

FALL 2023

# YOU



**STAYING TRUE  
IN A WORLD  
FAR FROM GOD**

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**CONFIDENT IN  
THE FACE OF  
HARD QUESTIONS**



## A BIBLE STUDY ABOUT LIVING UNASHAMED IN TODAY'S CULTURE

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Do you remember your middle school experience? There were many changes and uncertainties in that phase of life. Do you remember that one kid who always stuck out? Perhaps it was that one kid who was very quiet, or maybe the one who was always extremely loud.

Yeah, we remember those kids because they stood out. Unfortunately, the desire to stand out diminishes between adolescence and adulthood. Many adults make it a priority to blend in and not cause any trouble, especially believers. That's because we live in a culture that is becoming increasingly antagonistic toward those who follow Christ. Being fully committed to Christian discipleship may cause us to stand out and may evoke harmful attacks and assaults. However, Christians need not fear standing out. It's an opportunity to stand on our convictions and shine the light of Christ on those around us.

In this study, we will explore how Daniel gave a powerful example of what it looks like to live unashamed in a culture of unrighteousness and disobedience to God. You will be strengthened to:

- Develop Strong Convictions
- Pray with Passion
- Speak Truth Boldly
- Live Courageously
- Confess Wholeheartedly
- Prepare for Battle

These sessions will lead us to discuss how our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are. Through prayer, being a bold witness for God, doing the right thing in God's strength, being ready to confess and repent, and preparing for spiritual battles keep us close to God. We will be built up to speak hard truth in a culture far from God.

SESSION 1

# DEVELOP STRONG CONVICTIONS

Leader pages on pp. 102-105

**THE POINT:**  
OUR CONVICTIONS, NOT  
OUR CIRCUMSTANCES,  
DEFINE WHO WE ARE.

## DANIEL 1:3-13,17-19

<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.

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<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."

### MEMORY VERSE

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<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.

### KEYWORDS

**Young men (v. 4)**—The Hebrew word for "young men" literally means "children" or "boys" and probably refers to teenagers, an estimate of being age fifteen.

**They were to be trained (v. 5)**—This phrase literally means "to make them great [gādal]." The Hebrew word is used for raising children.

**Determined (v. 8)**—This word means literally "set upon his heart," referring to inner resolve.

**Vegetables (v. 12)**—This word is a translation of the Hebrew zērōa, which means basically "that which grows from sown seed." The term would include fruits, grains, and bread that is made from grains.

# HOW CAN WE DEVELOP STRONG CONVICTIONS?

The film *Soul* is centered on the life narrative of Joe Gardner, an extraordinarily talented jazz musician and experienced middle school music teacher. However, although Joe has committed himself to the classroom, Joe passionately and continually dreams about playing jazz music professionally full-time.

One day, Joe meets a famous jazz musician who invited him to play for her that evening. Joe's uncontrollable excitement distracted him while walking, which ultimately caused him to fall inside a utility hole of a sewer drain. He landed lost and bewildered in an unknown place called the Great Beyond.

Like Joe, we sometimes look at our world and assess all the things happening today and say, "This is NOT the world I have known!" It seems that we too have landed in the Great Beyond and we recognize there is something vastly wrong here. Similarly, the Old Testament prophet Daniel was transported into a foreign and ungodly place where everything was wrong. His example can help us to live faithfully to God in a seemingly unfamiliar world.

## Know who You Are // Daniel 1:3-7

The book of Daniel is framed as an autobiography that highlights the life of the prophet Daniel. According to the narrative, the Babylonians conquered the ruling Assyrians in 605 BC. Subsequently, the nation of Judah found itself under Babylonian domination. One of the first acts of Babylon's King Nebuchadnezzar was to capture choice citizens from Jerusalem, Judah's capital city, and bring them into his royal household. Daniel was likely about fifteen years old and was among those taken.

**The Best and the Brightest**—Nebuchadnezzar did not desire to bring men to Babylon who displayed apparent limitations; Nebuchadnezzar sought vividly fit, competent, and wise men who could support him, strengthen his power and influence,

and advance his Babylonian kingdom. Additionally, taking the strongest and most influential men to Babylon would weaken Judah, making it vulnerable to future assaults.

Nebuchadnezzar had not considered the religious foundation rooted in the lives of some of the captives, namely Daniel and his three Hebrew friends. These four young men grew up under the influence of Judah's godly king, Josiah. Josiah's reign (640-609 BC) was marked by a nationwide revival, a covenant renewal between the Hebrew people and God, and a reestablishment of God's



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Word as the foundation of worship for the Hebrew people. Although not mentioned in Scripture, we can infer that the youths' devotion to God and God's Word possibly began in the pattern set out by their parents.

**The Training and Teaching**—Nebuchadnezzar ordered that Daniel, Azariah, Mishael, and Hananiah be instructed: "in all wisdom, knowledge . . . the Chaldean language, and literature." The instruction was to last for three years, a typical duration for religious instruction in many ancient Near Eastern cultures.

