



## SESSION 1

# Develop Strong Convictions

### THE POINT

Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.

### THE PASSAGE

Daniel 1:3-13,17-19

### LIFE CONNECTION

We have all assimilated to some degree to the culture we live in. Our understanding, customs, and traditions all grow out of our culture. That's not necessarily bad, but it becomes an issue when those customs and practices conflict with the biblical standards to which God calls us. In the book of Daniel, we find a man who had convictions and lived out those convictions in a culture that called for a different standard.

### BACKGROUND

The book of Daniel was written during the Babylonian exile. It covers a period of about seventy years—from Nebuchadnezzar's first conquest of Jerusalem in 605 BC to around the third year of the Persian king Cyrus in 536 BC. Chapters 1–6 are historical and inform us of events that happened to Daniel and a few other young Hebrew exiles in Babylon. Chapters 7–12 are prophetic and record four visions given to the elderly Daniel concerning the kingdoms of this world and God's coming kingdom.

A number of purposes can be discerned for the book of Daniel. First, as chapters 1–6 demonstrate, Daniel recorded some of the history of a group of Jewish exiles who were taken from Jerusalem to Babylon in 605 BC, of which Daniel himself was a member. Second, chapters 7–12 reassure God's people that while the kingdoms of this world will come and go, God is moving the course of human history along to His desired goal. The world situation is not out of His control, and it will end in the coming of God's kingdom on earth. A third purpose of Daniel's book was to provide insight, guidance, and principles to God's people as to the extent of cultural accommodation they properly could make in a dominantly secular society that often was hostile to their faith.

### THE POINT

Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.

## GETTING STARTED

**DISCUSS:** Give your group an opportunity to discuss the question on page 15 of the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG): **What are some defining characteristics of our local culture?**

**RECAP (DDG, PAGE 16):** Invite a volunteer to read **The Bible Meets Life** to introduce the session:

Imagine a brand-new, white t-shirt. No matter how careful you are with that shirt, the bright whiteness will eventually start to fade. This isn't dissimilar to what happens to believers. Every Christian is living in the midst of a culture with different priorities, values, and beliefs, and as much as we try to remain pristine, we all become a little less bright the more time we spend in the world. Despite this natural dulling, we must remain true to who we are in Christ.

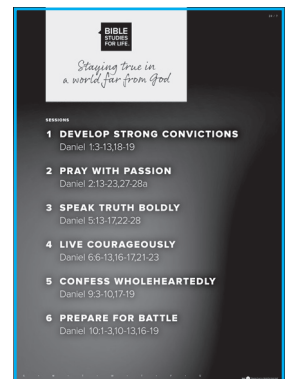
**GUIDE:** Direct attention to **The Point** on page 16 of the DDG. Invite the group to fill in the blank. **Our CONVICTIONS, not our circumstances, define who we are.**

**LEADER PACK:** Display **Pack Item 1**, the **Staying True in a World Far from God** poster, and give a brief overview of the session titles in this study.

**PRAY:** Transition into the study by asking God for the courage to live out our convictions in a culture that stands contrary to many of the things we believe and stand strongly for.



5 MINUTES



STUDY  
INTRODUCTION

**TIP:** When helpful, use this "Notes" column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.



10 MINUTES

NOTES

## DANIEL 1:3-7

<sup>3</sup> The king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the Israelites from the royal family and from the nobility— <sup>4</sup> young men without any physical defect, good-looking, suitable for instruction in all wisdom, knowledgeable, perceptive, and capable of serving in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the Chaldean language and literature. <sup>5</sup> The king assigned them daily provisions from the royal food and from the wine that he drank. They were to be trained for three years, and at the end of that time they were to attend the king. <sup>6</sup> Among them, from the Judahites, were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. <sup>7</sup> The chief eunuch gave them names; he gave the name Belteshazzar to Daniel, Shadrach to Hananiah, Meshach to Mishael, and Abednego to Azariah.

**GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT (DDG, PAGE 16):** Daniel was among a group of Israelites who found themselves living in a foreign land, among foreign people. The best and brightest of Israel had been sent to the cultural center of the Babylonian Empire with the intention that they be assimilated into that culture. But Daniel intended to follow the plans of God rather than the intentions of the Babylonians.

