

LESSONS
from the
LIONS' DEN

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Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to all the people who find themselves in a place (either geographically or circumstantially) where they don't want to be. May this booklet be a reminder to those of you who are in such a place that you are not there by accident. You are there because God has allowed you to be there. And He has a purpose He wants to accomplish in your life through whatever you may be facing. So be encouraged. God is still, even now, very much in control.

Introduction

I don't like tight spaces. Crowded elevators, the third row of an SUV, and MRI tubes are not my favorite places to be. When I'm in a tight space like that, all I really want is out.

I developed an aversion to tight spaces when I was very young. My dad and I were in St. Louis attending the Southern Baptist Convention. While there, we thought it would be fun to take the tram ride up to the top of the 630-foot *Gateway Arch*. It's 63 stories high.¹ On our ascent, the tram got stuck. There we were with no windows and no way out. It was my first time to experience claustrophobia. After what seemed like several hours (but was actually only a few minutes), the tram started moving again. We made it to the top. We looked out the little windows overlooking the city. We then rode the tram back down. On that memorable day, we saw a beautiful view of St. Louis, and I gained a distaste for tight spaces.

I've learned something since then. Tight spaces are not limited to four walls being close together. Sometimes we get in a tight space circumstantially. Things beyond our control begin to close in on us. We find ourselves in a place where we don't want to be. We find

ourselves experiencing something we don't want to experience. A serious illness. A flooded house. The loss of a job. A breakup. A divorce. The death of a loved one. A family member with Alzheimer's. A job transfer to an unfamiliar city. A lonely college dorm room. These are just some of the tight spaces people sometimes find themselves in. And when the walls start closing in, it can be an emotionally traumatic experience.

Are you in a place like that right now? Are you in a place where you don't want to be? Do you feel confined? Trapped? Do you feel like there's no way out? If you do, this booklet was written just for you.

Before we go any farther, let me say at the outset that there is hope. God won't literally let the walls close in on you. His grace is sufficient. He's with you. And eventually, one way or another, you will be delivered. Those tram doors in the *Gateway Arch* finally opened for us. We got out of our tight space, and you'll get out of yours, too.

Daniel's Tight Space

In the ancient world, there were different methods used for capital punishment. One method was to literally throw the guilty person

to the lions. This was evidently the method the Persians used.

Daniel, along with many other Jews, had been taken captive from Jerusalem to Babylon when the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the city of Jerusalem. Daniel was a young man at the time, probably a teenager (*see Daniel 1:1-7*). In the passing of time, the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians, and Darius was the Persian king. It was during Darius' reign that Daniel was thrown to the lions in the infamous "lions' den." But why was he thrown to the lions? What had he done wrong? Not a thing in the world. He was framed.

Darius had divided his kingdom into one hundred and twenty provinces. Each province was assigned a leader called a "satrap" (*Daniel 6:1*). A satrap would have functioned somewhat like a mayor today. Over these one hundred and twenty satraps, Darius appointed three governors who oversaw the satraps. One of those governors was Daniel. In time, "*Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm*" (*Daniel 6:3*). As a result of Daniel's popularity with the king, the other two governors and the one hundred

and twenty satraps became jealous of him and wanted him out of the picture. They knew Daniel had done nothing wrong, so they devised a wicked scheme that would land him in the lions' den (*see Daniel 6:4-5*).

These leaders went to the king and suggested that for thirty days no one in Persia could pray to anybody except to Darius himself. They knew of Daniel's faith, and they knew he would continue to pray to his God. The king unwisely signed their suggestion into law. For thirty days, no one in Persia was allowed to pray unless they were praying to, or petitioning, the Persian king (*see Daniel 6:6-9*).

Daniel knew about the new law, but he wasn't intimidated. He continued to pray to the one true God three times a day with the windows of his "upper room" wide open so everyone could see him (*Daniel 6:10*). Daniel's jealous peers reported this to the king who then had no choice but to sentence Daniel to be thrown to the lions. Darius didn't want to do this, but he had no other option. A law was a law. So Daniel was cast into the lions' den (*see Daniel 6:11-17*).

Miraculously, God spared Daniel's life. In fact, the Bible says that He "*shut the lions'*

mouths” so that Daniel came out of the den completely unharmed (*Daniel 6:22*).

But what was that lions’ den like? John MacArthur points out that “the word ‘den’ is related to the Hebrew term meaning ‘to dig,’ so it refers to an underground pit.”² MacArthur goes on to explain that this underground pit most likely had “a hole at the top” from which food was dropped for the lions to eat and “a door at the foot of a ramp or on a hillside through which the lions could enter.”³

Use your imagination. Daniel was put into this underground pit either through the hole at the top (presumably by the use of a rope) or through the side door where the lions went in. But once he was in there, he couldn’t get out. The side door was locked from the outside, and the hole in the top was much too high to jump out of, not to mention the fact that the hole was covered with a heavy stone (*see Daniel 6:17*). Daniel was in a mess. He was confined. He was trapped in a place where he didn’t want to be. He was in a tough, tight space.

