prone to pride and to flattery. They present a simple law, you’re the King. No one needs anyone else but you. If our people have a need or desire, they don’t need to go to anyone—especially any silly god. They should come to you. You are worthy. You are the man. So, he hears the flattery and the opportunity to raise his stock, and he signs it. And what we’re told is, once it become law, it was done. There was no repeal. There you have it. Daniel is called out of his vocational vacation. He’s put into a major leadership position and immediately the wolves come out. He’s loyal to God and grateful servant of the king. But he’s now faced with a choice: fear of the law and the consequence of death, or faith and following God, no matter where He leads. If you were Daniel, what would you do? I know what I’d *like* to do. I know what I’d *say* I’d do, but what *would* I do? That’s a hard question to answer.

N: So, Arnie, I'm curious, you've been in leadership both in ministry as well as the marketplace. How have you faced the choice of fear or faith?

A: So that's a great question. And I started out when I was in high school, I played football. I was in ninth grade and I played varsity football. I'd get hit by these big monstrous guys and they called me coward Cole at the end, because I hated the contact and I'd get creamed. So coming out of high school, you have this view of yourself as you're kind of a coward, but as time went on, and in the business world, you really do have have a choice. Is it fear or are you stepping out in faith and going forward and can you make it? And all of those kinds of things. So I've, at an early age, I've always taken, you know, fear is misery. Faith is adrenaline, blood circulating, go, go, go. I thrive on that and learned to use it. Now the problem, you can step out in faith so much, that it's really, it's a stepping out in faith, or stepping out in stupidity. So, and that's as a Christ follower, I have to really be careful, that one, I'm following God's will, following the Word of God, and really stepping out in faith, because fear is misery and you have a choice. Each day you have a choice, whether you're going to be miserable, are you going to step out in faith and really love it? And one other thing that I've learned too, and I learned this as a Christ follower, is nothing is impossible if you trust in the Lord. And I think that's a song. But that's kind of a theme song for me, is nothing is impossible, as long as Jesus is at the helm.

N: So I've got a question then for you. Because of being afraid of being tackled, is that why, whenever I come up to give you a hug, you cower? Is that why?

A: It's one of many reasons. [That's Coronavirus. Gotcha]. [No, that's Coronavirus, Nat.]

N: Okay. So how about this, so you said something key there, and it actually goes back to something you told us in a meeting recently. You gave us a challenge, you know, for the ministry context: are you going to choose misery or ministry in the face of a trial? And the trial we're going through right now, how are we going to respond? We have a lot of people who are in ministry, formal ministry, and we of course pray and hope they're just in everyday ministry of reaching out to people in their spheres of influence, and discipling people through various ways.

How would you encourage people during this time to make that choice of ministry or misery, and that's a really key decision?

A: Yeah, that is something that is just absolutely critical that you do every day. Because you can look at things and say, man, this is miserable and what if I get this and what if I get that? Or you just step out in faith and do what God's called you to do. I mean, to me it's one's exciting and one is miserable, and who wants to be miserable? Cara?

C: I don't want to be miserable. [Of all people, you don't.] What I was thinking about when you were telling that story about not wanting to get hit, and then you start to believe something about yourself that isn't true, is that, how many times do you go through life and people actually project their fear on you? And so then you start to believe those things. Like you can't get this job or you can't do this. It's actually people just projecting their fear on you.

N: Yeah. Their lie becomes your lie. [Yeah, yeah] [Yeah. Exactly.] Yeah. And that's a dangerous thing to do. Cara, what about you in this decision of choosing fear or faith? I mean, you're an author, you're a mother, you're a person of influence, and you've had to make these decisions, and you probably do daily: the choice of faith or fear. How do you make the decision of faith?

C: Well, I would first admit that sometimes I am afraid, but I do make a choice to go forward in faith. I think sometimes we just have to override feelings, because we know what's true. So override feelings sometimes, and don't be dumb, stupid, like Arnie says. I mean, if something is completely bonkers, I'm not going to go out in the street and think I can stand in traffic and that God's going to protect me.

I would think at that point then I'm just mocking Him. So you've got to override feelings and go forward. You can have concern, but going forward in faith despite that.

N: Okay. How do you do that practically though? Because it's easy for us to say, and I would say the same thing and I would say I believe the same thing. I'm going to focus on truth and not default to my emotions, but I know like, when there's something coming my way or uncertainty, it's really hard not to just focus on the uncertainty, or on the unknown, and just go, no, I know God's got it. So how do you practically do that? I mean, what are your steps to really focusing on truth, versus the uncertainty or fear?

