

LIVING FOR GOD IN A GODLESS SOCIETY: Spiritual Resolve

January 8, 2023

DAY 1 CHOOSING YOUR KINGDOM

Scripture: [Daniel 1:1-8](#); [Matthew 5:13-16](#); [1 Thessalonians 4:1-8](#)

Reflection: When you follow Jesus, it doesn't take long to realize you're called to be different. Jesus described this in [John 17:16](#) as being "*not of the world.*" In his [first letter \(2:11\)](#), Peter calls the followers of Jesus "*sojourners and exiles.*" But what does this mean in everyday life? From the beginning, from creation, God was calling people to follow Him and to be holy or set apart--to do counterintuitive things like loving your enemies and forgiving those who wrong you.

Centuries before Jesus came, a teenager named Daniel determined to follow God even when it meant being different and even if it cost his life. Daniel was part of a group of Jewish exiles taken to Babylon and chosen for the king's indoctrination program. As we study Daniel's choices, we can learn principles to guide us as we navigate living a holy life of spiritual resolve in an unholy culture. The first step always comes down to making a choice. Daniel 1:8 tells us, "*Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine that he drank.*" This teenager had to decide where to draw the line and take a stand. For him, that meant keeping the dietary laws he was taught from God's word. It also meant exercising self-discipline to not indulge in even permissible luxury food or drink that could lead to dependence on those pleasures. As we'll read, God both strengthened and honors Daniel in this choice and as he continues to choose God's ways above the ways of the culture around him.

Ask Yourself:

- How has following Jesus changed the way you live?
- What difference do you see in how you relate to difficult co-workers, interact on social media, or use God's name?
- Are you unsure how Jesus has changed your life? Why is that?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I want to stand for you. Help me see what that means in my daily life and give me the strength to make the right choices. Holy Spirit, search my life; show me ways you want to change me to make me more like Jesus, and help me cooperate with you in those changes. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: As you sit here, are you convicted of a behavior or attitude that is not Christ-like? Trust that God will help you change and take the first step today. That might be confessing it to a trusted friend and asking for accountability. Or it might mean removing yourself from a compromising conversation. What step will you take to live with spiritual resolve?

DAY 2 CHOOSING COMMUNITY

Scripture: [Daniel 1:9-17](#); [Ecclesiastes 4:9-12](#); [Galatians 6:1-5](#)

Reflection: Daniel chose to follow God in his eating habits, but he also brought three friends from his home tribe of Judah—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah—into that covenant with him. No conversation among the friends is recorded in Scripture, but Daniel may have been the leader who encouraged them to join his stand. There is no doubt they stood stronger together than they each would have stood

alone. At the end of the ten-day trial period, instead of just Daniel showing the excellent effect of God's favor on this new diet plan, those results were multiplied by four! And we can imagine how they supported one another to stay resolute. Those four Judean youths were a band of brothers who strengthened and steadied each other as they were isolated amid a hostile culture. We, too, need the strength of community to keep us accountable in our spiritual resolve.

Ask Yourself:

- After Daniel decided to change his diet, how did he present this to the chief of the eunuchs?
- What part might his friends have played in this? What was God's part?
- How do you depend on your life group or other community to support you in these decisions?

Pause to Pray: *Father, I know You created me to live in community. Thank You for the support I get from family and friends. Help me to support them in return. Show us how we can serve You better together than any of us could alone. Help us not to be afraid to challenge each other to stand up for You in difficult circumstances. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: If you are not part of a small group of believers, take a step toward a group today. Your local church is the best place to start! If you are already in a group, talk with your group about ways to encourage and hold one another accountable to live with spiritual resolve.

DAY 3 CHOOSING GOD'S TRUTH

Scripture: [Daniel 1:1-2 and 17-20](#); [Psalm 119:9-16](#); [2 Peter 1:20-21](#)

Reflection: Daniel must have known the evil reputation of the Babylonians. And he knew what would be forced into his psyche during his three-year indoctrination program in the arts of the occult. But Daniel and his friends were prepared by God's truth. They knew God's character. They knew He was sovereign over every detail. In the second verse of Daniel chapter 1, we read, "*And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand.*" God is in control of even this exile and servitude. In 1:17, God gave these four youths "*learning and skill in all literature and wisdom.*" They could hold onto God's truth and still be considered excellent scholars in an evil culture.

