

HOW YOUR TRUST IN GOD CAN GROW

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From childhood onward, it was a matter of course for my family—and therefore also for my brother and me—to attend church services every week. As children, we naturally attended the children's service, which back then was still called "Sunday school." To this day, I am very grateful to my parents for that—but also to the "Sunday school uncles and aunts," as we called them, who familiarized us with the Bible stories from an early age. And so, naturally, we also had one of Anne de Vries's legendary children's Bibles at home, filled with numerous illustrations. They were simple, somewhat rough-edged black-and-white line drawings—not exactly child-friendly. These pictures—probably from the 1950s—always made a deep impression on me. Unfortunately, I no longer have that book, but my father used to read from it to us regularly. I loved it and literally devoured the adventurous, sometimes very exciting stories.

DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN

One of these stories particularly captivated me: Daniel in the Lions' Den.

Daniel—one of the most important advisors to the Babylonian King Darius—falls victim to a plot and is thrown into a dark pit full of hungry lions. A certain death sentence. But Daniel trusted in God—and God protected him from the lions, who remained as gentle as lambs, did not lay a finger on Daniel, and did not harm a single hair on his head. In the biblical illustration, Daniel stood upright with his head held high—completely fearless—in the midst of these lions, while they cowered in a corner, looking frightened, and kept a safe distance. They sensed the presence of a great, strong, and mighty angel whom God had sent to stand by Daniel's side. The lions, not Daniel, were in a life-threatening place—they sensed this and therefore behaved as quiet as a mouse, as gentle as a purring house cat.

As a child, I found the image of Daniel, standing so tall and completely fearless, incredibly powerful. It gave me a deep sense of comfort and security that springs from an unshakable trust in God's presence. For the story of Daniel is not merely an adventure tale or a pious legend concocted by humans. It is the true story of a man who, even under the most adverse circumstances, held fast to his trust in God and—surrounded by wild animals and in complete darkness—experienced what it means to rely entirely on God.

If you're not familiar with the story, I recommend setting this letter aside for now, opening a Bible, or going to bibleserver.com in your web browser to read Daniel 6:1–29.

SUMMARY OF EVENTS IN DANIEL 6

I'll briefly summarize the story here before we take a closer look at individual verses: The story takes place around 540 B.C. Daniel, a man of Jewish descent, had made a career as a government official and was now—at around 80 years of age—serving the Babylonian King Darius as one of his highest-ranking officials. His loyalty, wisdom, and reliability had earned him great esteem with the king, and he enjoyed the king's complete trust, which aroused envy among his colleagues. They therefore sought a reason to accuse Daniel but found none. Finally, they realized that his firm faith in God was his only vulnerability. They knew that Daniel would remain faithful to his God, come what may.

So they persuaded King Darius to enact a new law: for 30 days, no one was allowed to make a request to any god or human being, but only to the king. Anyone who broke the law was to be thrown into the lions' den. Like many kings, Darius was very full of himself and also somewhat vain. Flattery always worked on him—so he signed the law.

Daniel heard about it but did not change his prayer life. As usual, he prayed to God three times a day. His enemies watched him, eventually caught him red-handed praying aloud by an open window, and brought charges against him before the king. Darius now realized he had fallen into a trap. It cut him to the quick. He was dismayed and tried to save Daniel, but a law once enacted by the king could not be revoked—not even by the king himself.

So Daniel was eventually thrown into the lions' den. The king, however, wished that his God—whom Daniel had always served faithfully—might save him—and he hoped fervently for it. Darius could not sleep all night, and he had completely lost his appetite. Early in the morning, he hurried to the lions' den and called out to Daniel.

To his great joy, Daniel answered. He was, in fact, very much alive. God had sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths. He was completely unharmed because he had trusted in God. Thereupon, Darius had Daniel brought up out of the den. True to the saying "He who digs a pit for others will fall into it himself", the king punished the scheming accusers and proclaimed throughout his entire kingdom that Daniel's God is the living God, whose reign is eternal and who can save and preserve people.

THE LIONS' DENS OF OUR PRESENT LIFE

So much for the summary. As I said, this is not a fairy tale from *1001 Nights*, nor is it merely a pious legend or a simple survival and adventure story. It teaches us a timeless lesson about unshakable trust in God, which endures even in difficult circumstances. The lions' den is a very powerful image in this context. It shows that God does not always prevent us from falling into the "lions' den," but that even in such places, He is always with us, stands by our side, sustains us, and rescues us. Together, let's now explore aspects of trust that keep us standing tall and fearless even today in our own "lions' dens" and that can carry us through even in dark times. Today's lions may no longer be animals with sharp teeth and deafening roars—but they are no less terrifying. What might today's "lion's dens" be?

- Perhaps your lion's den is called "loneliness"—the feeling of being alone in this world or of being unseen by anyone. It roars bloodcurdlingly like a hungry lion.
- But perhaps it's also the fear of the future or your next doctor's appointment, the threat of losing your job, problems that are overwhelming you, or an exam you're dreading.

