

Outline

NICE-Not! Prayer vs. Power – Daniel 2

Last week we started a new series and I think I shocked a few of you with it. I am promoting that it is time to stop being “Nice.” That’s right - for you who skipped out on the service last week: You have heard it for the first time in church – Stop being Nice! We even gave out stickers last week with the “Nice” crossed out.

Now, before you go thinking we have absolutely lost it around here at Ni River, let me explain. We live in a pretty “Nice” world. As a matter of fact, if you don’t make waves and go along with the program, you will be well-liked, reasonably tolerated, and generally overlooked and ignored in a rather less than impactful existence. **Nice people are rewarded with very little stress and next to no aggravation.** Nice people really don’t finish last, for then they might be noticed for their audacity to do something that was beyond their ability to do and chagrined for not keeping with the systematic principle of niceness where everyone knows their place and they stay there without speaking up. They don’t achieve great things, for that is left to the great achievers. They don’t think great thoughts, for society has designated who will be the great thinkers. Nice people just exist and are allowed to survive as long as they don’t think for themselves, attempt to get out of the box, and simply allow the “movers and shakers” to make all the rules.

The only problem with that concept is that God does not play according to the rules of “Nice.” He loves to shake things up and use people that the rest of the world thinks are foolish. As a matter of fact, “Fool, He has you on His list.” **God is willing to shape and change society and speak to the rest of the world with those who will live by His principles and seek His thoughts and ways that are way higher than those of the “Nice” majority!**

So my question to you for the second week in a row is – Are you a “Nice” person who simply allows society to dictate to you your thoughts and worldviews without the “Not Nice” habit of questioning why you and the rest of society are living and believing the way you do? Or, are you like the guy we started taking a look at last week, Daniel, a good person, who knows what you believe and believes what you know – unable to be moved off that worldview, but respectful and kind in your living of it? Let’s take a look at Daniel chapter 2 today and unpack this thought even further!

You know, nice people very rarely find themselves in trouble, while good people always seem to be in the middle of the soup! In chapter one of the book about his life, Daniel found himself in some pretty hot water and all of a sudden, here in chapter 2, Daniel finds himself in the midst of an impossible task. Good people, who live by their convictions rather than the whim and wave of society will always find themselves in some type of major decision or conflict. I read recently that we are always on the verge of tough times in our lives: we are either in tough times, coming out of tough times, or getting ready to go into tough times. The key difference between the “Nice” guy and the “Good” guy is the peace of the principles that help carry you through those times.

Anyway, here’s Daniel’s problem this time. Nebuchadnezzar the King of Babylon who has kidnapped Daniel from his homeland and forced him into service within his court, has requested/commanded from his Wise Counselors that they interpret a dream that he has had. It seems the King had too many anchovies on the pizza last night and doused it with one too many Budweisers, and he woke up from a really scary dream:

[In the second year of his reign, King Nebuchadnezzar started having dreams that disturbed him deeply. He couldn't sleep. He called in all the Babylonian magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and fortunetellers to interpret his dreams for him. When they came and lined up before the king, he said to them, "I had a dream that I can't get out of my mind. I can't sleep until I know what it means." Daniel 2:1-3 TM](#)

Not a bad problem. If I had a scary dream, I might want to tell it to you and see what you thought. Like if I dreamed that the Dallas Cowboys were to win the Super Bowl the next three years or if Jimmy Johnson was going to win the Nextel Cup again this year or if pink was the new black in the fall male

March 1, 2009

color fashions – where did that come from – definitely very scary dream... I would definitely need some help interpreting what those dreams were about. So I have some compassion for King Neb here!

One problem – he forgot the dream. Seriously, look what Daniel 2 says the king wants:

The king answered the fortunetellers, "This is my decree: If you can't tell me both the dream itself and its interpretation, I'll have you ripped to pieces, limb from limb, and your homes torn down. But if you tell me both the dream and its interpretation, I'll lavish you with gifts and honors. So go to it: Tell me the dream and its interpretation."