Such is the nature of lions’ dens. For Daniel, it was a literal, dark, underground pit where he was surrounded by lions. For you, it’s a different type of place. It’s a hospital bed. It’s a place of deep grief. It’s an unemployment

line. It's a nursing home. It's a surgical waiting room. It could be a thousand different places, but it intimidates you, confines you, suffocates you, and causes you much anxiety.

The remainder of this booklet will be devoted to some very practical and applicable lessons we can learn from Daniel's lions' den experience. May *Daniel's experience* encourage you. May *Daniel's God* comfort you. And may *the end of Daniel's story* ignite a spark of hope in you that your night in the lions' den will eventually end. And when it does, you will be able to inspire others the same way that Daniel inspires us all.

Lessons from the Lions' Den

1. No one is exempted from the lions' den.

Wouldn't it be great if really good people got an exemption from pain, isolation, unfair treatment, and suffering? Wouldn't it at least be wonderful if God's children were spared from such difficulties? Of course it would. But that's not reality. Jesus said, "*In the world you will have tribulation*" (John 16:33). So we have to accept pain and suffering as part of the earthly experience. No one gets a pass on that.

If any person in the Old Testament was going to be exempted from suffering, it seems like it would have been Daniel. He was a man of strong convictions. The Bible says that he “*purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself*” (*Daniel 1:8*). He was committed to living a life of purity that would honor God. In addition, he had a great attitude. The Bible states that “*an excellent spirit was in him*” (*Daniel 6:3*). He was a godly man who lived a righteous life (*see Daniel 6:4*). On top of that, Daniel did what was right even when doing what was right wasn’t easy. After all, he continued to pray to God even when doing so put him in great danger (*see Daniel 6:5-11*). And yet, even with all of those amazing qualities, he ended up in the lions’ den. That says to me that no one is immune from difficulties in this life.

Even a casual reading of the Bible reveals that some of God’s choicest servants suffered greatly. In the Old Testament, Joseph was falsely accused of a crime he never committed and sent to languish in an Egyptian prison as a result. Jeremiah was also unfairly imprisoned. King David had more enemies than he could count. In the New Testament, John the Baptist was beheaded. Stephen was stoned to death. James was killed by the sword. John was exiled to the island of Patmos where he grew

old alone. Even Jesus suffered. He suffered more than anyone. And He was perfect. No one is exempted from pain and heartache. It is part of living on planet earth.

We learn from the pages of church history that Peter was crucified upside-down. Paul was beheaded. And think of all the early Christians who were burned at the stake for their faith in Christ. Whether we like it or not, suffering is part of life. No wonder the Bible says, “*We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God*” (Acts 14:22).

In my life and ministry, I have seen some of the *best people* go through some of the *worst suffering*. Parents losing children. Married couples separated by death. Children with cancer. Adults with debilitating diseases. People being maligned and ruthlessly slandered (many times falsely) by the words of those who hate them.

Why does God allow these things to take place? Why do *bad things* happen to *good people*? While we may not get the full answer to that question until we get to heaven, we know now that we live in an imperfect, fallen world. As a result, we, as members of the human race, suffer in ways we never would have had sin never entered our world.

Suffering is part of life, at least for now. In heaven there will be no suffering. But on earth there is. No one is immune. No one is exempted. No one gets a pass. Not Daniel. Not Jesus. Not me. And not you.

2. *God's children are not alone in the lions' den.*

While both Christians and non-Christians suffer in this life, there is an advantage to being a Christian. The advantage is this: *Christians never suffer alone.* Jesus is with us. In fact, Jesus is *in us* in the person of the Holy Spirit. We are never alone. God Himself has said, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*" (*Hebrews 13:5*).

The Bible tells us that God sent His angel to be with Daniel in the lions' den (*see Daniel 6:22*). Think about that. In that dark, underground pit, Daniel was not alone. God was there. Perhaps this angel was the pre-incarnate Christ. Perhaps he wasn't. But either way, the angel in that lions' den represented the very presence of God. Daniel was not alone. And neither is any child of God.

The thing I am most thankful for is the presence of God in my life. I have never actually seen God, but I know beyond the

shadow of any doubt that He is with me at all times. That's His promise to me. And His presence gives me peace, comfort, and hope.

As I reflect on my own life, I have been blessed to have God with me during those seasons when I felt confined, trapped, and as though I had no good move on the checkerboard of life. There are times when we get into a pit that we just can't get out of on our own.

I have learned something about those experiences. Before God gets us *out of the pit*, He wants us to become aware of His presence with us *in the pit*. I believe that God values our awareness of His presence with us *in the pit* even more than He values our deliverance *from the pit*. In God's mind, *His presence* is more important than *our deliverance*. Our deliverance, without an awareness of His presence, would only mean that we can return to life as normal. But if we can develop an awareness of His presence in the depth of our pit, our lives will become far greater than normal. Our lives will have a depth, a richness, and a peace about them that they never would have had without our visit to the lions' den.

