

SECRETARY'S SCRIBBLINGS

“Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.”
(Daniel ch 6 v 3 – 4)

Working in a Personnel Boarding Section, I am probably more aware than most that we are in the throes of another series of promotion boards. Some will be enthusiastically completing ever more complex self-nomination forms (you retired members don't know what you're missing ...) while others may be more reluctant with an eye to the added responsibility and pressure of the next grade.

Balancing home, church and employment responsibilities is certainly becoming increasingly difficult. Conscientious believers can be particularly prone to the dangers of perfectionism in all areas, especially when the need (be it spiritual or work-related) outstrips our individual capacity to meet it, however hard we seem to work.

Even before I joined the civil service, Daniel was one of my favourite Bible characters. Apart from Joseph (curiously, another civil servant), Daniel stands almost alone as a shining, unblemished character in an Old Testament full of kings and prophets who, however fervent their life for God, at times tarnished their walk through falling dramatically or by a disappointing tailing off into apostasy.

So how would Daniel go down in today's NICS? How would we rate in his circumstances? How do we rate in our own jobs? It's sometimes easy to segregate our lives and see our church involvement belonging more to God than our flexi-time. But I believe Daniel was “a man greatly beloved” by God because his intimacy with Him was lived out in the at times red-hot practicalities of a civil service position.

As Daniel's fellow civil-servants, how can we walk before God and our colleagues with perfection while avoiding the pressure that comes from an unhealthy perfectionism? Whether we are casual AAs or Perm Secs, I believe that Daniel's character provides us with two important civil service competences (to use 'promotion speak') which we all need to develop.

(i) “God is my judge”

Daniel's name means “God is my judge.” The Babylonians substituted this name with “Belteshazzar” which means “preserve his life”. When the going gets tough in our office, how many of us have a tendency to be Belteshazzars? “Keep the head down ... don't make waves ... look after no. 1 ... how will showing integrity or witnessing affect my career prospects? ... what will my line manager think of me?”

In contrast, on Daniel's first day in the Babylonian Civil Service, we read of him purposing in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank – an action which could have carried the death sentence. There is a beautiful simplicity and consistency about Daniel's life and I believe it stemmed from his consistently living in the knowledge that God, and God alone, was his judge. Every civil service decision he made, every response to “the

Minister” wasn’t weighed by its impact on Daniel or on the absolute monarchs he worked to, but was made with sole and awesome accountability to God Himself. (And as an aside to those of us who can find it all too easy to be forthright, we should notice Daniel’s courtesy and respect in all his dealings with those in authority.)

Knowing that God is our judge can be both convicting when we are tempted to cut corners and liberating when we’re under pressure but know we’re doing our best: He is the judge and evaluator of our work. Daniel lived without fear before heathen tyrants. Can we not commit our ways to God by fearing Him more than our other fears?

(ii) “Daniel kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God as he did before” (Daniel ch 6 v 10)

The other competence which we would need to develop and maintain is a consistent quality of daily prayer life. It is remarkable that we don’t teach children to sing “Daniel was an eminent civil servant” but rather “Daniel was a man of prayer, daily he prayed three times.” If we want to walk with utter integrity and be regarded as a civil servant with “an excellent spirit” (Daniel ch 5 v 12) then intimacy with God is the only way.

I don’t know if other Departments have ‘in year reviews’ of their objectives and ‘personal development plans’, but with Investors in People status, once a training need is formally identified in DHSSPS, there is an impetus to address it by the end of the appraisal year. It might do all of our career prospects good (both spiritual and “earthly”) if we decided that these competences needed immediate action. In the light of lions’ dens and fiery furnaces, though, it would be remiss of me not to include a Government Health warning with the competences ...

Happy promotion prospects!

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“And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none. Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them” (Ezekiel ch 22 v 30, 31)

The local CSCU group to which I belong has been studying the topic of prayer over the last few months. Two of our recent studies have concentrated on Daniel ch 9 v 3 – ch 10 v 14 and Ezekiel ch 22 v 23 – 31.

These passages can teach us many things about how to pray. However, there were two things which struck home to all of us in the group. Firstly: prayer affects nations.

Many of us pray with persistence and faith for people in our families and workplace to be saved. We readily seek God’s face when we are going through times of difficulty. During times of particular national trouble we may even pray about national issues, but the one thing that hit the Castle Buildings group was that we do not pray as we would pray if we truly believed what these two passages were teaching.

The study on Daniel focused on prayer’s role in spiritual conflict. We often interpret world events on a purely human level, but God revealed to Daniel that there is a spiritual battle going on behind the scenes for His people, and that Daniel’s prayer and self-chastening had a direct impact on that battle.

Similarly, the passage from Ezekiel shows us God seeking an individual to stand in the way of His judgement on a land where prophets, priests, princes, and people had all turned their back on His ways. Sound familiar?

As God's representatives in a civil service and in a society where God's laws are increasingly being legislated against and where the difference between what is clean and what is unclean is not being shown (Ezekiel 22 v 23), it is sobering to read God's verdict on Ezekiel's day: "I sought for a man among them ... that I should not destroy it: but I found none."

"I sought for a man ..." Not only was it being brought home to us that prayer affects nations, we were also learning that one person's prayers affect nations. While we all readily acknowledged that we were living in just such a society as Ezekiel was describing, as we looked around at each other in the room (there were 4 or 5 of us there most weeks), it slowly began to dawn on us that if God were looking round the Castle Buildings group for such a man, He might also easily record that He found none.

I believe that the Bible teaches us that, once we hear God's Word and understand it, we are accountable. Sharing these lessons may be an attempt to widen accountability, but we in the Castle Buildings group are nonetheless accountable, and the passage in Ezekiel leaves us in no doubt as to the consequence of failing to pray.

Not only do we have reason to pray, we have encouragement to pray. God Himself tells us that our prayer affects the outcome of conflicts in the spiritual warfare which we cannot see. He Himself looks for intercessors and reminds us that intercession does not fail. 1 Timothy ch 2 v 1 – 3 exhorts us that "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men: for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

Like me, you may need to review your quiet times, the contents of your prayer lists and your CSCU prayer times. Fasting may come higher on the agenda than it has. World figures might even become real people to us as we pray for them. Surprising changes for the better in their behaviour may lead us to wonder if we, too, may be playing a part in God's sovereign workings.

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Revelation ch 11 v 15