Daniel 2:5,6 TM

Nice guy, eh? But when it comes to the "Nice" community, rules don't apply, except for their rules. Nebuchadnezzar is the unreasonable boss on the job, the controlling spouse, the intimidating bully, the manipulative neighbor who demands that everyone play according to his/her rules, then doles out consequences like sweet treats to everyone who has the audacity not to comply, to think for themselves, or challenge the status quo. Everything is nice until the demands cannot be met. This is a scary place to be. And these guys are scared:

The fortunetellers said, "Nobody anywhere can do what you ask. And no king, great or small, has ever demanded anything like this from any magician, enchanter, or fortuneteller. What you're asking is impossible unless some god or goddess should reveal it—and they don't hang around with people like us." Daniel 2:10,11 TM

These guys are pretty smart. They have a firm grasp of the situation. They know that if they can just get a hint of the contents of the dream, they can consult their libraries of Freudian theories and Behaviorism theories, or gather together a blue ribbon panel of psycho-social experts to debate the neotological aspects of the subconscious patterns of eurythmea as it relates to the nocturnal dream patterns of stressed dictatorial personalities. Heck, at least they could call Dr. Phil and he could guide them in some way to at least make something up that will help the King sleep a little better. King Nebuchadnezzar is having none of this. Look at his reaction to their reasonable request:

That set the king off. He lost his temper and ordered the whole company of Babylonian wise men killed. When the death warrant was issued, Daniel and his companions were included. They also were marked for execution. Daniel 2:12,13 TM

This is a stressful situation. This is a tough time. Check that – This is impossible! I don't see anyway out for these guys. This King is simply being unreasonable. Like they said, no one can tell someone what they have been dreaming – maybe it might be possible to interpret a dream for someone – even that is a bit iffy – but tell someone what they are dreaming and what the interpretation is? No, that is just not going to happen! These are some dead ducks.

I can just imagine these nice guys. They are scrambling. They are doing everything in their might to save their skins. I am sure they are huddled together and plotting last minute hostile take-overs and military coups – others are scheming how they might be able to get the confidence to trick the king into believing some made-up story about what his dream was and then give him a bogus interpretation that would work to fool the ol' guy. Others are packing bags and getting ready to try and make the quick escape. There is a lot of scheming and manipulating and bribing and hustling going on – but there is no time for any of this, for the King is wasting no time wasting these "Nice" guys. He is sick of their "Niceness" and the politically correct trickery. He has their number:

But the king said, "I know what you're up to—you're just playing for time. You know you're up a tree. You know that if you can't tell me my dream, you're doomed. I see right through you—you're going to cook up some fancy stories and confuse the issue until I change my mind. Nothing doing! First tell me the dream, then I'll know that you're on the up and up with the interpretation and not just blowing smoke in my eyes."

March 1, 2009

[Daniel 2:8,9 TM](#)

These nice guys have their smiles painted on. These nice guys think they have been fooling people with their nice lives lived in their own human scheming and political and manipulative ploys. And Nebuchadnezzar is sick of it. You know the interesting thing about nice guys – the only people they end up fooling is themselves. They think their little act in life has everyone fooled and that no one can see through them and their “fake” lives. Yet everyone knows who they are. You see, the nice guy or gal act fools no one and eventually everyone gets tired of the charade. But that is how so many of us try to survive in life. We think that if we act hard enough, if we really try super hard, if we muster up just enough strength, we can live this life, do this job, fake the world out that we are superhuman and that we have no problems, nor do we need to confront anything about ourselves, be taught anything, change in anyway, or grow personally. We don’t even need God – Nice guys got life under control.

That’s when the bottom drops out. That’s when we get fired. That’s when our husband dumps us for someone else. That’s when we realize we can’t control the partying and the drinking, but it is controlling us. That’s when we get sick or someone we love dies. That’s when we turn 40 and realize that we are not really that happy with what we have done with our lives and that life just seems to lack purpose. There is always going to be a King Nebuchadnezzar staring us in the face ready to execute us.

Have you been there? Are you there? I know I have been. Daniel is there right now. How do you handle that insurmountable, impossible problem and challenge in life? Work harder? The nice guy does until it kills him. Worry more? The nice gal does until her life is just one big bundle of frazzled nerves. Put on more clown makeup, ratchet up the acting job and try really hard to fake everyone out even more? Eventually the make up gets obvious – the act is seen through – the truth comes out.

