

end of our story—crushed and broken.

Because the only way for you to have peace in your life is to realize that God has saved you from this endless struggle to prove your worth. You are worth Jesus' life! You can't ever increase that! So you don't drive a pickup. So what? So you really aren't that tough. Who is? So you don't really feel in control. You're not! Jesus has rescued you from the world's messed up ideas about being a man, because your identity doesn't come from what you do or how much respect you get or how much money you make. Your worth comes from Jesus. Real men love Jesus!

Now, ladies, I know we're talking a lot about men today, but I hope you realize how important you are in all of this. We as men often don't admit it, but the way we feel about ourselves is greatly impacted by the women in our lives—our wives and mothers and even daughters. We men need you to find ways to let us know how much you value faith in Jesus. We need you to find ways to let us know that despite our sins and our shortcomings, as completely unremarkable as we might be in so many other ways, our faith in God makes us special to you.

Because it seems like our world tries to downplay the importance of fathers and husbands. It seems like the world is starting to believe it can get along just fine without dads. It's true that sometimes we do an awful job, but that's not how God planned the world! There is no way you can downplay the influence—for good or for bad—that a father has on his family. Studies have shown that the greatest influence on a child's faith is their father. There is no substitute for a dad who loves Jesus. Dads, you're important! God has put you, like he put Daniel, into a position of great influence and responsibility. You matter. Your faith matters! The way you treat God's name, even in the most difficult situations, will affect how others treat God's name.

Just like Daniel. What was the result of his night in the lion's den? King Darius issued a new decree that *"in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel."* Isn't it amazing that because of one man's boldness in praying to God, the whole Persian Empire was told about the living God! How could he do it? Do you ever wonder what was on Daniel's mind as he sat in that lion's den? I bet he was thinking something like this, *"In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song; This cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm. What heights of love, what depths of peace, When fears are stilled, when strivings cease! My Comforter, my all in all, Here in the love of Christ I stand."*

Can't you see Daniel singing that song as he sits among the lions? It's Jesus who makes a man strong. It's Jesus whose name has power. It's Jesus who makes a man a man. Some of you hunt bucks and mud trucks. Great! Some of you work in offices with suits and ties. Great! Some of you work with your hands and have the callouses to prove it. Great! None of that, however, defines who you are. You are Christians. You carry Christ's name with you wherever you go. To your family. To your coworkers. To your spouse. Want to be a real man? Real men love Jesus!

Daniel 6:10-27
Pastor Nathan Nass

Father's Day
June 21, 2015

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: "Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or man except to you, O king, would be thrown into the lions' den?" The king answered, "The decree stands—in accordance with the laws of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed." Then they said to the king, "Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day." When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him. Then the men went as a group to the king and said to him, "Remember, O king, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed." So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep. At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "O king, live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, O king." The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones. Then King Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language throughout the land: "May you prosper greatly! "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel. For he is the living God and he endures forever; his kingdom will not be destroyed, his dominion will never end. He rescues and he saves; he performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions."

Real Men Love Jesus

One of the blessings of having 25 nieces and nephews is that we never have to buy Isaiah clothes. Big tubs of clothes just get passed from one family to the next. In the latest batch, Isaiah got one particular shirt that says, "Hunting bucks and mudding trucks, that's how my daddy rolls." That's got a nice ring to it for Father's Day, doesn't it? "Hunting bucks and mudding trucks, that's how my daddy rolls." Yeah! Except in my case it's an absolute lie. I've never hunted a buck or mudded a truck in my entire life. But it kind of seems like

those are the type of things I should be doing as a dad, right? That's the kind of father a little boy wants! A real man.

Dads, if we're honest with ourselves, I think there's a part of us that wants to be known—at least by our spouses and our kids—as “real men.” It's just hard to know what that really means. On America's Got Talent this week, some guys did death-defying stunts on dirt bikes, and when they finished, Howard Stern said, “You are real men!” I heard on the radio that Ronald Reagan always carried a gun with him as president, and the radio host said, “Now that's a real man!” What do you think? What comes to mind when you think of a “real man”? Guns. Sports. Work. Power. Women. Beer. Hunting bucks and mud-ding trucks. It's confusing to be a man these days!