We, too, can live with spiritual resolve like Daniel and his friends. 2 Peter 1:20-21 reminds us that God is sovereign over His Word. We are confident that His Word is true because we believe He is Lord. In Psalm 119, the psalmist tells us that God's Word keeps us from sin. When the lies of our culture spin around us, the Word of God is always certain, always true. The darker the world becomes, the more we need to immerse ourselves in the light and truth of God's Word so that it is the benchmark for both our beliefs (orthodoxy) and our behavior (orthopraxy).

Ask Yourself:

- How much time do I spend reading and studying God's word?
- If my Bible was taken away and I had to depend only on memory, how much would I remember?
- Take a moment to write down all the attributes and names of God that you can think of. Praise God that He has put these truths in your heart!

Pause to Pray: *God, I confess that so many things distract me from reading my Bible. I want to seek you with my whole heart! I want to delight in reading your Word! And I want to remember your truth! Increase my hunger and thirst for You. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Make a plan to add 5-10 additional minutes in the Bible every day this week. Be creative! A few ideas: write some verses on cards to place in visible spots. Make a favorite verse the lock screen of your phone. Set an alarm on your phone to pause and read during your lunch break. Listen to a chapter during your commute to work.

DAY 4 CHOOSING YOUR TRUE IDENTITY

Scripture: [Daniel 1:3-7](#); [Genesis 1:26-28](#); [Ephesians 1:3-14](#); [Galatians 3:26-28](#)

Reflection: Not only did Daniel and his friends experience the isolation of exile and the indoctrination of evil teaching, but their captors also attempted to reverse their identities by changing their names. Their Hebrew names honored Yahweh, the one true God. Their new Babylonian names honored false gods. Daniel (*God is my judge*) was changed to Belteshazzar (*O Lady, wife of the god Bel, protect the king*). Hananiah (*Yahweh is gracious*) became Shadrach (*I am very fearful of god*). Mishael (*Who is what God is*) was turned to Meshach (*I am of little account*). Azariah (*Yahweh is a helper*) was called Abednego (*servant of the shining one Nebo*). Imagine them hearing false gods celebrated every time they were spoken to! Though their names were changed, these friends lived with spiritual resolve, true to their Hebrew names, and faithful to the Most High God.

Like Daniel and his friends, we are exiles in a culture that calls us “names”- trying to make us feel inferior, less than who we have become in Christ. One of the beautiful refrains of scripture is that God has made you in His image and that you belong to the good Father. Whatever names the world gives you, they are not your true name- Child of God. Beloved.

Ask Yourself:

- What false names or identities have those around you tried to place on you?
- What false names have you called yourself?
- How does reminding yourself of how God sees you and loves you change how you feel about yourself and how you see other people?

Pause to Pray: *Father, I need to be reminded of how much You love me and see me as Your child. I forget so easily and start believing the lies from others and even myself. Help me remember that just as a father with a newborn baby, You rejoice over me and love even to watch me breathe. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Write down three aspects of your identity in Christ and remind yourself of these truths this week.

DAY 5 CHOOSING YOUR STAND

Scripture: [Daniel 1:8](#); [Philippians 2:12-13](#); [Ephesians 6:10-18](#); [Daniel 12:13](#)

Reflection: We want to stand firm for God's truth. But how do we decide on a personal level when to stand for truth and when to sit down and pray and wait for God to change hearts? These are not easy questions, and they are never decided once and for all. As a teenager, Daniel resolved to take a stand over what he would take into his body. Later he made tough choices and resolved to tell the hard truth to powerful kings and to continue his spiritual discipline of openly praying even when he knew it could cost him his life.

Every time we stand for what is true, it helps us stand more easily the next time. Thankfully, as Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:12-13, we have God working in us to give us clear guidance about these decisions as we pray, read and obey His word, share with other believers, and trust and listen to Him. And Ephesians 6 tells us we have every weapon we need for these spiritual battles. There is comfort, too, in the very last verse of the book of Daniel. Daniel says in 12:13, *"But go your way till the end. And you shall rest and shall stand in your allotted place at the end of the days."* Go your way day by day, trusting God to show you when to stand and to give you the courage to do that, and then rest in Him, knowing He's already prepared that place for you to stand eternally in heaven.

