

The story of Daniel in the Old Testament is particularly relevant and instructive for us as modern-day Christians. The reason why? Because Daniel's story is much like that of all Christians—in reality and in potential. And that's surely no accident. Here are some of the story points.

First, Daniel was a serious follower of God. Does that sound obvious? Or, does that sound like a “given?” Well, the hard truth is, there are lots of unserious, half-committed Christians out there. Maybe you've heard somebody say something like, well, he's a friend “in name only.” Webster's dictionary defines “in name only” as this: “used to describe a person, thing, or action that does not have the qualities that its name suggests.” And, yes, there lots of “CINOs” out there—that would be “Christians In Name Only.” But, if we *are* going to enjoy the fullness of what God has for us, we have to be serious. But you know that!

Second, Daniel found himself immersed into a culture and under a government that did not honor the God of Israel. Nevertheless, his placement there and then meant he was to represent his God well there and then. This idea of “time and place” for Daniel—and us—was the subject of the Daniel “time and place” episode of the Whitestone Podcast. Be sure to give that one a listen! But just why is “time and place” important? Because every serious Christian is, by God's providence, constantly in a time and place where God can and will very effectively use them for purposes of His Kingdom.

Unfortunately, and somewhat surprisingly, many Christians often make the mistake of thinking that they are most clearly in the center of God's will when they are totally surrounded by Christian co-workers, especially if the workplace enterprise they are in is a Christian nonprofit.

But here's what I tell university students who are about to start their careers: if you are the only Christian in your workplace enterprise, well, *that's* when you can be absolutely sure God has appointed you there! Daniel, along with a few others like him, was strategically appointed to non-believing, kingdoms-of-this-world for his entire work life. And look how his persevering example of honoring God instructs us so well!

Third, Daniel was very competent. That's not just my opinion. Here what the book of Daniel says. “Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans.”

That's found in Daniel, chapter 1, verses 3 and 4 in the ESV. Listen again to the key words within these two short verses: again, the king of Babylon was looking for youths that were “skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace...” Notice that the king was not limiting his search to native Babylonians...no, he didn't want to be limited, he wanted the cream of the crop from the population of Judah, the country he had just defeated in war. Similar to the king, as strong stewards, great businesspeople and nonprofit leaders look for competence first in every key person in their organizations. That...exactly that...is the Christian's opportunity to be asked to join and then enhance a kingdom-of-this-world organization that needs help.

The extraordinary part is, the Babylonian king was the enemy of Judah, the very enemy who had just defeated Daniel's people. And there is no inkling that Daniel even considered seeking vengeance on the king. Rather, Daniel was prepared in his competence and his clear capacity for learning to serve wherever he was appointed—and that appointment fell in a kingdom directly hostile to the God that Daniel served.

Now, Daniel's situation foreshadows the privileged circumstance of every Christian: first, Colossians 1:13 tells us that the believer is transferred to the Kingdom of God—the born-again believer's true home as a new creature in Christ. Then that believer serves as a witness for Christ, proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom of God, and doing that proclaiming in the workplaces, neighborhoods, and communities where Christians serve. Just like Daniel, Christians are appointed to be at a geographic-specific time and place.

But let's not miss the main points about why Daniel was specifically selected: his knowledge, his capacity for learning, and his competence.

When I was the founding dean for the School of Business and Leadership at Colorado Christian University, I coined a slogan that is still core 25 years later: "The pioneering witness for Christ in the workplace is competence." This idea is drilled into the students during their entire time earning a professional business degree.

But why? It's simple—because if you are not competent in your work, you won't be listened to for a Christian witness. If you are a Christian doctor and botch a surgery, well then, good luck with being a truly effective witness for Christ. If you are a Christian lawyer and mess up in drafting a contract, neither your client nor your boss is then going to seek your advice for following your example on bigger life issues.

But when you are superbly competent at everything you touch and do, then, sooner or later, many will want to know what your foundational secrets are. In fact, in God's economy you are placed exactly where you are to be competent in your family, your church, your workplace enterprise. Competence is your foundational, door-opening key to effective Christian witness.

This may sound really basic. But the sad reality is, many people who claim Christ are perfectly content to be just average at their workplace enterprise. But the Apostle Paul exhorted the Philippians this way: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things."

We as Christians should pursue whatever is commendable and all that is excellent—and that lays the key foundation for witness and impact for Christ.

Go back and read the four verses that start the book of Daniel. This young man was in exactly the time and place God intended, even if it would seem unreasonable that it was going to be very hostile. But the qualifications set by the king give a benchmarking standard for every modern workplace enterprise: the king was looking for people with wisdom, knowledge endowment, lifelong learning, and competence!

Here's the point. If Daniel were not these things at the very time and place of Judah's defeat, then the entire book of Daniel would not exist as written: the pre-qualifying verses for Daniel's life as it was lived were the first four verses. So, here's the question: are we setting ourselves up to answer the call of God on our lives, the unique calling fulfilled by our unique competencies and knowledge and learning?

So, in our earlier episode, the first incredible relevancy of the book of Daniel to us as Christians was "time and place." God will indeed direct your steps. But the second relevancy of Daniel is amazing, and that is "competence." Our privilege, our opportunity is to be competent, ready for a life of fruitfulness in Christ!

Are we the "Daniel 1:4 Christians" God intends, poised to completely serve both God and man? Let's continue going all-in for growing our competence—it's the pioneering witness for Christ in the workplace!

