

# Dare to be a Daniel: Christian Witness in the Political Arena

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At the capital city of the greatest nation on earth, in the court of the supreme ruler, a young man from far away is appointed to a high position of trust. He is glad for the opportunity to use his God-given talents in helping see that the country is well governed.

But then comes a decree that the supreme ruler is to be regarded as exactly that. Not supreme under God, but supreme, period. The ultimate authority for what is right and wrong, what is good or evil, what is true or untrue.

What is the young man to do? He has a choice to make. Will he continue every day, as he has done all his life, bending the knee to the King of heaven? Or will he bow to the earthly king alone?

The young man says no. He will bow to God alone – honor him above all others – trust him whatever the consequences. He does that. And God sees him through.

## *Twice True*

This true story is actually two stories in one. It did happen to Daniel of the Jews, 2600 years ago under King Darius in the mighty empire of Babylon.

But it also happened to me in much the same fashion, 45 years ago when the Watergate scandal engulfed President Richard Nixon.

I was a junior member of the White House speechwriting staff, age 29, wide-eyed as allegations of grave wrongdoing felled Nixon's top aides and increasingly implicated the President himself.

Mr. Nixon had a constitutional oath to uphold, but so did I – the oath I'd earlier taken as a naval officer, an oath with no expiration date.

Like Daniel of old, I was praying every day to uphold justice and righteousness. To be clear, no one told me not to. No one ordered us to regard the man in the Oval Office as a deity.

They did tell us, though, in fact they told the whole country, that "If the President does it, it's not illegal." That sounded a lot like replacing a divine standard of right and wrong with an arbitrary human standard.

And it felt to me as though accepting this—and ignoring the danger signals I sensed from God—would amount to what the Bible calls worshipping the creature instead of the Creator (Romans 1: 25).

Of course, the Daniel analogy is far from exact. I faced no den of lions. I didn't even face political martyrdom. In making a public protest resignation via the Washington Post, I garnered applause as well as job offers.

## *Dare to Stand*

To this day, I can't claim to know the exact mix of high principle and low self-promotion in my motives at the time. In no way did it make me a more ethical person than many colleagues who stood by the embattled Nixon until he himself resigned eight months later.

It represented, however, one Christian's personal act of witness against the idolatry of politics and secular self-salvation that pulls so insistently on all Americans, right and left, in these wicked times. I thanked God then, and thank him now, for stirring me to take the stand I did.

"Dare to be a Daniel," goes the old hymn by Philip Bliss, a favorite of my dad's, drummed into my brother and sisters and me as we grew up loving God and country. "Dare to stand alone. Dare to have a purpose firm. Dare to make it known."

My firm purpose as a bit player in the epic drama of Watergate was to faithfully serve not only liberty but the Author of liberty.

When the time came to make it known, even if alone—and I was at that point virtually alone among my fellow conservatives and Republicans—gratefully my prayers for strength and guidance were answered enough to do what I felt I must.

## *Daniel's Fidelity*

Again and again over half a century in politics, education, media, and ministry, I've found those answers from the Lord at moments of need, resulting in "Daniel deliverance" for God's truth to be upheld and Him to be glorified.

The examples that follow happen to have occurred in the public eye. But anyone's deeds done in obscurity could have carried equal moral weight for good or ill.

It's the privilege, indeed the duty, of us all to practice of Christian citizenship with a Daniel's fidelity and fearlessness.

No one who has committed to following Jesus is excluded from this opportunity and obligation. We never know when it might be our turn to step forward as that “poor wise man” who saved his little city besieged by a great king (Ecclesiastes 9:14,15).

Yes, that man was unthanked, unremembered, we’re told, and sadly that’s the way the world goes. Still he was indispensable—and inwardly gratified to know it. So might you be.

“Hold the Gospel banner high, on to victory grand,” says one of Bliss’s stanzas. “Satan and his hosts defy, and shout for Daniel’s band.”

I don’t think he’s just talking about evangelism and the church. Satan’s most aggressive attacks today come in the political arena, the public square, the cultural and intellectual marketplace.

Daniel’s band is needed there as never before, often for explicitly Christian issues such as religious liberty, but frequently also for secular issues of constitutional order and common grace, vindicating “the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God.”

## *Moments of Decision*

Here then are a few more of the Daniel moments I’ve experienced in the ups and downs of a political career from 1970 to the present.

\*\* Running for Governor of Colorado in 1990, a few weeks before election day, I was blindsided by hostile newspapers deriding my belief in the power of prayer with stories fed them by partisan opponents and an atheist group.