**READ:** Ask someone to read aloud Daniel 1:3-7 on page 16 of the DDG.

**LEADER PACK:** In advance, make copies of Pack Item 2, the Book of Daniel handout, and distribute them to your group. Use this information to provide historical context for the events in the life of Daniel. Display Pack Item 3, the Map of Babylonian Empire poster, and point out the locations of Jerusalem, Babylon, and the route taken by the exiles.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group’s attention to statement 1 on page 16 of the DDG. Invite the group to fill in the blank: **The world expects us to conform to its EXPECTATIONS.**

**RECAP (DDG, PAGE 16):** Nobody asked Daniel and the others what they would like to learn, to eat, or even if they wanted their names to be changed. They lived in Babylon now. This dynamic should feel familiar to us because, like these Israelites, believers in Christ find themselves living in a culture with all kinds of expectations. As believers, we have an unchanging Source of truth. It’s not in our nature to fit in. It is in our nature, as children of another kingdom, to stand apart.

**DISCUSS:** In what areas do you find your Christian worldview challenged these days?

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see the importance of drawing the line where we will not compromise.



**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**  
*What are some ways we might feel like foreigners in this world?*

## DANIEL 1:3-7 COMMENTARY

**Connection to The Point:** Daniel was placed in circumstances beyond his control.

**King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (v. 1).**

Nebuchadnezzar became king upon his father’s death and proceeded to put down further revolts in Judah in 597 BC and 586 BC, eventually destroying the Jewish kingdom and its capital city of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar instituted forced deportation, and thus took many Jewish captives to Babylon.

**Babylon (v. 1).** From the root meaning “to confound,” Babylon goes back in Bible times to the tower built there and God’s act of confusing the languages (Genesis 11:9). The height of its splendor and fame, however, came under Nebuchadnezzar, who built great temples and canals, fortified the city’s double walls, and constructed the magnificent hanging gardens. The great city was perhaps the first to reach a population of 200,000, and it’s estimated to have had a half a million people in Daniel’s day.

**Jerusalem (v. 1).** Jerusalem was the capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Its name means “city of peace.” David conquered the ancient city from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:6-7; 1 Chronicles 11:4-5). David also bought a threshing floor there from a Jebusite, upon which Solomon later built the Jerusalem temple. The Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city of Jerusalem and its temple in 586 BC. The Persian king Cyrus the Great allowed the city, its walls, and its temple to be rebuilt when he permitted the Jewish captives to return to their land, ending their exile.

**Some of the vessels from the house of God (v. 2).**

Nebuchadnezzar took only some of the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem. Others were taken later, when King Jehoiachin was deported (2 Kings 24:13), and still others were taken when the city and temple were destroyed when King Zedekiah was overthrown (Jeremiah 27:12,19-22).

**Ashpenaz, . . . chief eunuch (v. 3).** This man was the chief of the officials under Nebuchadnezzar. He was responsible for selecting and caring for the conquered foreign nobles who were to be trained in the ways of the Babylonians. That he was a eunuch need not be taken literally. The same Hebrew word is used of Potiphar, and he was married (“office,” Genesis 37:36). Thus, the word could be rendered “leading man” or “officer.” At any rate, he treated Daniel with kindness and favor.

**The Chaldean language and literature (v. 4).** The script of the Chaldean language and literature was cuneiform, a system of characters composed of wedges. This reference may refer not merely to the general learning of the population but more specifically to that of a special class of learned men.

**They were to attend the king (v. 5).** This statement gives the express purpose for the three years of training. In Babylon, such training began about age fifteen and continued to about age eighteen.

**He gave the name Belteshazzar to Daniel, Shadrach to Hananiah, Meshach to Mishael, and Abednego to Azariah (v. 7).** All four of the Hebrew young men’s original names had theological meaning that would have reminded them of their heritage and of the true God (v. 6). The Babylonians replaced each of these names with names of pagan significance. The two sets of names appear together only here in the book of Daniel. The Babylonian names are in 2:49 and in chapter 3; the Hebrew names are additionally found in 1:11,19 and 2:17.



15 MINUTES

NOTES

## DANIEL 1:8-13

<sup>8</sup> Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank. So he asked permission from the chief eunuch not to defile himself. <sup>9</sup> God had granted Daniel kindness and compassion from the chief eunuch, <sup>10</sup> yet he said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and drink. What if he sees your faces looking thinner than the other young men your age? You would endanger my life with the king."

<sup>11</sup> So Daniel said to the guard whom the chief eunuch had assigned to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> "Please test your servants for ten days. Let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then examine our appearance and the appearance of the young men who are eating the king's food, and deal with your servants based on what you see."