If we learn to value *God's presence* even more than we value *our deliverance* then we will have taken a huge step forward in our walk

of faith. We will, in essence, be saying, “God, You know I want to be delivered from this situation. You know how badly I want my circumstances to change. But even more than that, I want to come to know You better than I ever have before. I want to be so satisfied with You that the changing of my circumstances, the deliverance from my situation, is secondary to my awareness of Your presence here with me right now.”

Friend, if we can get to a place where we can honestly pray a prayer like that, we will have already, in a very real sense, been delivered. We will have been delivered from an attitude that says, “Get me out. Change my circumstances.” And we will have been lifted to a place where we can say, “Rescue or no rescue, a changing of my circumstances or not, all I want is to be at peace with You. And being at peace with You isn’t dependent upon my circumstances. It’s dependent upon my faith. And my faith is dependent upon Your promise that You are always with me. It’s not dependent upon my ability to *feel* Your presence. It’s dependent upon Your promise, whether I *feel* anything or not. So, please God, help me to trust You right here and right now. You’re in the lions’ den with me. And that’s even more important to me than getting out of

the lions' den. *Your presence means more to me than my deliverance.*"

I pray to God that each of us could pray a prayer like that and really mean it. If we could, we would bring much joy to the heart of God. And that kind of attitude, that kind of faith, would bring much peace to our own hearts.

Remember, though, the key is having a strong awareness of God's presence. The Bible says that in His presence we find "*fullness of joy*" (*Psalm 16:11*). So when we are living our lives with an awareness of God's presence, we have joy in our hearts. That's why the devil does everything he can to cause us to lose our awareness of God's presence. He entices us to sin. He places fearful thoughts in our minds. He seeks to confuse us. He tries to overwhelm us. He causes us to get so busy doing a thousand other things that we forget about the presence of God. *An overloaded schedule, an overactive mind, and an overly stressed central nervous system can all cause us to lose our awareness of God's presence.*

And this can happen before we even know it. If you feel as though you have lost your *intimacy with* and *closeness to* God, I want to suggest a prayer that could greatly help you. It is a prayer that the Lord placed on my heart

during a stressful season of my life. I went through a time when I felt so overwhelmed, so isolated, and so very alone that for the first time in my life I almost completely lost my awareness of God's presence. I knew in my heart that He was with me, but I just couldn't sense His presence. During this time, I prayed a prayer one day that I just knew God had led me to pray. Here's the prayer: "*Jesus, I pray that Your invisible presence will become more real to me than the visible presence of anybody else.*"

In time, God began to answer that prayer for me. I began to once again sense His presence in my life. For me, it was a series of very difficult circumstances regarding my health and a pace of life and ministry that had completely overwhelmed me. As I began to make some practical changes to my schedule, and as I learned to trust God more fully with my health, His presence became real to me once again. But it took some time.

Perhaps circumstances in your life have caused you to *unintentionally* take your focus off of God as well. It's easy to focus so much on our families, our health, our work demands, and our ministry responsibilities that we *gradually* and *unknowingly* begin to think more about those things than we do about God. It's

not that we have stopped loving God, or even that we have stopped trusting Him. Instead, it's that our minds are so full of other concerns that we have stopped enjoying the presence of God. When the pace of our lives, and even the pace of our thoughts, is too fast, that's what often happens. We stop enjoying God.

If you find yourself in a place like that today, *my prayer for you is that the invisible presence of Jesus will become more real to you than the visible presence of anybody else.* In time, I believe God will answer that prayer. In the meantime, keep trusting Him and ask Him to help you to focus more on His presence than on your problems and responsibilities. And ask Him to help you slow your pace of life down as much as possible. *Do less and enjoy God more.*

Daniel wasn't alone in his lions' den, and you aren't alone in yours either. The difference between us and Daniel is that he had *an awareness of God's presence* while we sometimes lose that. But when the awareness of His presence returns to our lives, all is well again. The peace returns. The confidence comes back. The joy is restored.

I can't stress it strongly enough: *The awareness of God's presence changes*

everything about our lives. I believe with all of my heart that it is our greatest need. So pray that God will restore to you a strong awareness of His never-changing, unending, all-sufficient presence because God's children are never alone in the lions' dens of life.

3. *God's children are never at the mercy of the lions.*

The lions' den wouldn't be all that scary if there were no lions in it. It's the lions that frighten us. Why? Because lions have the power and the ability to destroy us.

For Daniel, those were real-life lions. According to one source, male lions can weigh up to five hundred and fifty pounds, and female lions can weigh up to four hundred pounds.⁴ So these lions Daniel faced were big, strong, and intimidating. And, to make matters worse, they had enormous appetites.