In these dark times, when we find ourselves in "lions' dens," it becomes clear what we truly rely on—yes, can rely on.

FAITH MEANS TRUST

The central theme of the Bible is faith in God. But what exactly is "faith"? "Those who know nothing must believe everything," a well-known writer once said. We use the term "faith" in exactly this sense when someone asks us a question and we're unsure of the answer: "I don't know for sure, but I believe that..." The Bible, however, understands this term to mean something completely different.

One day, Jesus' disciples came to him and asked, "Increase our faith!" and his somewhat mysterious reply was, "If you only had faith the size of a mustard seed..." Elsewhere, Jesus explains that the inconspicuous, tiny mustard seed will one day grow into a mighty, widely branching tree with deep roots. Jesus was making it clear that faith is something that develops gradually and needs time to grow and mature. It may start out as small and unassuming as a seed, but if you nurture and care for it, it takes root, grows, and eventually bears fruit in its own time.

Sometimes you hear Christians say things to fellow believers in difficult situations like, "You just have to believe more, then ...!" But that points to a very mechanical way of thinking—as if you could collect

“faith points” and then, once you have enough, withdraw your miracle from God’s account. But that’s not how faith works! It’s therefore easier to understand if, instead of “faith,” we speak of trust—trust in God. Because that is exactly what is meant: Faith is, in fact, simply the very natural consequence of a lived relationship and a trusting connection with God.

Yes, this trust begins—just like any intimate relationship—very small and with a first step toward one another. But everything that follows is, at its core, simply a matter of time, getting to know one another, and nurturing the relationship.

ASPECT 1: TRUST IN GOD GROWS THROUGH DAILY NURTURING OF THE RELATIONSHIP

And that brings us back to Daniel. In the Book of Daniel, we learn about a first aspect of his strong and unshakable trust in God:

Daniel 6:11 (GNB) Daniel had windows in his upper room facing Jerusalem. **Three times a day** he knelt there to praise God and bring his requests before Him. When he heard about the king’s decree, he went **as always** into his house and knelt **at the usual time** by the open window.

When the royal decree was issued forbidding anyone from praying to God, Daniel could have hidden himself away. He could have prayed secretly, quietly, and discreetly in private to avoid trouble. But Daniel did the exact opposite: He went to his window three times a day at the usual time, just as he always did, and prayed. It had, so to speak, become second nature to him.

Daniel’s trust in God was not merely a stopgap measure, not a last-resort ace up his sleeve to be pulled out when nothing else worked—but a deeply rooted way of life that had developed over many years—and was now bearing fruit in the midst of crisis. His trust in God had grown through his daily life. By nurturing his relationship with God day after day for years on end, he had built up this trust bit by bit.

And that is precisely the point: Deep, firmly rooted trust in God—the kind that truly sustains and protects you in the lion’s den—does not arise overnight or spontaneously by reflecting on your situation in the dark abyss and in the midst of a crisis, suddenly becoming very devout, starting to pray, or quickly reading or memorizing a few Bible verses. In a crisis, you draw on the reserves you’ve built up during good times and on the trust that has grown and matured there. In other words: Your personal time with God, your Bible reading, your times of prayer—in other words, the personal relationship with God you nurture today—are your solid foundation for tomorrow. They become your fuel and spiritual nourishment, so that you can still “bite down with strength” tomorrow.

It is not through worry and brooding that you become fit and well-equipped for the dark nights and the “lions’ dens” of life, nor through pious activism in times of crisis, but through your faithfulness and consistency today. They make you strong and resilient for the future.

ASPECT 2: TRUST MEANS LETTING GO OF CONTROL AND SURRENDER

Trust, then, arises above all through regular and increasingly familiar interaction. Another aspect becomes clear in the verses that follow:

Daniel 6:16–17: *Then the king ordered Daniel to be brought and thrown into the lions’ den. [...] Then a stone was brought and placed over the opening of the den. The king took the seals and personally sealed the stone with his royal seal and the seals of the powerful men of his kingdom, so that no one could interfere with Daniel’s fate.*

So Daniel was thrown into a deep, dark pit, and a heavy stone was rolled over the opening, which was then sealed as well, “so that no one could interfere with his fate,” as it says here. From that moment on, Daniel had absolutely no control over his life anymore; he was no longer “in control of the situation.” He could not roll the stone away, he could not break the seals, nor could he tame the lions. He was completely at the mercy of others; his life, so to speak, hung by a thread. He was entirely in God’s hands and 100% dependent on Him.

This, then, is the second aspect: Trust means letting go and leaving the outcome to God. This is surrender in the very best sense. Trust does not involve spending sleepless nights agonizing—in a desperate and futile effort to find a solution on one’s own. Rather, it means entrusting one’s worries to God: “My time is in Your hands!” Missionary work abroad is an excellent example of this experience. Participants find themselves in a foreign country, surrounded by an unfamiliar language, different people and ways of life, unfamiliar food, and a completely foreign culture. This experience can often feel as if the ground has been pulled out from under your feet. In their desperation, they cling to God and pray with all their might: “Lord, do something. Lord, help us. Don’t let us perish!” Yet, surprisingly, it is precisely these people who later report with great enthusiasm that God was present and that they experienced His signs and wonders.