**READ:** Ask someone to read aloud Daniel 1:8-13 on page 17 of the DDG.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group's attention to statement 2 on page 17 of the DDG. Invite the group to fill in the blank: **Draw the line where you will not COMPROMISE.**

**RECAP (DDG, PAGE 17):** Perhaps Daniel drew the line at his diet because there were specific prohibitions in the law of God regarding what to eat and what not to eat. Even so, Daniel was respectful. Like Daniel, we'll encounter places in which cultural norms and expectations contradict the law of God. But we can draw a line with the character, kindness, and confidence of the children of God.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for verse 8 on the next page of this Leader Guide to give further information about Daniel's decision to reject the king's food and wine.

**DISCUSS:** How do you distinguish between matters of preference and issues of conviction?

**DO:** Direct the group to the **Engage** activity on page 17 of the DDG (page 27 of this Leader Guide) to help them identify areas in which culture tries to get believers to compromise. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

**DISCUSS:** How do we navigate the tension between standing in our convictions and not isolating ourselves from the world?

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses, we see the importance of serving and standing for the Lord no matter what the culture does.

### ALTERNATE QUESTION:

**How can we determine when to compromise and when to stand firm?**

### THE POINT

Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.

## DANIEL 1:8-13 COMMENTARY

**Connection to The Point:** Daniel determined he would not let his circumstances redefine who he was or his relationship with God.

**Would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine (v. 8).** Whereas Daniel seemingly did not object to being given a pagan name or assigned pagan learning, he made a decision based on principle when it came to the food and drink he was offered. Behind this rejection were two concerns. First, the food the Babylonians consumed did not meet the requirements of the Mosaic law and thus was considered unclean (Leviticus 3:17; 11:1-47; 17:10-14). Second, the fact that the food and drink from the Babylonians were first offered to their pagan gods before being consumed. Thus, the meals were consecrated to their gods, and those who took part in them in effect worshiped those idols. For Daniel to participate in such meals would have been self-defiling. Further, in the East, to share a meal was to enter into a covenant friendship, to commit oneself to the allegiance of the person—in this case, to that of the king. This Daniel could not do.

In fact, well over a century earlier, Hosea had prophesied about this very situation for the exiles of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Hosea 9:3-4). Many Jews during the period of Greek dominance between the Old and New Testaments made a similar commitment to Daniel's. We are told, "Many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die" (1 Maccabees 1:62-63). Fortunately, this was not the outcome for Daniel.

**Kindness and compassion (v. 9).** While the chief eunuch showed Daniel kindness and compassion, it was God and His intervention that caused the eunuch to treat Daniel in this way. The word "kindness" is the important Hebrew word *hesed* that has many shades of meaning, including "goodwill." "Compassion" is used in the plural to add intensity to the term. Thus, it refers to a deep-seated sympathy.

Because God caused the chief eunuch to respond in this way, it opened the door for Daniel to propose an alternative suggestion.

**"Endanger my life with the king" (v. 10).** Not only could the course of action Daniel suggested endanger the lives of the captives, but also that of the chief eunuch, because he was solely responsible for the care of these captives and would be held accountable for them with his life. Ashpenaz could lose his life for changing the king's orders and directions. He might also face the consequences of siding with those who were rejecting participation in this show of loyalty to the king by not eating his food.

**The guard . . . assigned to (v. 11).** When Daniel did not succeed with Ashpenaz the chief eunuch, an unnamed guard—a person lesser than and under the authority of the chief eunuch—was the one to whom Daniel pitched his idea. This man agreed to test Daniel's proposal for ten days. He no doubt enjoyed the king's rich food and wine himself while he substituted vegetables and water for the young men's portion of meat and wine. According to verse 16, it seems the guard apparently not only substituted their food for the ten-day test period, but also for the course of the next three years! It should be noted that the word that appears as a proper name for this guard in the KJV, "Melzar," means "steward," "attendant," or "guard," and is used here as a title and not as a proper name.

**"Vegetables to eat" (v. 12).** "Vegetables" literally is "things sowed." Neither the vegetables nor the water would have been offered to the pagan gods, nor would eating them have violated the Mosaic food laws. The vegetables likely would have included a variety of grains and greens, not just peas, beans, and legumes.



10 MINUTES

NOTES

## DANIEL 1:17-19

<sup>17</sup> God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding in every kind of literature and wisdom. Daniel also understood visions and dreams of every kind. <sup>18</sup> At the end of the time that the king had said to present them, the chief eunuch presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> The king interviewed them, and among all of them, no one was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they began to attend the king.

**READ:** Ask someone to read aloud Daniel 1:17-19 on page 17 of the DDG.

**GUIDE:** Use the commentary for the reference to “visions and dreams” (v. 17) on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain that Daniel now lived in a culture and society that placed great emphasis on visions and dreams and their interpretation. So, this was an important gift from God to Daniel that would help him significantly as the years went by.