We face different types of lions. They don't typically walk on four legs. They probably aren't as large as Daniel's lions. But they are just as intimidating. They roar just as loudly. They are just as vicious. They can be just as deadly. A cancer diagnosis. The death of a spouse. A forced retirement. A vindictive threat. A vicious rumor. The unkind words of

others. These things can destroy a person's life, damage his reputation, and threaten his future. Our very destinies can be shaken.

I find great comfort when I read these words from Daniel, "*My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths*" (Daniel 6:22). In that lions' den, Daniel discovered a powerful truth: *With God's presence comes God's protection*. Those lions that threatened to destroy Daniel couldn't open their mouths. God had miraculously shut them. God proved to be stronger than the lions.

Here we learn an important truth: *We, as God's children, are never at the mercy of the lions*. Instead, the lions are at the mercy of God. While the lions may be stronger than we are, they are no match for God. This is what the Bible means when it says, "*He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*" (1 John 4:4).

God had rendered the lions in that den powerless to harm Daniel. He does the same thing to the lions in our lives. Those lions you may be facing can't get to you without first coming through God. And if God allows them to get to you, there's a reason for it. And, at any moment, He can shut their mouths and make it possible for you to continue on in life. Whatever lions may be circling around you, I

encourage you not to focus on them. Keep your focus on the Lord. Remember, He controls the lions.

My life has been greatly enriched by a handful of pastors. One of those pastors is Dr. Charles Stanley at First Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Years ago, I heard him tell a story I never have forgotten.

When he became the pastor of First Baptist in 1971, it was a tumultuous time in the church. For the two years prior, he had been the church's associate pastor. Then, when the senior pastor retired, the church voted to call Dr. Stanley as the new pastor. But it was a real mess. Almost forty percent of the church voted against him. Many left the church. Many resigned their positions of leadership within the church. Some threatened him, and one man punched him in the face during a service. What was the problem? Evidently some of the members were there more for social reasons than for spiritual ones. They didn't approve of the strong Bible preaching of Dr. Stanley. They criticized him for, of all things, preaching truths like the authority of Scripture, the need for people to be saved, and the imminency of Christ's return. It seems like a pastor would be affirmed and applauded for preaching those basic biblical truths. But that wasn't the case in

Atlanta, at least not by the hostile, vocal minority. The real problem was that he couldn't be bullied by the "movers and shakers" in the church. The real problem was that he took his lead from God, not from the church "power players." They couldn't control Dr. Stanley, so they did everything they could to try to intimidate him into leaving. It was a difficult time to say the least.

During this season, an elderly lady in the church asked Dr. Stanley to come to her house and visit her. She had something she wanted to show him. He was busy, of course, and since it wasn't an emergency, he naturally put it off as long as he could. Finally, though, he went to visit this aging lady. When he arrived at her house, she told him she wanted him to look at a picture. It was a picture of Daniel in the lions' den. She said, "Pastor, tell me everything you see in that picture." He looked at it for a moment and then said, "Well, I see Daniel. I see the lions. I see the inside of the den." She said, "You haven't seen it yet." He cited some other things he saw in the picture. She then said, "Is that it? Is that all you can see?" He told her that it was. She then replied, "Well, you missed the most important thing. You missed the fact that Daniel isn't looking at the lions. He's looking up to God." And then she said, "Pastor, you've got some lions down there

at the church who are after you. If you are going to survive, you have got to get your eyes off of the lions and get them onto God. Forget the lions. Ignore the lions. Focus on God!”

Dr. Stanley said that experience changed his perspective of his situation. From that day on, he put his focus completely on God. As the old song instructs us to do, he learned to turn his eyes upon Jesus in a fresh, new way.⁵

Friend, that’s what you must do. Get your eyes off of that medical report. Get your eyes off of your loneliness. Get your eyes off of the people who are talking behind your back. Get your eyes off of the lions in your life. Look up. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Focus on Him. He controls the lions. He is in control of whatever you are facing. *As children of God, we are never at the mercy of the lions. We are at the mercy of God.* And our faith, our focus, our hearts, and our attention must be always and forever upon Him.

The great Christian Corrie Ten Boom once said, *“If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed. If you look within, you’ll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you’ll be at rest.”*⁶ Be at rest, my friend. Don’t look around. Don’t look within. Look above. Remember, *with God’s presence comes His*

protection. That means you're not at the mercy of the lions. God knows how to shut their mouths and keep you safe. Look up and keep moving forward!

4. *In the darkness of the night, remember that morning is coming.*

I have always liked the verse in the Bible that says, "*Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning*" (*Psalms 30:5*). That verse provides such hope for a better day tomorrow than we sometimes experience today. And we need that hope because sometimes the day can be just awful and the night can linger on and on.

I don't like long nights. I like to fall asleep fast and then wake up eight hours later and feel like the night only lasted for a few seconds. But I don't always sleep that soundly. Sometimes the night drags on, and I wonder when the morning will ever arrive.

I bet you've had nights like that, too. And, even if you're a good sleeper, I bet you've had some seasons in your life like that. Seasons that just wouldn't end. Sometimes the "night" is an eight-hour period. Sometimes it's eight months. Sometimes it's eight years. Sometimes the "night" can last longer than that.