Ask Yourself:

- Is there some way God is calling me to take a stand for Him now?
- How am I preparing myself to live with spiritual resolve?
- How can I be more conscious about daily putting on that full armor of God that Paul talks about in Ephesians 6?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I resolve to live for You. I resolve to read your Word and learn your truth. Help me to prepare myself to hear your voice, and know the nudging of your Spirit so that I will be ready when opportunities to speak and to act come my way. Show me how to be a light of your hope, peace, and love in a world of darkness. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Reflect on all you learned from Daniel and his friends this week. How will you take a clear step toward living with spiritual resolve? Tell someone! Even better, invite someone to take this step with you!

LIVING FOR GOD IN A GODLESS SOCIETY: Walking Through God-sized Problems
January 15, 2023

DAY 1 WALKING THROUGH A GOD-SIZED PROBLEM

Scripture: [Daniel 2: 1-11](#), [1 Peter 3:14](#), and [1 Peter 5:10](#)

Reflection: To be human is to suffer. The harsh reality of our lives on this side of heaven is that we will have pain and suffering. Perhaps, a lot of it. The world wasn't designed to answer all of the questions we have and all of the hurt we experience. There are no worldly protections that we can employ or acquire that will keep us from suffering.

We can look to Daniel's story to gain insight into how we can walk through God-sized problems in our lives. In today's reading from Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar is suffering through bouts of insomnia and bad dreams. He seeks out the wisest men in the kingdom to help him figure out what it all means. He's so desperate to make sense of what he's experiencing that he threatens all the wise men with death if they cannot give him answers. Unsurprisingly, they have nothing to offer him and even acknowledge to the King that whatever he's dealing with can only be answered by gods who aren't walking among man.

The only balm to this worldly pain is to know God and be in a relationship with him. We can see through the story of scripture how God shows up in humanity's suffering. No God-sized problem is too big for God. As followers of Jesus in this modern world, we have the benefit of knowing the end game. Jesus came down to earth, lived a life among men, suffered, and died on the cross so our sins would be forgiven. Our earthly suffering isn't the end. There is a better life to come.

In the book of 1 Peter, Peter writes to followers of Jesus, encouraging them in their suffering and pain. He reminds them that they can be full of hope in their suffering because of Jesus's promise of life after death for those who believe in him. We are offered this same hope.

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." 1 Peter 5:10

But, this doesn't mean life on earth will be easy. So, over the next few days, we'll look at Daniel's story to discover how to walk through God-sized problems.

Ask Yourself and Reflect:

- How am I like King Nebuchadnezzar when I have a problem or something is causing me pain?
- How does (or how should) the hope I know exists because of Jesus's death and resurrection influence how I suffer? *refer back to Peter's words in 1 Peter 5:10*

Pause to Pray: Read [Psalm 63](#) and meditate on the words as your prayer today

Take a Next Step: What is one area in your life TODAY that you can actively decide to hand over to God? Once you identify it, call it out, and hand it over, and leave it with God – *"God, I give You _____ . You know what I do not. Teach me to trust You in this suffering."*

DAY 2 TIME TO PRAY

Scripture: [Daniel 2:12-18](#); [Philippians 4:6](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:17](#)

Reflection:

*What a Friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!*
Joseph Scriven, 1855

When preacher Joseph Scriven wrote this poem in 1855, he was living in Canada and his mother was across the ocean in Ireland and sick. He wrote this poem as a way to encourage and remind her that in suffering, she could take it all to God in prayer. Up to this point in his life, Joseph knew what deep suffering felt like. He was engaged to be married two different times, and both times his fiancé died a tragic death. And yet, in his writing, he can acknowledge that our pain is even greater if we don't take it to God.

In this day in age, there are so many places that our culture says we should look for the answers to life's problems. Social media, friends, within ourselves, the list goes on and on. The temptation is real to try and solve our problems on our own. Our society tends to demand quick answers. Waiting isn't something any of us really want to do or think we have time for. And when we're waiting, we can be tempted to fill every second of the silence with some kind of noise. Sheesh!