Nebuchadnezzar also ordered that each of their Hebrew names be changed to those that honored various Babylonian gods. Their original names reflected their parents' faith in God. Perhaps he wanted to erase from their minds the beliefs and culture they knew in Judah. On the other hand, maybe Nebuchadnezzar was preparing these young men to work in Babylon. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar planned to use them to instruct future captives on how to conduct themselves once they arrived in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar also ordered his servants to feed the young men food and beverage from the royal table to acclimate them to royal Babylonian life. Nebuchadnezzar undoubtedly ensured that the young Hebrew captives received the best food, education, and mentorship.

### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES THESE YOUNG MEN EXPERIENCED IN THEIR CAPTIVITY?

The documented experiences of these young Hebrew men in Babylon serve as a cautionary tale for us today. The world will increasingly expect people of faith to abandon all allegiances to God, as many parts of modern culture continue to move further from God-honoring traditions aggressively. The world will continue to pressure believers to embrace lifestyles that violate God's Word. However, Daniel, Azariah, Mishael, and Hananiah remained faithful to God when faced with similar opposition. The question for us today is how faithful will we remain?

## Determine Where You Will Stand //

### Daniel 1:8-13

**Decision and Defilement**—Daniel, Azariah, Mishael, and Hananiah were informed that they would receive the king's royal food and wine (v. 5). The royal food, without question, would have been the finest cuisine prepared by the most talented cooks in Babylon. However, Daniel viewed the food as a source of defilement. Here, the Hebrew word "defile" implies something polluted or desecrated. There are two possible reasons why Daniel viewed the king's food as defiled:



## DIGGING DEEPER CHANGED NAMES

One of the first commands that Nebuchadnezzar ordered when the young Hebrew men arrived was that their names be changed from Hebraic to Babylonian names. Daniel's birth-assigned name carries the suffix "el" for Elohim and means "God is my judge"; Nebuchadnezzar's chief official changed his name to Belteshazzar, which meant "Bel's prince." Hananiah's birth given name carries the suffix "iah" or "yah," which is short for Yahweh and means "Beloved by the LORD"; Nebuchadnezzar's chief official changed his name to Shadrach, which meant "Illumined by Sun-God." Mishael's birth name carries the suffix "el" for Elohim and means, "Who is as God"; Nebuchadnezzar's chief official changed his name to Meshach, which meant, "who is like Shach." Azariah's birth-assigned name carries the suffix "iah" or "yah," which is short for Yahweh and means "The LORD is my help"; Nebuchadnezzar's chief official changed his name to Abed-Nego, which meant "Servant of Nego."

**Why is it important for believers to reject the labels of the world?**

- **Daniel, Azariah, Mishael, and Hananiah were raised in Jewish homes that made distinctions between “clean” and “unclean” animals (Gen. 7:2-3, 8-9) and therefore viewed certain foods as unkosher.** Hebrew Law prohibited Jews from eating certain animals (Lev. 11).
- **Ancient pagan religions often compelled adherents to present food before idols, and the priests would consume it.** In light of this, God gave strict instructions to Moses, prohibiting him, along with the other Hebrews, from consuming food offered to idols (Ex. 34:14). This was an ongoing issue that even early Christians faced (1 Cor. 8:1-13).



## HOW CAN WE DETERMINE WHEN TO COMPROMISE AND WHEN TO STAND FIRM?

Daniel took a hard stand for his religious convictions. Although he was gracious in his request by asking permission to decline the food, he had already decided in his heart that he would not consume the king's food (v. 8). Daniel's resolve is a lesson for us. We must establish our convictions against unholy, compromised, or unacceptable behavior before we face moments of decision.

**Time for Testing**—The chief eunuch, Nebuchadnezzar's chief servant, warned Daniel against rejecting the king's food (v. 9). First, rejecting the king's food would be viewed as an act of disrespect and rebellion. Additionally, the chief servant feared that rejecting the king's food

would impact Daniel's health, putting the servant's life in danger. Daniel disregarded the warning and made the same request to the personal guard who was assigned to him (vv. 11-13). The guard obliged and fed the young Hebrew men solely vegetables (grains, fruit, and other vegetarian food) and water for ten days. After ten days, the guard evaluated the young Hebrew men (v. 14).

Daniel, Azariah, Mishael, and Hananiah stood firm on their convictions and looked healthier during the ten-day evaluation than those who ate the royal food. Consequently, the guard continued feeding them the modified diet for the duration of the three-year training period. The young Hebrew men's unwavering stance brought glory to God. Credit would have been attributed to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians if the young Hebrew men had eaten the royal food and appeared in excellent physical and mental shape. However, credit was due to God.

## Stand Without Compromise //

### Daniel 1:17-19

Daniel recognized that God was actively at work—even in their then-current threatening situation. Three times in this first chapter, Daniel affirmed God's hand had been at work amid the historically disastrous events (vv. 2,9,17).