Hope is a powerful thing. Hope says, *“Something better is coming. Tomorrow will be better than today. God has something special planned for me. One day my life will be better.”* God wants us to live with hope like that.

But when the night lingers on, sometimes we lose our hope. And the loss of hope can be a debilitating thing. That’s why the Bible says, *“Hope deferred makes the heart sick”* (Proverbs 13:12). When we lose our hope, we lose our excitement about the future. We no longer have anything to look forward to.

Amazingly, Daniel never lost his hope. He knew that God was with him. He knew that His angel had shut the lions’ mouths. He knew that he would survive this experience. We don’t read anything in the biblical narrative that would cause us to believe that Daniel was anxious, uptight, discouraged, or depressed. *In a hopeless situation, Daniel still had hope.*

The question is this: *How can we keep our hope when the night drags on?* Well, two thoughts come to mind. First, *find your peace in the presence of God.* He is with you in your current situation. Second, *keep anticipating what God has next for you.* When Daniel saw that God had shut the lions’ mouths, he knew

that the lions wouldn't kill him and that he still had a future. You still have a future, too.

Everyone needs something to look forward to. People look forward to a lot of different things: graduating from college, getting a job, getting married, having children, saving a certain amount of money, having a bigger house, enjoying a long retirement. Those are good things to look forward to, but those aren't the things that I'm primarily looking forward to in my own life. Do you want to know what I'm looking forward to? *I'm looking forward to getting to a place in my spiritual life where I am so relaxed in Jesus that I never get rattled.* That's my new life goal! And I'm looking forward to the arrival of that day! Because of God's goodness to me in the *past* and His provision for me in the *present*, I am confident that He will get me to a place in the *future* where I am seldom, if ever, rattled. And that gives me something to look forward to!

Can you imagine the excitement Daniel must have felt "*very early in the morning*" of his deliverance when he heard King Darius' voice giving the order to get him out of that pit (*Daniel 6:19*)? What a relief that must have been. Morning had finally come. Friend, your morning is coming, too. One day, the King of kings will give the order to His angels to lift

you out of your lions' den. Your deliverance is on the way!

Your question is probably this: *When will that day arrive?* While I can't answer that question specifically, I know this: *Your deliverance will be right on time.*

Someone has said, "God not only determines the *depth* of our trials, but He determines the *length* of them as well." Think about that. Your trial has an end date. It won't last forever. And God's timing is always perfect. Morning will come. At some specific, God-appointed time, your long night will end. Whatever you do, don't give up now! You're too close to being delivered!

5. *When things are dark and your vision is limited, don't focus on things that are currently hidden from you.*

Until the morning comes, don't try to figure everything out. Don't sit around all night asking why things are happening like they are. In other words, *when things are dark, don't focus on things that are currently hidden from you.*

Here's a good question: *How dark was Daniel's lions' den? Was it pitch dark?* You

could make an argument that it was. After all, it was night for at least part of the time he was in there, so it was dark outside. There was a closed door on the side of the pit and a heavy stone covering the hole in the top. Even during the daylight hours, how could any light get in? If it was pitch dark that means that Daniel couldn't see the lions. They could see him because of their great night vision, but he couldn't see them. So *he chose not to focus on what he couldn't see*. That's why he was so peaceful and calm.

Maybe, though, there was some light in that den. Remember, an angel was in there with Daniel, and angels are emissaries of light. What is unclear is whether or not Daniel could see the angel. Sometimes, many times, most of the time, perhaps all of the time, we can't see angels. I've never seen an angel, but I know they watch over me. Perhaps Daniel's angel illuminated the lion's den so that he could see both the angel and the lions. The Bible just doesn't tell us whether the pit, on this occasion, was pitch dark or whether it was brightened up by the angel. But think about it. Even if Daniel could see the lions, he couldn't fully see all of them at the same time. Even with the gift of peripheral vision, it would not be possible for Daniel to look into the eyes of every lion at the same time. He couldn't see all of their

facial and visual expressions. So, in that sense, even if there was angelic light in that den, some of those lions were hidden from Daniel's sight at any given time. There were some things he just couldn't see. And that was a good thing. If Daniel had been focusing on those lions he might have wondered, "Is that one's mouth still closed? Is that one going to claw me to death?" Those thoughts would have robbed him of his peace and destroyed his hope. So the lions, at least some of them, were hidden from his eyes. He couldn't focus on *all* of them, so he chose not to focus on *any* of them. The biblical account portrays Daniel as calm and relaxed. *Daniel chose not to focus on things that were at least partially hidden from him. He chose to focus on God instead.* By having the right focus, Daniel was able to keep his peace.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible says, "*You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You*" (Isaiah 26:3). Think about what that verse is saying. It is saying that *our job is to trust God; His job is to give us peace.* That's quite a liberating thought. It's not our responsibility to keep ourselves peaceful and calm. It's our responsibility to trust God and keep our minds on Him. If we will do that, God has promised to keep our hearts peaceful and calm. He has promised to give us peace.