There is a better way. A more effective way. Daniel shows us in this passage the importance of prayer in the midst of a God-sized problem. It's really all we can do. He doesn't just pray on the spot; he sets time apart to be in prayer. He knows that he cannot come back to King Nebuchadnezzar with any kind of answer until he has taken time away to pray and speak to God. Even under the threat of the King's wrath, Daniel made it known he would step away to seek God's counsel.

Throughout scripture, we are commanded to take everything to God in prayer. There's nothing in our lives that we shouldn't be offering up to God. Whatever you're facing today, you can take it to God in prayer. As followers of Jesus, we all await the second coming when he returns and makes everything right. When all the pain and suffering are done forever, and we're all ushered into eternal life in Heaven. Until then, prayer is one way we can be close to our Heavenly Father. In his letter to the church of the Thessalonians, Paul points readers to the second coming of Christ. In his closing, he gives some instructions to the church about what they can do now in the waiting. We can heed Paul's advice even now.

"Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Ask Yourself and Reflect:

- How am I trying to solve life's problems myself instead of taking them to God in prayer?
- What can I learn from Daniel about prayer when facing God-sized problems?
- When will I take time to pray for myself and for others?

Pause to Pray: Read [Matthew 6:9-12](#) and use it as your prayer today, as Jesus instructed.

Take a Next Step: Be intentional about prayer this week. Set an alarm on your phone, designate your commute to school or work to pray, or find other quiet moments that you might otherwise fill.

DAY 3 GIVE GOD CREDIT AT EVERY TURN

Scripture: [Daniel 2: 19-28](#), [Ephesians 3:20-21](#)

Reflection: After time away in prayer, God gives Daniel an answer about the King's dreams. The very first thing Daniel does upon receiving the answer is to praise God. Everything about Daniel's praise points back to God. There is nothing self-serving about Daniel's praise. He fully recognizes that apart from God there would be no answers.

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. Daniel 2:20

It might be easy for us to think that, at some level, when things go right for us, or something good happens, it's because of something we've done. The reality is this: Every gift and talent we have is because of God. Every answered prayer is because God has chosen to answer the prayer. When He shows up in our God-sized problems, it's so that He would get the glory, not us.

We are not capable or wise enough to fix any of the problems we find ourselves facing on our own. Our only hope is in God. The apostle Paul, like Daniel, recognizes that anything we're able to do in this life is because of God's love and mercy. In his letter to the church in the city of Ephesus, Paul calls out God's power and ability to do more than we can imagine, and in turn, He is worthy of our praise forever.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21

Ask Yourself and Reflect:

- How often do I stop to praise God for what he is doing when I'm in the midst of a struggle?
- Am I living my life for my own glory or for God's glory?
- How can I be more like Daniel in lifting God and others up before myself?

Pause to Pray: Read [Psalm 118](#) as your prayer and praise!

Take a Next Step: Call to mind a specific time that God answered a prayer you had prayed or gave you an answer you sought. Spend some time today praising and thanking Him for this great gift in your life. Make a practice of doing this daily!

DAY 4 Remember Which Kingdom You Belong To

Scripture: [Daniel 2:29-45](#), [1 Peter 2:4-6](#)

Reflection: It's finally time for Daniel to recap King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and give an interpretation. Right from the start, Daniel is pointing back to God as the revealer of the dream. At the start of his

explanation to the king, he says, “...*this mystery has been revealed to me, not because of any wisdom that I have more than any of the living...*”(vs 30).” Daniel is humbly and acutely aware that what he’s about to share with the King is not because of any of his own doing.

God uses this dream to show how all of the great powers and kingdoms of the earth will eventually be destroyed. In the dream, the kingdoms of earth are described as statues and while they’re made of materials like gold, silver, bronze, iron, and clay, they do not withstand a rock that appears and destroys them all. In the end, the statues become dust and blow away until nothing is left, but it’s the rock “not made by man” that destroys them and still remains. Daniel is prophesying the coming of Jesus’s kingdom that will eventually conquer everything. For it is the only true and lasting kingdom.

“And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever.” (Daniel 2:44)

In the New Testament, Peter refers to Jesus as the “living stone,” the one chosen by God to build His kingdom. When we’re going through the hardest challenges life throws our way, we can be sure that when we stand on the rock of Christ, we will not be shaken. Remember which Kingdom you belong to.