So what's a real man? Well, if anybody was ever a real man, it's got to be Daniel. You heard the story. Daniel was the guy who spent a night in a den of hungry lions and survived. Doesn't that sound like a real man? It's the perfect story for Father's Day. Today God wants to use the story of Daniel to teach us what to value in a man. So what do you picture Daniel to be like? I always pictured someone like Hercules or Tarzan with big muscles. A real man, right?

Let's start with this: Do you know how old Daniel was when he was thrown into the lion's den? Daniel was over 80 years old. That changes things a little, doesn't it? When you picture Daniel in the lion's den, don't picture a movie star fighting lions. Picture your grandpa with white hair, leaning on his cane. And did you catch why Daniel was thrown to the lions in the first place? Because he got on his knees and prayed. Really? That's it? That doesn't hardly seem manly, does it? Or maybe we need to change our definition of a man. Daniel was an old man who prayed.

Of course, there's more to his story than that. Daniel was an Israelite who was taken as a captive to Babylon. For 66 years he worked for the kings of Babylon. Then, in 539 B.C., the Persians conquered Babylon, and King Darius made Daniel one of his top officials. But that didn't sit well with the other Persians. So they spied on Daniel to find a way to bring him down. But this is all they came up with: “*We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.*” Isn't that a great compliment? The only fault they could find was that Daniel believed in God. So they got King Darius to decree that anyone who prayed to anyone other than Darius over the next thirty days was to be thrown into a den of lions.

The trap was set for Daniel. So what would you have done? Maybe part of you is thinking, “That doesn't sound so hard. It's just for thirty days. How hard would it be just to not go to church or pray for thirty days? That's not that bad!” Well, for Daniel that was impossible. Faith can't be hidden. Daniel knew the 2nd Commandment about loving God's name. He knew that praying to Darius wasn't an option, and he also knew that not praying wasn't an option either. God's name is meant to be praised. To stop praying and worshipping and praising God is a great misuse of God's name. Daniel just couldn't do it—not for thirty days, not even for one day.

Because Daniel's greatest fear wasn't failing to live up to the king's expectations. It wasn't death. It wasn't the lions. There was something more important to Daniel than his life—God's name. His greatest fear was offending and disowning God. That was the last thing he was willing to do. So when his faith was threatened, when his life was on the line, when he had to make a choice, he did what he always did. “*Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.*” And he got thrown into a den of lions.

But God couldn't have been happier! To our modern ears, Daniel kind of sounds like a wimp, doesn't he? He didn't even fight back or complain! But in God's eyes, Daniel was a real man, “*because he had trusted in his God.*” The next morning, Darius happily pulled him out of the lion's den without even a scratch on his body, “*because he had trusted in his God.*” It wasn't Daniel's strength that saved him. It was his faith in God. If Daniel's going to teach us what God values in a man today, then we're got to change our definition of a “real man.” A real man isn't someone who can do it all on his own. To God, a real man is someone who trusts in God's name.

To help us understand this even more, I want you to compare Daniel with Peter in our Gospel lesson. Daniel knew that his life was on the line, yet he openly confessed God's name, even in a difficult situation. How was Peter different? Peter caved under pressure, joined the crowd, and denied Jesus three times. So which took more courage? Sometimes people say Christians are weak. But does it take more courage to stand up for God or ignore him? Daniel was concerned about God's name, and it showed. Peter—at least at that moment—was concerned about his own name, and it showed. This is not easy! It's not easy to always treasure God's name.

So who are you more like—Daniel or Peter? The way you treat God's name shows a lot about your relationship with him. Our second lesson today said, “*At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*” I often thought of that verse when I played basketball. If at the name of Jesus, the angels in heaven bow, they must really be busy during basketball games, because Jesus' name gets thrown around a lot! Omg! Oh, wait. That's another one, right? God your Savior wants his name to be for you the most precious thing. If it isn't, “*the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name*” (Exodus 20:7). This is a big deal!

And one of the worst ways to misuse God's name is to never use it at all. Just think, Daniel couldn't imagine going a single day without stopping to pray three times to God. One of the greatest insults we give God is when we don't use his name at all! But isn't that exactly what our world tells us? “Real men can do it on their own. Real men are strong. Real men are in control. Real men take their life in their own hands. Real men don't need God.” Isn't that the message we're fed? And we're tempted to buy into it. Except it's all a lie. Can you see how our world has separated from manhood the most important part of being a man? Real men love Jesus! Without Jesus, you will end up like Daniel's enemies did at the