There are times in our lives when God hides things from us. He doesn't allow us to see everything that's going on. Sometimes He hides *His purposes* from us. Sometimes He hides *the actions of others* from us. Sometimes He hides *satanic schemes* that have been devised to destroy us from us. God knows that if we knew everything that was going on around us that we would feel overwhelmed and panic. Some things are simply hidden from our eyes.

Another one of my favorite Bible verses says, "*Who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely upon his God*" (Isaiah 50:10). Sometimes we do walk in circumstantial darkness. We can't see what's really happening in our lives. God doesn't tell us *why* we're going through *what* we're going through. There are times when God even hides *Himself* from us. Listen to this verse: "*Truly You are God, who hide Yourself*" (Isaiah 45:15). We can't always see what God is up to in our lives.

When *things* are hidden from us, when *God* is hidden from us, the wisest thing we can do is to trust Him. The Bible says, "*The secret things belong to the LORD our God*" (Deuteronomy 29:29). In another place it says, "*Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and*

lean not on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). There are times when things are hidden from our eyes, from our ability to understand. They are secrets. They are mysteries. They are known only to God. Perhaps He will reveal these mysteries to us one day, perhaps not. But for now, we have to make a choice to trust Him.

Life is full of things we just don’t understand. That’s why the Bible instructs us not to lean on our understanding. Our understanding isn’t always strong enough to hold us up.

I’ve learned this in life: *When we’re in the lions’ den, when it’s dark and things are hidden from us, we have a wonderful opportunity to put into practice all of the things we have previously learned about God.* Those are the times when God becomes real to us. Our “theology” gets incorporated into real life. This, when you think about it, is the purpose of the darkness...to teach us to trust God when nothing makes sense.

You need some basic truths tucked away in the back of your mind so when something bad happens you will have something strong to fall back on. You need some little nuggets, some foundational truths from Scripture, that you can

remind yourself of. I suggest these three. They've done me a world of good through the years:

- * God's in control.
- * God has a plan.
- * God's plan is good.

Memorize that. Believe that. Claim that. And say that out loud when you are in the darkness. God will be pleased. Satan will be silenced. You will be strengthened. And others will be blessed.

Don't focus on what you don't know and on what you can't currently understand. Focus on God's good plan instead. Remember, His plan is good whether you can see it now or not.

6. God will get the last word on your situation.

People end up in difficult circumstances for a lot of different reasons. Many times it is because of their own sinful choices. I think about the Old Testament prophet named Jonah. God told him to go in one direction, and he went the other way. He disobeyed. He sinned. And, as a result, he ended up in the belly of a great fish. Jonah got into a mess because of his own sin. Sometimes we get into a mess for the

same reason. *When we sin, there are always unpleasant consequences.* We must take responsibility for our actions.

But, at other times, it's not our sin that caused our problem. Maybe it's somebody else's sin. Maybe it's a circumstance beyond our control. Or maybe it's because we are seeking to live a godly life. Maybe you are in the predicament you are in today because you took a stand for God, and, when you did, all hell broke loose. That's what happened to Daniel. He ended up in the lions' den not because of any sin in his life, but because he loved God and was serving Him faithfully. Perhaps that has happened to you, too.

If so, be encouraged. You are not alone. Since the beginning, God's people have been mistreated because of their faith. The Bible says that "*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*" (II Timothy 3:12). Notice that if you even have a "*desire*" to live a righteous life that you will be persecuted by somebody.

So what are we supposed to do if this is the cause of our suffering? Well, first of all, make certain that this is truly the cause. When we find ourselves in a predicament, it's easy to immediately blame someone else and cling to

our own supposed godliness. But that's a dangerous thing to do. That approach leads to self-righteousness. And a self-righteous person never deals with his own sin. So ask God to reveal any and every sin in your life that could have led to your problem. Often times, He will reveal a sin that you need to confess and repent of. But if He doesn't, if it is true that you are being persecuted for your faith, if God makes it clear to you that you are caught up in a satanically-inspired personal attack, let me give you some suggestions.

First, pray for those who have turned against you. There is no biblical record of Daniel praying for those who threw him into the lions' den, but, when we get to heaven, I wouldn't be surprised to learn that he did. Pray for those who persecute you. This is clearly the right thing to do. Remember the words of Jesus: *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you"* (Matthew 5:44).

Second, cast yourself at the mercy of God. Ask Him to protect you, sustain you, and deliver you.

Third, leave the results in God's hands. He will do what is right in His own time and in His

own way. The Bible says that after Daniel was *delivered from* the lions' den that his accusers were *thrown into* the lions' den. Not just his accusers, but their children and their wives. We read that "*the lions overpowered them, and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den*" (Daniel 6:24). Isn't that interesting? What the accusers had planned for Daniel, they experienced themselves. What irony. It reminds me of the verse that says, "*Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him*" (Proverbs 26:27).

