

Faithfulness Under Pressure

HOW CAN WE REMAIN FAITHFUL WHEN FACING PRESSURE?

Focal Verses • DANIEL 1:8-21

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will ANALYZE the choice that Daniel and his friends faced and that choice's outcome, ASPIRE to have faith like Daniel when confronted with contradictory directives from authorities, and IDENTIFY similar situations that call for the exercise of faith.

In Focus

Denise had been working at her new company a little over a month, and she had just been invited by her co-workers out to lunch. While at lunch, her co-worker Tamika asked if she was doing anything for the weekend. She had not been out in a while, and replied that she did not have plans yet. Tamika asked if she would like to go to a party in what Denise knew was a neighborhood known for drug dealing.

Tamika said, "Most of us who work here hang out around there together, and it would be cool to have you join us." Two of the other co-workers at the table nodded in agreement.

Denise thought about it for a second. She remembered her cousin almost overdosing at a party in that same neighborhood. She knew that God had not called her to be involved in that kind of environment.

"No, I think I'll pass. I'm not really into the party scene like that. But let me pay for lunch today. I appreciate you all inviting me."

Sometimes God places us in situations where our faith will be tested. Have you ever been tempted to compromise the standards of your faith to be accepted by others?



Keep in Mind

"But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank:..." (from Daniel 1:8, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Daniel 1:8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.

9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.

10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.

11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,

12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.

13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.

15 And at the end of ten days, their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.

16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.

17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

18 Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.

19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king.

20 And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

21 And Daniel continued even unto the first year of King Cyrus.

The People, Places, and Times

Pulse. The Hebrew word for pulse is *zêrôa'* (zay-ro'-ah), and it refers to vegetables, fruit, legumes, grains, and bread. This type of food was very similar to a healthy vegetarian diet. This type of food was eaten in a partial fast, excluding meat and other delicacies. Eating pulse was not a condemnation of eating meat, but was regarded by the participants as a way to humble themselves before God.

Eunuch. A eunuch was usually a man who was castrated. These men were guardians of the women of the court, chosen because they

could not harm them sexually. Eunuchs were also placed in charge of other court offices because they were not distracted by sexual desires or family responsibilities. In the ancient world, eunuchs were considered remarkable for their faithfulness to their masters. Eunuchs were common in the royal courts of the Jews, Persians, Babylonians, Romans, and Greeks. For the Israelite community, it was forbidden for eunuchs to be a part of public worship (Deuteronomy 23:1).

What role does fasting play in developing and strengthening our faith?

Background

The book of Daniel opens with the statement that God delivered the Southern Kingdom of Judah into captivity. The Southern Kingdom would experience three stages of captivity. The first one occurs in 605 B.C. when Daniel and the three Hebrew boys are taken during this stage. The second is 596 B.C. when King Jehoiachin and the prophet Ezekiel are taken into captivity and the third and final stage is 586 B.C. when the Temple is destroyed by fire. Scholars argue that since Daniel and the Hebrew boys were taken into exile early, they may have been from a wealthy, prominent family. While in captivity, Daniel and the Hebrew boys remained faithful to God and did not worship the king or the king's gods.

What does it mean to be faithful?

At-A-Glance

1. Purpose Over Pressure (Daniel 1:8–14)
2. Faith Over Fear (vv. 15–16)
3. Testimony After the Test (vv. 17–21)

In Depth

1. Purpose Over Pressure (Daniel 1:8–14)

Daniel's purpose in refusing to eat the particular food that the king had provided was much less about ingesting food, and more about maintaining faithfulness to God's Law (Leviticus 17:7–16). While Daniel was in the king's control, he had to obey certain rules, but he still maintained control over his own body.

This type of commitment should also reside within us and resonate with our family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. More than a simple protest, Daniel asked permission to follow an alternate diet and also offered a test run to monitor him and the three Hebrew boys. Servants of the king were not to appear before the king sad or sick; this would have been an offense

to the king and could even result in the loss of the eunuch's life. Nehemiah 2:1–3 records that Nehemiah, the cupbearer, was never in the king's presence sad, except for one occasion.