Ask Yourself and Reflect:

- Do my actions reflect the kingdom that I belong to?
- Where am I standing on shaky ground rather than standing on God’s truth and promises?

Pause to Pray: Use [Psalm 18:2](#) as your prayer

Take a Next Step: What “kingdoms” in your life need to be destroyed so that you can stand on God’s rock? Make a plan (and share it with someone close to you so they can hold you accountable!) to destroy whatever is holding you back from fully belonging to God’s kingdom.

DAY 5 STAY THE COURSE. DON'T GIVE UP!

Scripture: [Daniel 2:46-47](#), [John 16:33](#)

Reflection: Daniel 2 ends with King Nebuchadnezzar realizing that Daniel’s God is the one true God. As a result, Daniel is promoted within the kingdom and alongside his friends, he’s able to make a difference within the city.

No God-sized problem is too big for God. And truly, thank God for that. We won’t ever fully understand the things that God calls us to walk through in our life. That’s ok, and it’s part of His greater plan. As Jesus says in John 16, we are called to “*take heart*” because His plan is better. As we learned this week, these problems and trials that we face in our life are meant to bring glory to God. Life on earth has never been about humanity’s comfort or understanding. In many ways, this is a very counter-cultural way to live. In the world, we’re encouraged to seek answers and find peace in any and all ways. As followers of Jesus, we know true peace only comes from Him. Through spiritual disciplines like prayer, we can walk through life step-by-step with the Father who created us and loves us. When you find

yourself with a problem that feels way too big, don't give up. Create time to pray. Give God credit at every turn. Remember which Kingdom you belong to.

“The cross is laid on every Christian. The first Christ-suffering which every man must experience is the call to abandon the attachments of this world. It is that dying of the old man which is the result of his encounter with Christ. As we embark upon discipleship we surrender ourselves to Christ in union with his death—we give over our lives to death. Thus it begins; the cross is not the terrible end to an otherwise god-fearing and happy life, but it meets us at the beginning of our communion with Christ.

When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

— **Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship**

May we live our lives, no matter what is to come, in communion with Christ.

Ask Yourself:

- Do I have an action plan to walk well through struggles and trials that I'll face in my life?
- What do I need differently to stay the course and stay close to God when life on earth feels like too much to bear?

Pause to Pray: Refer back to the passage in [John 16](#) and use this prayer time as a time of thanksgiving, thanking God that he has a greater plan and that he's worthy of your praise and trust

Take a Next Step: Remember what you've learned this week and take time to pray every day, give God glory always, and remember who you belong to!

LIVING FOR GOD IN A GODLESS SOCIETY: Standing on the Inside

January 22, 2023

DAY 1: IDENTIFY YOUR IDOLS

Scripture: [Daniel 3:1-7](#), [Exodus 20:3](#), [Matthew 22:36-38](#)

Reflection: King Nebuchadnezzar made a huge golden image and invited many officials to the dedication. There it was proclaimed to all the people that as soon as the music started, they were to fall down and worship the image or be immediately thrown into the fiery furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew they couldn't bow down and worship this image. This would be against God's law- *"You shall have no other gods before me."*

Whatever we put before God in our life is an idol. It's rarely a giant idol in our culture, but it is often comfort, money, security, jobs, people, and even our phones. God doesn't want us to give our hearts and souls to anything ahead of Him, not because He is selfish, but because He knows that He is the source of everything good that we need. He promises abundant life. What does your phone promise?

When asked what the greatest commandment is, Jesus responded, *"love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind."* What does love like this look like? For one thing, it looks like standing when all others bow to idols. And it looks like bowing to God when all others turn away.

Ask Yourself:

- What/whom does my heart love most? My soul? My mind?
- What is the evidence of my love?
- Why do I lean toward this thing/person instead of God?

Pause to pray: *Lord, I am certain that there are things and people in my life that I have lifted above you in my affection, time, and attention. Reveal those to me and teach me to delight more and more in You. I want you to have my whole heart, soul, and mind. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Take a practical step to lift the Lord above one of the other loves in your life this week. For example, if one of your loves is your phone, try talking to Him first thing every morning before checking your phone. Or commit to reading your Bible before you read your emails.

DAY 2: WHO IS WATCHING YOU?