God is a God of justice. He Himself has said, "*Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them*" (Deuteronomy 32:35).

An ancient quote says, "*The mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small.*"⁷ A "mill" is a building or a factory of some kind "with machinery for grinding grain into flour."⁸ The process is slow but thorough. The above-mentioned quote compares God's vengeance to the grinding process that takes place in a mill. It isn't immediate. But it is thorough. Mark it down: *God will get the last word on your situation.* Just don't take matters

into your own hands. Let God be your vindicator.

I must close this section with a word of caution. Never, under any circumstance, should we pray for God to punish our enemies. We should pray instead for God to forgive our enemies. We should pray for Him to be merciful to them. That's what Jesus prayed for His executioners when He was on the cross (*see Luke 23:34*). That's what Stephen prayed for those who were stoning him to death (*see Acts 7:60*). And that's what we should pray for those who try to destroy us. We should pray that God would extend His grace and mercy to our enemies just like He has extended His grace and mercy to us. We should pray for their forgiveness. We should pray for God's mercy. And we should leave our case with God, praying that He will stay His hand.

7. *There's life after the lions' den.*

Daniel's story didn't end in the lions' den, and neither will yours. There is life after that disease, that heartbreaking experience, that financial reversal, that vocational setback, that season of grief. There came a day when Daniel was delivered out of that den. That day will come for you as well. What you are now experiencing will one day be a distant memory.

We read that “*Daniel was taken up out of the den*” (*Daniel 6:23*). One day those words will be written about you.

Even if you die in your lions’ den, there’s life after death. Cancer, or any other disease, won’t be the end of your story. If you are a Christian, death only affects your earthly body. Death can’t kill your soul. When you are summoned by the King of heaven out of your lions’ den of suffering, you will be totally, permanently, and eternally free. Your body will die, but your soul will be liberated.

After Daniel was delivered, his life became better than it had been before. First, he had a greater testimony. The Bible says, “*Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God*” (*Daniel 6:23*). For the remainder of his life, people said, “Aren’t you the man who was thrown to the lions?” *Daniel’s very existence became his greatest testimony.* The same thing will happen to you if you will just stay faithful. God doesn’t always keep us *from* the lions’ den, but He does keep us *in* the lions’ den. When you come out of yours, you will have a stronger testimony than ever before.

Even King Darius was convicted and blessed by Daniel’s remarkable deliverance.

Listen to his words: *“To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions”* (Daniel 6:25-27).

Through Daniel’s experience, the pagan king came to believe in God. How could he not believe in a God who had so powerfully protected Daniel? After that night in the lions’ den, Daniel had an incredible testimony. *A divine deliverance always results in a powerful testimony.* But remember, *you can’t be delivered unless you’re in a mess.* So that dilemma you’re now facing is the prerequisite for your deliverance. *Your testimony is being written while you wait on God to come through for you.*

Not only did Daniel emerge from that lions’ den with a stronger testimony, the Bible says that when he came out he *“prospered”* (Daniel 6:28). God rewarded him for the trouble he had experienced. He gave him what the Bible

calls “*double honor*” (*Isaiah 61:7*). He gave him more than he had before. God always does that. He will give you more of whatever He wants you to have. More faith. More influence. More friends. More compassion. More love. More peace. More possessions. More opportunities. More of whatever He wants you to have. After his time in the lions’ den, Daniel had more years to serve the Lord. He saw visions. He made a difference in his world. God gave him “*beauty for ashes*” (*Isaiah 61:3*). Daniel’s story had a happy ending.

This is what God has in mind for you. When you are pulled out of that lions’ den, you will have more of a testimony than ever before. And you will have more of an influence on others than you ever imagined possible. Rest assured, *the lions’ den you are currently in will serve you well in the end.*

Let’s go back to the illustration I shared earlier about all the trouble Dr. Stanley had at First Baptist Church in Atlanta in the early 1970s. How did that story end? Well, at the time of this writing, he is now eighty-six years old, and, by the grace of God, he is still pastoring that church. The “lions” who sought to destroy him are no longer on the scene. And amazingly, he is still pastoring the same church

almost fifty years later. For him, there has been a lot of life after the lions' den. Remember, *it's not over until God says it's over*. Keep focusing on Him. One way or another, the best is yet to be!

A Helpful Thought

When I'm going through a difficult time in my own life, I try to remember three prepositions. The words "*in*," "*for*," and "*through*" always encourage me. I remind myself, first of all, that God is doing something "*in*" me. He's perfecting my faith. He's purifying my character. He's in the process of making me a little more like Jesus. He's doing something "*in*" me.

I then remind myself that God will one day do something "*for*" me. He will give me whatever He wants me to have. Just like He "*prospered*" Daniel, He will one day "*prosper*" me (*Daniel 6:28*).

Then, God will do something "*through*" me. He will use me to encourage others from the experiences He's seen me through. I can, in some small way, be an instrument of blessing in the hands of God. When God has done something "*in*" us, He can then do something "*through*" us. The Bible says that God

“comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (II Corinthians 1:4).

