

Stewardship of Time and Talents

We often hear folks within the church speak about stewardship; and specifically, stewardship of time and talents. In the Christian, Lutheran tradition, what does this mean? Does God really have a say in what I do with my time and the talents (abilities) He has given me? How do I tune in to what God wants for my life?

We can learn from the prophet Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They were all taken captive and brought to Babylon to serve in the court of their conqueror, King Nebuchadnezzar. They were among the best and brightest of the Israelites. God had given them abilities (talents) and they were called on to serve Him in the court of a foreign king!

The story begins following the exile of the prophet Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to Babylon in Daniel 1

⁸ But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. ⁹ And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, ¹⁰ and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king."

¹¹ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." ¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. ¹⁶ So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. ¹⁷ **As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.** ¹⁸ At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

¹⁹ And the king spoke with them, **and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.** Therefore they stood before the king.

²⁰ And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom.

So, Daniel and his companions remained faithful to God and used the time and talents God had given each of them to serve where He had planted them. Daniel and his friends understood that these talents and abilities were given by God and should be nurtured as such. This is where the need for prayer comes into play. We need to seek God's wisdom in prayer in order to use our talents and abilities to the full for God's glory.

In the next part of our story, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream and he demanded that his wise men tell him the dream AND its interpretation (impossible for a mere man to do!). The wise men demurred and the king then demanded their heads. Daniel is faced with execution and he asks God to intercede.

The story continues in Daniel 2

Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, ¹⁸ **and told them to seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery**, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹ Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. ²⁰ Daniel answered and said:

**"Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.**

²¹ **He changes times and seasons;**

he removes kings and sets up kings;

he gives wisdom to the wise

and knowledge to those who have understanding;

²² **he reveals deep and hidden things;**

he knows what is in the darkness,

and the light dwells with him.

²³ **To you, O God of my fathers,**

I give thanks and praise,

for you have given me wisdom and might,

and have now made known to me what we asked of you,

for you have made known to us the king's matter."

Daniel asks his friends to intercede with God and I can only assume he also prayed for wisdom and rescue from the king's order. Even though all of these young men were already blessed by God to be gifted advisors to the king, they still went to God in prayer to seek His will and wisdom, in a life and death situation!

Daniel then offers a prayer of thanks for God's intervention.

Daniel's faithfulness to God is on display in chapter 2

Daniel answered the king and said, "No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked,
²⁸ **but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries**, and he has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days.

Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed are these...

Of course, Daniel tells the king the dream and interprets it for him.

The pagan king even recognizes and praises the one true God because of Daniel's witness! Both Daniel and his friends are promoted and given even more responsibility than before.

I think you can see through these examples, that the talents and abilities God has given to us are to be used for His service, no matter when or where this service might take us. As we faithfully use our talents and abilities, God gives us opportunities to use them for the sake of others and to give Him glory. He may also provide additional responsibilities as we grow and mature in the use of our abilities just like Daniel and his friends. Not all of the situations we experience in using our talents for God may be comfortable or without danger (as was the case for Daniel several times see also Daniel's interaction with Darius and the lions in Daniel 6). Just as He was with Daniel and his friends, God is faithful to us as He shows us in Word and Sacrament.

There are certainly ways in which we can squander the time and talent God has given to us. There are numerous examples of how people called by God misused their God-given abilities and time. Rather than concentrate on these, here are a few brief examples and references.

Saul (*1 Samuel 13 and 15*),

Solomon (began devoutly see *1 Kings 3*, fell away, see *1 Kings 11*, possibly returned to faith, see *Ecclesiastes*),

Nicodemus (devout Pharisee, wanted to understand Jesus see *John 3:1-21*, possibly came to faith later on see *John 19:39-42*),

and Paul (persecuted and murdered Christians see *Acts 7:58-8:3*, ended up as an apostle see *Acts 9:1-31*).