

“It's Hard to Be Humble”

A Sermon Based on Daniel 4

First Presbyterian Church, Kingwood

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I want to show you something. This is a Bible I received the summer after my sophomore year of High School. I won't tell you when that was. But I will tell you this. I got this Bible at a summer sports camp sponsored by the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

The speaker at the camp was a professional football player, a guy by the name of Don Shinnick. He played linebacker for the Colts. He was getting ready to go to training camp with them and start the last season of his career. It would be his 13th.

He was a terrific player. He was quick, strong and tough. He acted tough. He talked tough. And he had an incredible list of accomplishments. He played on two NFL championship teams. He was on the cover of Sports Illustrated. And when he retired he owned 37 career interceptions, which is still an NFL record for a linebacker.

So at camp, he spoke to us about success. He told us he was proud of what he'd achieved on the football field. And he told us that one of the things he was most proud of was his ability as a linebacker to keep his balance.

"Balance," he said, "is something I think about constantly on the football field. Because when I'm out there running around it's easy to forget about it. And when I do, I know the next thing that's going to happen. I'm going to get knocked down! So I keep reminding myself, 'Shinnick, stay balanced!'"

Then, Don Shinnick picked up his Bible. He turned to one of Paul's letters. And before he began to read, he reminded us of how successful Paul was, not as a football player, but as an apostle. And when he finished telling us about Paul's resume, he read these words to us. Paul wrote them in Romans 12:3. "I bid every one among you," Paul wrote, "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, according to the measure of faith that God has given to him."

Then he looked up and said, "Those words are words to live by, on the football field or wherever God takes you in life. So mark them down in your Bible. Make them life verses and read them often." And that's what I did. I went to my room at camp that night, and I highlighted the words of Romans 12:3 in my Bible. And I don't know if you

have any life verses that have shaped your life. But those words of Romans 12 have shaped my life.

And whenever I read the fourth chapter of the book of Daniel that we read again this morning, I remember the words of a tough guy named Don Shinnick. Because I know, just like you do, that the story of Daniel doesn't take place on a football field. But I also know Nebuchadnezzar was one tough king. If you don't believe it, just get out a history book and read about him.

He talked tough. He was tough in battle. And because of his toughness he had amazing success. He created an empire. But according to the book of Daniel, one of the toughest things for Nebuchadnezzar to do was keep his balance; not on the battlefield, but on the field of life. And when you read his story, you'll discover pretty quickly, the thing that causes Nebuchadnezzar to lose his balance most of the time is pride.

Did you hear or read the story this week. It was major news in the financial world. It was a story about a man who traded stocks in London on behalf of UBS, a major Swiss bank. According to the early estimates, he made deals that will ultimately cost UBS more than 2 billion dollars.

And the reason he made the deals? Well according to some of the papers, he lost his balance. He prided himself on his ability to gauge a risk better than those around him. He began to think whatever he touched would always turn to gold. So he started to bet some of the bank's money, not only in the markets, but in London casinos. And eventually his behavior exceeded his ability to cover it up and his employers found out about it.

"He was a nice guy," one of his friends said. "He'd talk to anybody, greet everybody. I haven't got a bad word to say about him." But there are people at UBS who know a little more. And they have things they'd like to say. So the trader was arrested in London this week. And he's likely to be traveling to Switzerland again very soon. All because his pride pushed his life out of balance.

It happens, doesn't it? Whether your forte is finance, or football, or forcing people to be part of your empire. It's easy to let pride push your life out of balance. "I was in my palace, contented and prosperous," Nebuchadnezzar says in Daniel 4:4. And there was no reason for him not to be.

"Twelve months later," Daniel says, "as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon, he said, 'Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty.'"

Nebuchadnezzar was looking down at a city full of buildings and each of them said something about his accomplishments. In a recent archaeological book about the city of Babylon, it takes 126 pages just to record the inscriptions that are still left on stones that were part of the city. The inscriptions commemorate Nebuchadnezzar's achievements. Some of the designs may have been created by Nebuchadnezzar himself.

From the roof of his palace, when he looked out Nebuchadnezzar saw it all, and then as he looked farther, he saw a double wall. It ran all the way around the city. One person who wrote about it in the ancient world said the wall was so wide you could turn a four-horse chariot completely around on it. And all along the wall there were more inscriptions showing Nebuchadnezzar's achievements.

The city of Babylon in the fifth century B.C. was his city. It was his trophy case. There was no doubt about it. And if he were alive in our world, most people would probably say Nebuchadnezzar had every reason to be proud. They'd probably look to him for advice on how to succeed at life. They'd probably buy his book and watch his interview on "Good Morning, Babylon."

And they'd never believe his life was tilting out of balance. But it was. And God, who knows more about our lives than any friend, who knows more than our resume reveals, or our trophy case displays, God cares when a human life He's created gets out of balance.

I've got a favorite story about this. It's a story about a guy who's the CEO of a big corporation. And he's driving up the Coast highway in Oregon with his wife, and the car's getting low on gas. So they pull into a gas station.

And if you've ever been in Oregon, you know they don't have self-serve gas stations. Attendants still pump your gas for you in Oregon. So the guy goes inside to get something to drink. And when he comes out, he notices his wife is engaged in a pretty animated conversation with the guy who's pumping the gas.

So he gets in the car, pays the attendant, and drives away. And he and his wife start talking. And it turns out she knew the attendant. They used to date each other when they were in high school.

And this CEO, whose life is just a little bit out of balance at that moment, after a minute or two of silence, says to his wife, "I'll bet I know what you're thinking. I'll bet you're thinking you're pretty lucky you married me, the CEO of a great corporation, and not that service station attendant."

And she says, "No. Actually I was just thinking if I'd married him and not you, he'd be the CEO of a great corporation right now. And you'd be a service station attendant!"

You see there's an illusion that affects all of us in our lives from time to time. And because it's an illusion, it tries to distract us, to make us forget something it doesn't want us to recognize. It focuses our attention on ourselves. It says to us, "you made yourself who you are. You know that, don't you? And you've done a lot in your life. You've achieved more than most."

But while we're looking at ourselves and all we've accomplished, while we're at home in our palaces, content and prosperous, we've missed seeing something else. We've missed seeing God at work in our lives.

So let me just ask. How's your balance been lately. Have you been quick to see God at work in your life. Or have you been buying into the illusion. Have you been slow to see your limitations and your dependence on God? Have you convinced yourself that the life you have is the life you've built yourself? Or have you been reminding yourself as the Bible says that all we are and all we have are gifts from God?

You see, the truth is unless we take time to do that, unless we take time remind ourselves regularly, like a linebacker on a football field, unless we take time to say, "Got to keep my balance. Can't let pride push me off center. Got to give God some of the credit and stay balanced. "

If you want to leave a legacy then learn the lessons Daniel 4 wants to teach you this morning. Keep your balance. And remember the real measure of a good life is not how much success you achieve, but how much faith you find.

Remember Paul's instruction. "I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, according to the measure of faith God's given him."

The story of Daniel 4 is the story what can happen to someone who doesn't do that. The story of a young London stock trader this week is a story of what can happen to someone who doesn't do that. Don't let their stories become your story. Take some time. Bring

the balance back to your life. Look back and give thanks to God. For all that you are and all that you have are His gifts.

Let's pray ...