These three words will help you, too. In the lions’ dens of life, God wants to do something “*in*” you. Then, He wants to do something “*for*” you. And ultimately, He wants to do something “*through*” you. This seems to be the process God uses with His servants. We see it in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Daniel, Job, Peter, John, and Paul. It’s God’s way. He does something “*in*” you first, then something “*for*” you, then something “*through*” you. Don’t rush the process. The first part is the slowest part. It takes a while for God to do “*in*” us all that He needs to do. Actually, it takes a lifetime.

No matter where you are in life, regardless of how long you’ve known the Lord, God is always going to be doing something “*in*” you. Scholars tell us that Daniel was over eighty years of age when he had his lions’ den experience.⁹ All the way to heaven God will be doing things “*in*” us. Never assume that you’re too old to learn something new. *None of us has “arrived” yet.* We are works in

progress, and the work won't be complete until we see Jesus face to face. That's why the Bible says, "*He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*" (*Philippians 1:6*).

The Most Important Question

The thing I love about this true story of Daniel and the lions' den is that we can all relate to it. Sometimes we all end up in tight spaces where we don't want to be. But the most important question isn't: "*Can you relate to Daniel's experience?*" The most important question is: "*Do you know Daniel's God?*"

Early in the morning of his release from the lions' den, King Darius inquired, "*Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?*" (*Daniel 6:20*). As part of Daniel's answer, he said, "*My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths*" (*Daniel 6:22*). The most important words in that sentence are the first two words, "*My God.*"

To Daniel, God wasn't just the God of heaven and earth. He wasn't just the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He was Daniel's God. In other words, Daniel knew God in a personal way. Do you know God like that? Is

God real to you? Do you know Him personally? Do you have a relationship with Him? If not, the good news is that you can. You can begin a personal relationship with God right now.

The Bible says that *“whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved”* (Romans 10:13). That simply means if you will ask God to forgive you of your sins, if you will ask Him to save you, and then if you will trust Him to do it, that He will save you. You don't have to turn over a new leaf or promise to do better. You just have to ask Him to forgive you and help you to change. And then you have to trust Him to do it. If you'll do that, He will save you, and He will change you. And *you will do better because His Spirit will be in you to help you live your life God's way*. Pray this prayer if you want Jesus to save you:

“Dear Jesus,

Thank You for dying on the cross to pay for my sins. And thank You for coming back to life again. I need You in my life. I have sinned, and I am sorry. Please forgive me.

Right now, I ask You to come into my heart, forgive my sins, and make

me a Christian. I ask You to save me, and I trust You to do it. Welcome to my heart. Thank You that You will never leave me. Begin now to make me the person You want me to be.

*In Your Name I Pray,
Amen.”*

Friend, if you prayed that prayer, God just answered it. He just forgave your sins. He has come to live in your heart. And He will never leave you.

If you're in a lions' den right now, you're not alone. *Daniel's God is now your God.* And He's with you in that tight space. *The God who shut the mouths of Daniel's lions will shut the mouths of your lions, too.* He will protect you and keep you safe in His care.

And, one day, He will summon all of His children from the lions' dens of this life to live with Him forever in heaven. We will be free at last. We will be home. Our struggles will be over.

But don't wait until that day to enjoy God's presence. You have that right now, wherever you may be. When your night in the lions' den lingers on and on, use that time to commune

with God. He'll make the time pass faster.
And He'll fill your heart with perfect peace.
That's His promise for everyone who will trust
Him.

¹ Facts, US Geography Facts, "Gateway Arch Facts," http://www.softschools.com/facts/us_geography/gateway_arch_facts/2394/ (accessed 9/21/18).

² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Nashville, 1997, p. 1237.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "Lion," Wikipedia, September 16, 2018, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lion> (accessed 9/18/18).

⁵ Helen H. Lemmel, *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*, The Baptist Hymnal, Nashville, Convention Press, 1991, p. 320.

⁶ Debbie McDaniel, "40 Powerful Quotes from Corrie Ten Boom," Crosswalk.com, 5/21/15, <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/inspiring-quotes/40-powerful-quotes-from-corrie-ten-boom.html> (accessed 9/11/18).

⁷ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "*Retribution*," Poets Corner, <http://www.theotherpages.org/poems/2000/l/long52.html> (accessed 9/11/18).

⁸ "Mill," *Webster's II New College Dictionary*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 2001, p. 695.

⁹ John MacArthur, p. 1236.

Lessons from the Lions' Den

- 1. No one is exempted from the lions' den.*
- 2. God's children are not alone in the lions' den.*
- 3. God's children are never at the mercy of the lions.*
- 4. In the darkness of the night, remember that morning is coming.*
- 5. When things are dark and your vision is limited, don't focus on things that are currently hidden from you.*
- 6. God will get the last word on your situation.*
- 7. There's life after the lions' den.*

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