But God is actually always with us, even here in Germany and in the midst of everyday life. Here, however, we feel confident, familiar with our surroundings, and know how to help ourselves. We often find solutions through our own efforts or experience, completely forgetting that we are, in fact, dependent on God. Yet it is an absolutely amazing feeling when, with a firm awareness of God’s presence and our dependence on Him, on the one hand our knees tremble with fear, but on the other hand we feel, deep in our hearts, an indescribable heavenly peace and a supernaturally strong boldness—just like Daniel standing upright in the midst of the hungry pack of lions.

THE PRACTICAL TEST FOR YOUR OWN HEART

In his hopeless situation, Daniel’s strength of faith and his trust in God were put to a severe test. “Severe test”—that’s the key phrase. Just as a sponge releases the water it has absorbed only under pressure, circumstances in which control slips completely from our grasp—in which we are utterly at a loss and don’t know what to do next (that is, the “lions’ dens” of our lives)—reveal the state of our hearts and thus the true quality and strength of our trust in God. Sometimes this is quite sobering, but this insight is nonetheless invaluable.

Incidentally, in this way we actually make use of the lions’ den—as a practical test or spiritual checkup to see where we truly stand in terms of spiritual and personal maturity—not just how we feel or how we appear during Sunday morning worship—and how deep our trust extends under pressure. James calls this “falling into all kinds of trials,” or, in modern terms, “tests of endurance”:

James 1:2–4: *Dear brothers and sisters! Consider it a special cause for joy when your faith is repeatedly put to the test. You know, after all, that through such tests of endurance it becomes firm and unshakable. This steadfastness should take effect in your entire life, so that in every respect you may become mature and blameless Christians, lacking nothing.*

That’s easier said than done! In theory and from a safe distance, these words seem like a wonderful concept for growth, but when you yourself are thrown into a den of lions, it’s anything but amusing. On the other hand, we very often turn to God only when we ourselves are completely at a loss and helpless, and simply don’t know what to do next. Yet we will experience God’s miracles—supernatural, heavenly, powerful, and mighty—precisely where we least expect them: right in the midst of the lions’ den, just like Daniel. Do you long for divine signs and miracles in your life and through your life? They’re waiting for you in the lions’ den.

Cultivate a deep relationship with God today, and over time your trust will become deeply rooted. If you continually set out on God's paths, remain faithful to Him, stand by Him, and follow Him—even when it becomes uncomfortable, works to your disadvantage, and you lose control—your roots will, over time, be so deeply established that these lions' dens cannot truly shake your trust in God at its core.

James 1:12: *Blessed is the one who endures **trials** and remains steadfast in faith. God will crown him with the **crown of victory—eternal life**. He has promised this to all who love Him.*

GOD HAS THE FINAL WORD—NOT THE LIONS

Do you know what that means? Quite simply: The lions that threaten your life and roar so loudly and blood-curdlingly do not have the last word! True trust in God is not a naive, simple-minded, or blind risk, but a surrender into the strong arms of God, our Creator and heavenly Father. Daniel experienced this, and God is still the same today. He knows your fears, doubts, and worries, and He is there to save you!

Daniel 6:22a: *"My God sent His angel. He shut the lions' mouths so that they could not harm me."*

Then you, too, will be able to say this and look forward to the new day with confidence. To conclude, let's take another brief look at how Daniel's story ended. This conclusion is far more than just a happy ending. It encourages us to remain faithful to God even in the most difficult situations. When we do that, those around us will recognize that God is the living God and that our faith is worthwhile:

Daniel 6:26–28: *Then King Darius sent a message to the people of every nation, province, and language. It read: "I wish you happiness and peace! I hereby decree that throughout my entire kingdom, reverence be shown to the God of Daniel! For He is the living God, who reigns for all eternity. His kingdom will never fall; his dominion endures forever. He rescues and delivers; he performs signs and wonders, both in heaven and on earth. He rescued Daniel from the lions' den."*

Of course, there will be envious people and schemers (there always are)—people who make your life difficult and hope only that you will fail or lose your faith. But there are also many people like King Darius—perhaps relatives, friends, or colleagues—who aren't waiting for you to fall, but who sincerely hope that everything will turn out well.

They watch closely to see how you handle crises and problems, hoping that your faith will stand the test even in difficult times. They want to see if you will continue to faithfully follow and serve God even when things get difficult or when you have to accept personal sacrifices for doing so. They are watching you because they themselves are considering whether they should place their trust in Jesus Christ, "the living God who saves, sets free, and performs signs and wonders both in heaven and on earth."

No matter which lions are roaring in your darkness today – you are not alone! What you build up in everyday life through steadfastness and faithfulness to God will become your firm foundation in stormy times. When you let yourself fall completely into God's arms, He will turn your greatest crisis into a place full of closeness and strength. So go forward today with your head held high, courageously and full of hope. Your trust will certainly be rewarded – and your courage in faith will become a light that shows others the way to God too.