How should we respond when we face temptations to compromise or disobey God? What should we do to resist?

2. Faith Over Fear (Daniel 1:15–16)

Daniel asked to be fed a vegetarian diet in order to avoid eating meat sacrificed to idols and to avoid other trappings of Gentile royalty that might have compromised his dietary restrictions.

As Daniel and his companions ate a diet of pulse (vegetables), rather than consume the king's meat and drink, others expected them to wither away. However, as they feasted on vegetables and stood on their faith in God, they were blessed with even healthier appearances than all those in the royal household. Their patience and calmness in this high-pressure situation helped them operate less out of fear of death because of offending the king and more through faith in God. They were confident that they would survive and thrive in God's care.

How can our faith support us in triumphing over our fears?

3. Testimony After the Test (Daniel 1:17–21)

Despite Daniel's youth and the fact that he was a captive, he honored God in all that he did. By staying where God had placed him, Daniel and his friends could witness God's power simply by being obedient. Their resistance to the meal requirement was balanced by their willingness to serve and answer to the king.

Their physical appearance astounded those around them, especially when accompanied by the God-given gifts of discernment and prophecy. Daniel and his friends' testimony was not in their ability to pray for and receive an immediate release from captivity but rather a demonstration of how God kept them, elevated

them, and ultimately made them victorious in a treacherous situation. The book of Daniel would present other times (e.g. Daniel chs. 2-5) when Daniel and his friends would be tested further by the wicked king and how they continued to be faithful to their God.

What are the benefits of choosing to obey God and remain faithful?

Search the Scriptures

1. How did Daniel phrase his request to make it seem more favorable to the attendant (Daniel 1:13)?
2. How was God working in the lives of Daniel and his friends while they were in captivity (vv. 9, 17)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How can we be sure that we can take a stand for our faith?
2. What are some of the “Nebuchadnezzars” that we face today?

Liberating Lesson

Those whom society designates as role models are not guaranteed to be examples worth following. Our culture celebrates fame and seems to worship money at any cost, regardless of the true price in terms of morals and decency. How, then, can we demonstrate principles and cherish faith in God when the very opposite is what receives all of the attention?

The church must be willing to speak the truth, identify both the good and the questionable, and discern good from evil. A simple act of

discernment can prevent disaster and may well save a soul.

If you evaluate your personal life, do you demonstrate the characteristics of a positive role model?

Application for Activation

Write out a list of positive Christian role models who exhibit a life of conviction and character.

Choose to fast from specific foods this week, e.g., meat or sweets.

Pray that God will give you convictions that come from Him and not from your other authority figures.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Sources:

- Adeyemo, Tokunboh, ed. "Daniel." *Africa Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006. 989–1012.
LaCocque, André. "Daniel." *Global Bible Commentary*. Edited by Daniel Patte, et al. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004. 2653–261.
Lai, Barbara M. Leung. "Daniel." *The People's Companion to the Bible*. Edited by Curtiss Paul DeYoung, et al. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010. 162–63.
Newsom, Carol A. *Daniel: A Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Edited by William P. Brown, Carol A. Newsom, and Brent A. Strawn. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

Say It Correctly

Hananiah. hah-nah-NIGH-ah.
Michael. MEE-shah-el.
Azariah. As-uh-RYE-uh.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 134

Nehemiah 12–13

Psalms 55:15–19

DAY 135

Esther 1–5

Psalms 55:20–23

DAY 136

Esther 6–10

Psalms 56:1–7

DAY 137

Job 1–4

Psalms 56:8–13

DAY 138

Job 5–7

Psalms 57:1–6

DAY 139

Job 8–10

Psalms 57:7–11

DAY 140

Job 11–13

Psalms 58:1–5

Notes