Scripture: [Daniel 3:1-18](#), [Matthew 5:14-16](#), [2 Corinthians 5:20](#), [1 Peter 2:12](#)

Reflection: Many people were at the dedication of King Nebuchadnezzar's enormous image. He invited all the leaders and officials of the provinces. It was a big event- lots of people and lots of commotion. But when the trumpets sounded, some people noticed that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not bowing down to worship. So they ran and tattled!

Whenever you take a stand and go against the crowd, people notice. Those people may ignore you, judge you silently, ridicule you, or tell others to avoid you. Regardless of the reaction of others, you must resolve to stand. Your light is meant to shine everywhere, and in everything you do! When people

know that you are a Christ-follower, they will watch and notice if your life matches your faith. You are an ambassador for Christ in a world that is lost. They need to see Him in you!

Ask Yourself:

- How does my everyday life reflect what I believe?
- How apparent is my faith to the people in my spheres of influence (home, school/work, neighborhood, etc.)?
- Who in my life shines a bright light for Jesus?

Pause to pray: *Lord, I want my faith to be evident because people see your love and your forgiveness in me. I invite you to convict my heart and teach me to follow you more closely. I want my whole life to glorify You! Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Choose someone in your life who is a bright light and invite them to grab a cup of coffee. Ask them about their choices and how they have come to shine so brightly.

DAY 3: NO MATTER THE COST

Scripture: [Daniel 3:14-15](#), [1 Peter 3:14](#), [1 Corinthians 16:13](#), [Joshua 1:9](#)

Reflection: So Daniel's buddies, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, choose to obey God and defy the king. And the cost was high, very high! Being burned alive in a fiery furnace was the punishment for their crime. But ever since they had come to Babylon and chosen to eat God's way, they had resolved in their hearts that God was their true King. They would live for His Kingdom and not for the culture around them, the land of their exile. They were committed to following God wholeheartedly, to obeying all His commands, no matter the cost.

The cost of your obedience is probably not death by fire. But it may be the death of your professional career because you will not compromise. Or the end of a relationship because you will not lie. How were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego able to stand? Because they had consistently taken smaller steps of obedience. And because they had one another. It's always harder to stand alone, especially when the cost is high.

Ask Yourself:

- Where am I tempted to compromise my beliefs to avoid standing out?
- When have I experienced the cost of discipleship?
- Am I standing alone? Who are my "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego"?

Pause to pray: *Lord, give me the courage to stand for you no matter the cost! I know that You are with me, and You strengthen me. I want my life to bring you glory and honor. I don't ever want to be ashamed to stand for you! Help me, Jesus. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Invite a trusted Christian to coffee and describe a situation in which you are tempted to compromise but want to stand firm. Ask them to pray with you and for you!

DAY 4: TRUST GOD. ALWAYS.

Scripture: [Daniel 3:16-18](#); [Matthew 6:9-13](#); [Luke 22:41-43](#); [John 16:33](#); [Philippians 4:6-7](#)

Reflection: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could feel the heat of the fire, yet they did not waver. They still refused to bow to anything or anyone but God. Inwardly, there must have been a tug-of-war between their fear and their confidence in God. They believed He had the power to save them, yet they knew He may not! They could stand at peace before King Neb without knowing what would happen next because they knew God was Almighty, sovereign over the universe, present with His people, and merciful toward them.

Many years later, after sharing some of the difficult things to come, the true King would encourage his followers, *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

Ask Yourself:

-After reading the Lord's prayer and Jesus' prayer before He is arrested, what do you learn about trust and faith?

-Am I okay if God doesn't answer my prayers the way I want? Do I trust that God knows what is best for me, even if it's not what I had hoped for?

Pause to pray: *Lord, I want to trust You with all my heart, no matter what. Even in the most challenging times when I don't understand, and I'm not in control. Teach my heart to trust You. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Write Philippians 4:6-7 on a notecard or create a lock screen, so you see it frequently. Consider memorizing it so that you are reminded that even in your anxious moments, He gives you peace.

DAY 5: DON'T LOOK AWAY!