C: Focusing on what I know to be true about God. I mean, aren't we in an uncertain time right now? Just in that every day we wake up and something is different. And I don't like that. Right now, I wouldn't say I'm not struggling with it. I just choose to believe that God tells the truth and I, and that's how I reconcile that. And then I go about my day and I also do things that are, I think pretty practical. If I'm starting to focus on what's going on right now, with the sickness or all these decisions the government is making, that I may or may not necessarily agree with, I turn off the news, I put my phone down, I walk away and I go do something with my kids, go play Clue or something, because it gets my mind off of it.

N: So you have a choice in what you focus on then, right? [Correct. Yes.]

A: Oh, it is so crazy though. It is a choice. I got up this morning and I'm reading about who has the biggest chance of getting on a ventilator. And I read the medical issues and it's like, Whoa, that's me. And you just have to make a conscious effort to say, stop it, Satan. I'm going to move on. You know, I'm not going to think about this. And if it happens, then the Lord will see me through. Or if I don't make it, I'm in Heaven. I mean, how can you possibly lose? But you can just focus on this stuff. I've been on a ventilator before; it's awful. You know, I don't want to do that. And you can go all day long, be in a bad mood. You can start thinking about that. Oh I better... And pretty soon you have gotten further from Jesus today than you were yesterday, and

you've lost ground, and then bad things happen. So stepping out in faith is just, it's really the only way to go, isn't it Nat?

N: Yeah, absolutely. That's exactly right. But what we're not saying in all this is to be naive or to put your head, you know, in a bag or in the sand, and ignore the reality of what's going on around us. I mean, if you look at the First Century apostles or even Jesus, they were keenly aware of the situation. And many times Jesus is like, Nope, I'm ducking out of here, and my time has not yet come. And same with, you know Paul, I mean he was like, no, this is not a good situation. I'm getting out of here as quickly as I can.

So we're not encouraging people to act without information. But what we are saying is we have to be believers who focus on the truth, the Word of God, and we need to be careful how much misinformation or negative information we're pulling into our lives, and focusing on that, when we have the Word of God and truth at our disposal. So we need to be wise and discerning in what we're consuming, because what we focus on becomes reality. That's true for nonbelievers and it's true for us today. So if we're going to live with wisdom, and we're going to live on mission and move closer to Jesus today than we were yesterday, we're going to have to be people who default to the Word of God, who are in constant communication with Him and who are living in community with each other as believers. Well before we wrap up, I'm just curious, how has your relationship with Christ impacted your choice of faith over fear?

C: I mean we talked about seasons before and you know, there are those people who just are afraid. They really just want to get through life without having any problems whatsoever. But I think you miss out on such a grand adventure, when you decide to not have kids because you're just afraid of all the things that come with kids. Or you're afraid to get married, or you're afraid to take that job. Yeah, I'm not going to, you know, God said things are going to go wrong. But man, you'll just miss out on so much good life, if you're afraid to live it.

N: Do you remember that movie Parenthood from the Eighties with Steve Martin? Do you remember this movie?

C: I totally do because my kids still sing The Diarrhea Song.

N: Yeah, okay. That movie encapsulates what you just said. Remember Steve Martin is so afraid of embarrassment and of failure for himself and for his family, and he feels like it's a roller coaster. And whenever he feels like that, he's on the roller coaster, he gets sick and he hates it, instead of leaning into it and enjoying it. And at the end of the movie, you know, they're at that children's play and the, I forget what exactly happens, but the kids, you know, like messing up lines or falling over and knocking, I mean, and he just, he learns to lean into it. He enjoys the ride of the roller coaster and it changes everything for him. And we assume that's true moving forward. That's much of what you're talking about. Christianity is going to be, as Dr. Cole says, it's going to be a battleship, as you just alluded to. I mean, it's this whole roller coaster. You can hate the rollercoaster ride or you can enjoy it. You can thrive on the excitement of the battle or you can cower in fear. Both are options. But I tell you, there is one that's enjoyable and one that it brings other people in, and creates excitement and energy. And there's one that just completely tanks the whole party. And I know which one I'm choosing. Arnie, what are your thoughts on this?

A: I totally agree with what you're saying, and it's like if you choose fear, you're choosing to be lukewarm. Really. How exciting is that? And whereas if you choose faith, and for me, when I walked away when I was 18, I looked around and there wasn't anybody in my life that claimed to be a Christian that it's like, man, that I just went, who wants to live that kind of life? Well, at 47,

when I became a Christ follower and all my non Christian friends thought I was crazy, I've had the most exciting adrenaline filled life as a Christ follower than I ever did before I came to know Jesus. So it's, the choice though is yours. Are you going to be lukewarm where nobody wants to follow you and Jesus doesn't have nice things to say about people that are lukewarm? Or are you going to be on fire for Jesus? I mean, to me it's a no brainer.

N: Well, we would encourage you, the three of us, to lean into the season of life you're in. It's going to be full of excitement. It's going to be full of challenges. There could be great trials, much like what we are going to see here in Daniel Six, but we promise you, the ride is quite exciting when you lean into it and you decide to choose faith over fear.