My service on the board of a prayer-research foundation conducting lab experiments with seeds was ridiculed, as if unfitting me for office. I weathered it—enroute to a decisive loss—by joking with audiences at my own expense and by quietly thanking Christ for the blessing that comes when we’re persecuted for His sake.

\*\* Running for State Senate a few years later, I was again treated to the atheists’ “mock and marginalize” tactic when campaign mailers suggested I was—that’s right—unfit for office because my Andrews’ America blog had urged Christian parents to take a hard look at the occult subtext of the Harry Potter books.

I weathered it once more, winning this time, and it showed me in a clearer way than ever before that the Enemy’s cleverest ploy is to try and convince people he doesn’t exist.

\*\* After the mass shooting at Columbine High School shocked the state and nation in 1999, I filed a Senate bill for action in early 2000 that would mandate a display of the Ten Commandments in every Colorado public building, classroom, and courtroom.

The Decalogue has long been displayed in the US Supreme Court chamber and on our own state capitol's front lawn, after all—and our bill was drafted to comply with prevailing First Amendment jurisprudence.

But the furor from Democrats and news media was as if we planned an Ayatollah-style theocracy. Remind schoolchildren “Thou shalt not kill” and judges “Thou shalt not steal”? Horrors!

However Democrats were spared the inconvenience of fighting the bill legislatively—let alone suing to overturn it once enacted—because my own fellow Republicans balked at the prospect of having a yes-vote used against them at election time.

As a loyal party man, I reluctantly pulled the bill prior to floor action. So much for “the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God” nowadays, here in a state that still blazons throughout the capitol building a Latin motto invoking the Holy Spirit.

\*\* I had more success with legislation calling for every public school to invite (not require) students to pledge allegiance to the flag—and to study in their civics classes the meaning and history of patriotism.

We passed that bill. But again, not without howls of protest from the opposition party accusing us of brutalizing the tender consciences of Colorado children.

Contemporary liberalism, it seems, has its own religiously held answer to Pilate’s famous question of what is truth. “The truth,” liberals as much as insist, “is nothing in particular”—and they then label as an oppressor anyone who disagrees with them.

\*\* Later, during my decade as a Denver Post opinion columnist, a smugly anti-Christian editor repeatedly spiked or rewrote my seasonal essays encouraging readers to reflect on the timeless realities and universal longings attached to Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving.

## *Unawed*

All these were instances of the dominant worldview today that says if you live by the Bible you are way, way out of the mainstream—you enter the public square with two strikes against you.

This attitude of our authoritative elites, relentless and merciless, tends to cow many devout Christians (and observant Jews) into avoiding the public square altogether, except as voters—and too often not even as that.

As our hymn puts it: “Many mighty men are lost, daring not to stand, who for God had been a host, joining Daniel’s band.”

Spiritual timidity, civic illiteracy, and—frankly—emotional immaturity combine to silence the voices of believers and dampen or misdirect their activism. By immaturity, I mean the giddy or downcast mood swings set off by the oscillating fortunes of “our side.”

The childishness Jesus smiled at in the religionists of his times, dance with me Monday, weep with me Tuesday (Luke 7:32), is unworthy of Daniel’s band. Politics doesn’t work that way.

Warned that Herod might kill him, Jesus again responds with a smile and a shrug, brushing off the king as “that fox” (Luke 13:32). He was secure in his own kingship—under which we should be equally secure, unawed by any and all politicians or political winds.

As the Lord set his face toward Jerusalem, Herod or no Herod, we need to set ours toward the New Jerusalem, which includes, until he returns, witnessing for Christ in the polity where we happen to find ourselves, serving him patiently and cheerfully in good times and bad.

## *What Politics Isn’t*

Christian citizens need to remember three things. Politics is not war. Politics is not optional. And politics is not ultimate.

(1) Because politics is not war, opponents are not our enemies and defeat is not death. Our life, liberty, and property are not forfeited in defeat, even if in some degree impaired. We live to fight another day. The end doesn’t justify the means. Christ’s command is still to love everyone; everyone.

(2) Politics is not optional, though, because the decisions we all make together in self-government still matter a lot. Justice and injustice hang in the balance. The plight of the poor and downtrodden cries out to us. Civic engagement is a duty. God still calls us to seek the welfare of the community in which we’re placed (Jeremiah 29:7).