Scripture: [Daniel 3:1-18](#), [2 Corinthians 4:18](#), [Colossians 3:1-2](#), [Psalm 123:1](#)

Reflection: The almost unbelievable story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego reveals a trio of friends who knew the real God in their life. And they knew He was mightier than what they saw and felt in the culture around them. Exile was hard. Surviving an evil empire was hard. Still, over and over again, when they were tempted to look away and do the easy or the convenient (or the life-saving!) thing, they made the difficult choice. They kept their eyes fixed on God and chose to obey Him. Their perspective on life was not rooted in this temporary world they could see with their eyes. That's why they could stand when everyone around them bowed. And why they could say, *"But even if He does not...."* Their trust was in Someone greater and His eternal promises.

It is good to remind yourself that life in this world is temporary. Your eternal home is with God in His Kingdom. Everything here will one day pass away, and He will make *"all the sad things come untrue"* (The Jesus Storybook Bible).

Ask Yourself:

-How does my view of eternity impact how I live now?

-What have I learned from Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego this week?

Pause to pray: *Lord, I choose to keep my eyes fixed on You. Help me to see things from an eternal perspective, knowing that this world and its temptations and sorrows are temporary. Help me to rest in knowing that what is seen will not last but what is unseen is eternal. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Consider your calendar for the upcoming week. What do you find there that needs you to trust God more deeply, rely on yourself less, and keep an eternal perspective? Set an alarm to pray specifically over that appointment every day.

LIVING FOR GOD IN A GODLESS SOCIETY: A Savior in the Fire

January 29, 2023

DAY 1 GOD IN THE FIRE

Scripture: [Daniel 3:19-30](#); [John 16:7, 13](#)

Reflection: In the previous weeks of the series on Daniel, we've seen God give favor to Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they were trained in Babylonian society. We have also seen God reveal himself through the interpretations of dreams. These four men have been faithful to the Lord while also discerning things that help them build relationships and share their faith. In Daniel 3, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are met with a situation where they are standing up and being faithful to the Lord and it seems that it will mean the end of their lives. They know that the Lord will deliver them (Daniel 3:18), even if it might be deliverance through their physical death. Miraculously, the Lord meets them in the fire. Jesus is right there with them, talking with them and protecting them to such a degree that they don't even smell like fire. This is crazy! Especially when we note that the soldiers who threw them in died because of the heat of the fire. Through their faithfulness, King Nebuchadnezzar comes to a greater understanding of who God is. Today we can feel like we are "in the fire" when we stand up for faith in Jesus. And in those moments we can know, more assuredly than even Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that the Lord is with us because we have the Holy Spirit, who lives in every believer.

Ask Yourself:

- How have I seen Jesus show when I have felt like I was "in the fire"?
- What am I afraid to face right now?

Pause to Pray: *Lord, thank you for never abandoning me "in the fire". Never let me forget that You are with me. Everywhere. Always. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Make a written record of how Jesus has shown up for you in difficult times so far. Put it somewhere that you can revisit when things are difficult again.

DAY 2 GOD IN THE LION'S DEN

Scripture: [Daniel 6](#); [Matthew 5:43-48](#); [2 Corinthians 2:15-16](#); [Galatians 5:16-26](#)

Reflection: At this point in his life, Daniel has faithfully served for about 70 years through 3 different rulers. The current king, Darius, recognizes Daniel's qualities of integrity and knows about his faithful service to God. Daniel is highly respected by King Darius partially because of his faith. But King Darius makes a foolish law that requires Daniel to choose between following God and the king. Daniel willingly submits to the consequences of his actions, and the Lord miraculously saves him from the lions. And because of this, the Lord's name is praised through Darius' royal decree. Similarly, in today's culture, we might have a boss who respects us, yet doesn't share our faith. But they may honor our faith because of our character. Still, there will be coworkers who might want to sabotage us because of our faith and/or their desire to get ahead. People will usually respond in one of these two ways as they witness faith in Jesus: admiration (hopefully leading to faith) or disgust (running away from the Lord). We are called to be faithful to the Lord regardless of how others respond. We're also called to love both types of people.

Ask Yourself:

- How has my faith garnered admiration in others?
- How has it resulted in disgust?
- How do I treat the people around me, regardless of how they treat me?

Pause to Pray: *Lord, help me to love the people around me, no matter what their response is to you. This is hard! Soften my heart and help me to see them with your eyes. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: In what tangible, practical ways can you share the fruit of the Holy Spirit with the people around you today?