As is often the case, God brings the “Nice” community to a place where their rules just won’t work. And the bottom drops out. The finances blow up. The bills come due. The truth bubbles to the surface. The hurt can’t be masked. The executioner stands at the door. All the hard work and the effort just does not pay off. It is for this reason that God shows us a “Daniel” who is living by the blessing of obedience to godly principles and shows him the solution. Daniel illustrates that “nice” people kill themselves trying to manipulate the situation and please the people around them. They will give you great effort to please you. However, Daniel knew that pleasing the king would only get himself killed. There were already plenty of nice advisers failing at that political ploy. So what did Daniel do? He cheated. **Nice people work hard. Good people work smarter.** Daniel chose not to panic and not to try and control a problem that he could not humanly control or repair. He chose to pray to the God of the Universe to solve the problem for Him. The Nice guys finished last. The Good guy came out on top! Look at the story:

[Daniel then went home and told his companions Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah what was going on. He asked them to pray to the God of heaven for mercy in solving this mystery so that the four of them wouldn’t be killed along with the whole company of Babylonian wise men. Daniel 2:17,18 TM](#)

Daniel and his three friends knew the situation was impossible – that the problem was beyond them. They knew politics, hard work, or good acting were not going to get them through this. They knew humanly speaking, they were goners. But they also knew they had a power within them that was supernatural. They knew that the God of Creation was their God and that He could solve this situation. They chose to pray rather than depend on their own power to fix the impossible. Their only hope was to depend on the true source of power and survival in their lives – and they prayed very specifically for His help to survive. They prayed that God would reveal the dream and the interpretation to them. They did not hesitate for they knew that God existed. They did not scheme for they had a habit of depending on God to solve life’s crises rather than their human efforts. They did not act like they had it together, for they knew they did not. They prayed because they knew God knew more than they did and that they had no control over life, but they knew who did control life. And look at the story’s close:

[That night the answer to the mystery was given to Daniel in a vision. Daniel 2:19 TM](#)

Why are you working so hard to figure out life’s impossible problems? Why are you trying so hard to live

March 1, 2009

out the life that you have? Why are you depending so heavily on the “nice” image to get by in life, only to have it leave you feeling so empty inside and devoid of purpose? Why are you stressing life so much? Because the Nice Guy always works harder, while the Good Guy always works smarter. The Nice Guy has to keep up the “got it together” image and has to solve her own problems. The Nice Gal has to fit in just right and not get rejected. That effort always runs out of steam. The Good Guy realizes that down deep, he is not so good and he needs someone who is good to make him good and to work out things for him. The Good Gal locks into seeking the help of the Good God who has her life completely in control even when the bottom seems to drop out in life. God is in control. God will work things out for the Good. He promises this:

The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within...The moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. He knows us far better than we know ourselves. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. Romans 8:22-28 TM

A couple of Quick Principles of Living Good Lives dependent on a Good God:

- There will be impossible times in our lives.
- We will not know how to pray and if we let Him, the Spirit will pray for us.
- God will work every detail in our lives into something good.

There is a bit of a catch to this principle of “Good” Living. God’s truth and blessing of life only come to those who are living as He directs and talking to Him with frequency. He will let us scheme and manipulate and work in our own strength – and kill ourselves. However, He stands ready to help us live this life in peace and joy. Obedience and utter dependence on God to solve my problems are the only way that I will live a life of blessing and impact the world in a positive way. And in the process of it all, it is the only way to prove that God exists! **“Nice” depends on human effort, but “Good” comes from God.** What are you prepared to do with your life, nice guy and gal?

Look how the story of Daniel ends here in chapter 2:

The king asked Daniel "Are you sure you can do this—tell me the dream I had and interpret it for me?" Daniel answered the king, "No mere human can solve the king's mystery, I don't care who it is—no wise man, enchanter, magician, diviner. But there is a God in heaven who solves mysteries, and he has solved this one. He is letting King Nebuchadnezzar in on what is going to happen in the days ahead. This is the dream you had when you were lying on your bed, the vision that filled your mind..." Daniel 2:26-28 TM

Daniel showed the King that only God can do the impossible. Daniel did not take the credit. He had prayed and asked God to help. Then he did something that you and I find difficult to do. He let God handle the situation. We are so quick to pray a little prayer and then try to solve the problem for God. God wants us, like Daniel, to pray, wait for the answer, then be content when He, rather than us, solves the problems in our lives.

How does a Good Guy solve life's problems with Good God?

1. Identify the real issue or problem in your life.
2. Tell God about it.
3. Ask Him very specifically to solve the issue or problem in His way lifting up empty hands for Him to fill however He chooses to fill them.
4. Wait on God to solve the issue or problem, with NO help from you.
5. Obey the fleeting, positive thoughts that come into your heart!

Let's talk to God right now. Will you pray with me?

March 1, 2009