(3) Nor is politics ultimate, however. The New Jerusalem alone is ultimate. We’re but pilgrims here, seeking a city that has foundations (Hebrews 11:10). The Babel project that first failed in Genesis 11, a tower built to heaven, has been failing ever since. The modern tendency of rendering more and more to Caesar, less and less to God (Matthew 22:21), leads not to utopia but over a cliff.

## *Resist the Undertow*

Rendering too much to the state, the government, bossy politicians and bureaucrats, policies and programs, manmade laws and regulations, deadens human flourishing, as all history shows with negative examples—and as the exceptional American story shows positively.

But that's not the worst thing about it from the standpoint of a Christ-follower. The worst thing about rendering wrongly in the political arena is that it corrupts our God-reliance with Caesar-reliance and self-reliance. It's spiritually enslaving and degrading. It tarnishes the divine image in each of us.

That's the "why" of daring to be a Daniel. As individuals and as the body of Christ, we must resist the idolatrous undertow.

Or differently put, we must refuse to bend and sway to the seductive music that worldly power plays as a sort of soundtrack for political hypnosis (Daniel 3:5).

During six years as a senator, as I advanced in leadership and became all too comfortable with the flattery and ego that come with public office, I fought back with two brief prayers or "God moments" for the bookends of each day.

In the morning, walking up the grand staircase to tackle the legislative agenda, I'd quietly say, "Lord, deliver me today from senatorial pomp."

In the evening, walking down after battles won and lost, compromises honorably or dishonorably made, I'd put it all on His altar with the words—partly in jest but partly serious—"Lord, how much of my soul did I lose today?"

## *Our Witness Matters*

How faithfully I lived up to those two aspirations in 2200 days of legislating, others would have to judge.

I only know it felt good to put my armor on again and again in those small ways—and I thank the same God who saw me through the Watergate White House for seeing me through the Colorado General Assembly. All glory to Him.

Let's be honest. In neither setting was I, one person participating in the self-government of these United States, a significant factor in how things turned out. Your acts of political witness, heralded or unheralded, probably won't be very significant either.

That's not the point, though. Our witness matters immensely to God, even if it matters little or not at all to the world.

While we of course want righteousness in the political arena, we want God honored and the Constitution obeyed and the common good upheld, those things may or may not result from our best efforts.

We must always remember that America is not in the Bible. It's not a province of the Lord's unshakable kingdom (Hebrews 12:28). Neither was Babylon.

When Daniel, unscathed by the lions, emerged and told Darius, "O king, live for ever," that didn't make it so (Daniel 7:21). Both the emperor and his empire were soon gone.

What lives forever is Daniel's daring witness under Christ the one true King.

He exemplified what we now know as Mother Teresa's precept, "God hasn't called me to be successful, but simply to be faithful." The cynics may say you and I are but ants on the chariot wheel of onrushing history; let them. We know better. We'll give it our all regardless.

### *Three A's*

To conclude, then, here's my idea of what giving it our all means. King Jesus, I believe, wants us to be faithful in just a few simple things for the short span of years we're in this life. I'll summarize them in three A's.

(1) Day by day we live in Him by breathing God's air. We inhale truth and love from Scripture, then exhale them in prayer and relationships.

Breathe in, breathe out. Inhale, exhale. Trying to do it any other way may amount to existence—but this alone is life.

(2) Day by day we serve Him by building God's ark. This world drowning in sin and suffering and selfishness needs a vessel of rescue. A whole fleet of them, in fact.

That's the church as a divine institution along with all the human institutions mankind relies on, good government included. Hear those rushing floodwaters? Grab a hammer and pitch in.

(3) Day by day, finally, we proclaim Him by being God's ambassadors. Somebody within this very hour may cross my path in personal darkness desperate to know the Light of the World. Is my faith candle under a basket—or up where that struggling brother or sister can see it?

To help others find righteousness is to be a shining star in eternity, we read at the close of the Book of Daniel (12:3). What a benediction.

## *Up with the King*

There's no sugar-coating the trends for America and Western civilization right now. Things are going to get worse before they get better. We live in wicked times. Evil giants walk abroad.

All the more reason for Christian citizens to be men and women of daring. God won't fail to honor the risks we take for Him, the sacrifices we make.

As the hymn puts it, "Many giants, great and tall, stalking through the land, headlong to the earth would fall—if met by Daniel's band."

Join me then. Together we dare. Together we prevail. Down with the giants. Up with the King!

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*"O king, live forever"? Only one King ever has.*

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