DAY 3 DEVOTION & DANGER

Scripture: [1 Peter 5:8-9](#); [John 14:15-17](#); [2 Corinthians 10:3-4](#)

Reflection: Though our world is very different from the one in the book of Daniel, we too are challenged to be faithful to the Lord in a society that often is against Him. Peter reminds us that Satan doesn't want us to succeed, and he is searching for those with their guard down to prevent the glory of the Lord from being known. As we stay devoted to the Lord no matter what, we may end up in dangerous places. Maybe not in a literal fire or a lion's den, but perhaps risking losing a relationship or a job. Many people in countries around the world are at risk of physical harm as well. However, we have hope because we have the Holy Spirit with us to help us stand firm along the way. Ultimately, every dangerous place we face isn't only about the physical circumstances, there is also a spiritual element going on behind the scenes. The Lord can meet us in both the physical and the spiritual, and He is victorious!

Ask Yourself:

- How will I be ready for the dangerous places my faith in the Lord might take me to?
- Who sets an example for me of courage and resolve in hard times? How can I connect with them?

Pause to Pray: *Holy Spirit, give me the strength to stand firm in dangerous places. And not just me- so many people around the world face rejection and danger because of your Name. Remind us of your victory. Fill us with your hope. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Be ready to start a new plan when this one is finished! Reading God's Word is one of the primary ways He readies to be bold and courageous. Choose a new plan and invite a friend to do it with you!

DAY 4 GRACE IN THE MOMENT

Scripture: [James 1:2-4](#); [2 Samuel 22:2-4](#); [2 Corinthians 12:7-10](#)

Reflection: Many times we see the dangerous places coming before we get there. It is generally our natural reaction to avoid them if we can, or to ask the Lord to remove them. The interesting thing about the Lord is that He often wants us to experience those dangerous places ("trials" as James calls them) so that He can meet us IN that hard space (fire, lion's den, etc.). The trials deepen our faith, increase our dependence on Him, and remind us that He alone is God.

Never forget- the grace of God is sufficient. For every moment. Don't worry about what tomorrow brings. His grace comes in the moment that you stand firm in your faith, knowing that He stands alongside you through every insult, hardship, and fire. Even as the lions charge, His power is made perfect in your weakness.

Ask Yourself:

- Reflect on Day 1's question again- what am I afraid to face right now?
- Why am I afraid? Because I am weak? Alone? Incapable?
- How does fear change to faith in God's presence?

Pause to Pray: *Lord, this is hard, but I praise you for the trials I experience and that they are transforming me and deepening my faith. Thank you for your sufficiency- your presence, your grace, your love, your power. They are all enough for me. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: God is with you all day today. Be mindful to look for His hand at work and praise Him for it!

DAY 5 SUFFERING THAT INSPIRES

Scripture: [Daniel 3:24-30](#); [Daniel 4:1-3](#); [Daniel 6:16-27](#); [1 Corinthians 15:55-58](#); [2 Corinthians 1:3-5](#)

Reflection: Often we don't know the specific reason for why we experience dangerous places or suffering in our lives. One thing we do know, and we saw it repeatedly in Daniel 1-6 is that the way we face trials can show others the power and majesty of the Almighty God. Notice that Daniel and his three friends never ran to danger. They weren't thrill seekers or trying to gain attention for themselves. When they were faced with tough choices, choices with dangerous consequences, they chose God. And every witness to their words and actions knew the God they served. It didn't change every heart in Babylon, but it may have changed some.

Just as God's blessings are not given for your own sake, but for the blessing of others, so too will He use the trials of your life for the blessing of others. When you weep with hope. When you cry out in prayer. Not pretending to "be okay." Struggling and doing it by faith. People around you see the very real trial. And they see the very real God.

Ask Yourself:

- How honest am I about the struggles in my life? Do I try to make everything look "pretty"?
- In what ways can I be honest about struggles, while also expressing faith and trust in God?

Pause to Pray: *Lord, you see the hard places, and you are with me in each one. Thank you! May my trials bring you glory. As I lean closer to you, as I cry out, as I cling to hope, may my honesty point others to your great Name. Amen.*

Take a Next Step: Someone in your life is struggling- a coworker or friend or neighbor- how can you pray for them, encourage them, and share Christ with them?