**GUIDE:** Direct your group’s attention to statement 3 on page 17 of the DDG. Invite the group to fill in the blank: **Serve and stand for the LORD no matter what the culture does.**

**RECAP (DDG, PAGE 17):** The king was so impressed by these men that he employed them in his direct service. Daniel chose to trust and stand firm and left what happened next in the hands of the Lord. History is full of faithful believers who also stood but didn’t have the same kind of results. The call of God is clear: Stand faithfully and entrust the rest to Him.

**DISCUSS:** What are some things that help us stand firm in our convictions?

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** See the optional activity (on page 27 in this Leader Guide) to give your group an opportunity to identify ways Christians are called to stand today.

**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**  
*How might others benefit when we stand our ground?*

## DANIEL 1:17-19 COMMENTARY

**Connection to The Point:** Daniel’s conviction to stay true to God did not waver, and he used the gifts and skills God gave him to serve.

**Knowledge and understanding . . . and wisdom (v. 17).** Once again, the text stresses that it was God who gave these four young men knowledge and understanding. We are not told how hard they studied or how difficult the material was over their three-year course of study—incredibly difficult in both cases, most likely—but all four of these young men were given insights and comprehension that their comrades could not achieve by their own means. “Knowledge” here refers to the God-given ability to discern what is true from what is false. “Understanding” relates to the mastery of the entire corpus of the Babylonian writings.

**Every kind of literature (v. 17).** “Wisdom” is the ability to apply wisely and correctly the knowledge they acquired. Such gifts were given to all four young men. In this sense, they were like Moses, who was skilled in all the wisdom of Egypt (Acts 7:22).

**Visions and dreams (v. 17).** Something more was given to Daniel. God gave Daniel understanding of all kinds of visions and dreams. Daniel had the ability to see, understand, and interpret what visions and dreams meant. This will become important in the chapters that follow. Visions normally occur when one is awake. Dreams occur while one is sleeping. The reference here includes not only the visions and dreams that came to Daniel, but also those that came to others. Daniel now lived in a culture and society that placed great emphasis on visions and dreams and on their interpretation. So this was an important gift of God to Daniel that would help him significantly as the years went by.

**No one was found equal to (v. 19).** With that short comment, these four young men **began to attend the king.** But after saying that, Daniel returned to make a further comment on the king’s final examination of these four young men: “In every matter of wisdom and understanding that the king consulted them about, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and mediums in his entire kingdom” (v. 20). “Ten times” is a standard idiom for absolute superiority. These four were absolutely superior to “all”—not just some—of “the magicians and mediums.” And not just superior to those who studied with them for three years or who lived in Babylon. No, they were superior to all those “in his entire kingdom”—which was a most extensive empire. The term “magicians” was used of soothsayer priests in Egypt; and the term “mediums” refers to a conjurer. These were considered the wise men of Babylon.

# LIVE IT OUT



5 MINUTES

NOTES

**ASK:** What actions will you take in response to today's study?

**GUIDE:** Direct your group to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 18 of the DDG. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform how they live out their convictions this week.

- **Draw the line.** What are you consuming that's drawing you away from God's standards? Draw the line and stop watching, listening to, and following those things.
- **Know where you stand.** Make a list of items on which you will not compromise.
- **Know God's standards.** Commit to a daily study of God's Word. Look for biblical commands and examples of godly living.

## Wrap It Up

**GUIDE:** Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 18 of the DDG) to guide their discussion. Encourage your group to spend time each day in God's Word with the **Daily Study** section (pages 19-24 of the DDG).

**RECAP:** Read or restate from page 16 of the DDG.

Every Christian is living in the midst of a culture with different priorities, values, and beliefs, and as much as we try to remain pristine, we all become a little less bright the more time we spend in the world. Despite this natural dulling, we must remain true to who we are in Christ.

**PRAY:** Close your group time with prayer, thanking God for the strength He provides us to follow our convictions, rather than be defined by our circumstances.



SCAN ME

BIBLE  
STUDIES  
FOR LIFE

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[BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra](https://BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra)

THE POINT

Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.

## ENGAGE

List areas in which culture tries to get believers to compromise today.

How has God helped you avoid compromise?

NOTES

## BONUS CONTENT

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** In advance, gather four tear sheets and several markers for each. Write one of these phrases on each sheet: Stand Apart, Stand Firm, Stand Up, Stand With. Place the tear sheets in different corners of your meeting room.

- Encourage the group to visit each sheet and list some ways Christians are called to stand in each situation.
- Once everyone has had an opportunity to add their ideas, bring the group back together and discuss their responses.