**Intellect and Insight**—Rather than merely acquiring information (knowledge), the four young Hebrew men received wisdom and understanding that comes exclusively from God. They embodied and demonstrated what James wrote about centuries later, “Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God . . . and it will be given to him” (James 1:5; cf. Col. 1:9).

God also gave Daniel something beyond mere intellect—something the other young Hebrew men did not possess—the ability to understand visions and dreams of every kind. The Babylonians believed their gods conveyed messages through dreams. Daniel's ability to interpret dreams far surpassed what the king's priests, magicians, mediums, and sorcerers could do, which ultimately impressed the king (2:1-48).

Nebuchadnezzar intended to display the superiority of Babylon's so-called gods when he

## THE POINT: OUR CONVICTIONS, NOT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, DEFINE WHO WE ARE.

removed the sacred vessels from the Jerusalem temple and placed them in Babylon (v. 2). However, Daniel's God-given ability to understand every kind of vision and dream confirmed the superiority of God—Yahweh—over the false Babylonian deities.

**Superior and Service**—Nebuchadnezzar had requested the best and the brightest for his service, and the time came for Nebuchadnezzar to inspect all the captives who had received three years of training. The king was clear about his expectations: “young men without any physical defect, [men who had received] instruction in all wisdom, knowledge, [who were] perceptive, and capable of serving in [his] palace” (v. 4).

The four young Hebrew men's evaluation surpassed the others and exceeded Nebuchadnezzar's expectations. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar confirmed, “no one was found equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah” (v. 19). Consequently, Nebuchadnezzar hand-picked them to serve in his palace.

### HOW MIGHT OTHERS BENEFIT WHEN WE REMAIN STEADFAST?

Although Daniel learned about Babylonian culture, literature, and language, he refused to compromise his faith. The Lord did not abandon Daniel; God blessed him and the other young Hebrew men.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Mindfulness and other consciousness-based practices have garnered much traction within the last two decades. These schools of thought teach people how to raise their conscious awareness and be present with physical, emotional, and mental processes. However, the reality is that we need something greater. Paul reminded us, “Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens” (Eph. 6:12). Therefore, overcoming the world's principalities requires more than conscious-awareness. Fortunately, Jesus promised to send his disciples the Holy Spirit—the Counselor—the Spirit of truth (John 14:16-17). The Holy Spirit operates as God's voice that reminds us of God's Word and holds us accountable to our convictions rooted in God's Word. We can depend on the Holy Spirit to speak to us and support us, especially during times of difficulty and opposition.

**Why is it important for believers to depend on the Holy Spirit when physically, emotionally, and mentally drained?**

## LIVE IT

### How can we make sure that our lives are guided by our convictions?

Once we accept Christ into our hearts, we are expected to learn and live out God's Word daily. It is true that life's circumstances—coupled with compromising cultural changes in society—sometimes make it difficult to stand on our convictions about God's Word. However, God equips every believer with the gift of the Holy Spirit that guides us in truth and helps us remain faithful to our convictions. Begin to:

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- **Analyze your own life situation.** Is God working in an unexpected way? If so, pray and ask for His wisdom to see the bigger picture of what God is doing in your life.
- **Think about your own life.** Is there an area in which you have compromised and adopted the world's unbiblical values? Pray and ask God for strength to know what to do in this situation.
- **Tell your story.** Share with your family or friends the details of a time God led you into an unexpected or even uncomfortable place, but you later saw God's hand at work.

# DAILY READINGS

## 1. THE CHOICE // JOSHUA 24:15

If someone in authority requires that you go against your convictions, you know that the choice between carrying out that order or losing a personal opportunity can be hard. This is true, especially when all eyes are on you. Like Daniel, we know that the only eyes that matter are God's eyes, and just as Daniel refused to disobey God, we know that choosing to disobey God is not an option. Joshua reminds us to "choose for yourselves today: which will you worship" (Josh. 24:15). Jesus should always be the final authority, which means making the hard choices and being "okay" with the consequences.

**Disobedience is never an option. We choose Him because we love Him, and no consequence is worth the cost of doing anything else.**

## 2. WHO ARE YOU? // 2 TIMOTHY 2:15

When you look in the mirror, are you happy with who you see? If not, it might be a good time for self-evaluation. Every day, we make choices that affect our lives and others, sometimes weighty decisions with which we have to live. Daniel knew who he was and was settled in that. Knowing who we are in Christ is half the battle, which is why spending time with God is so important. He becomes our mirror, showing us an image of ourselves. From there, all we do is live life out, which we can do confidently because we know who we are and whose we are.

**The more time we spend with God, the more we learn about ourselves, which makes decision making and maintaining peace that much easier.**

## 3. WHAT WILL YOUR LEGACY BE? // EPHESIANS 6:13

How will you be remembered? Answer wisely; this is your legacy. What will remain long after you transition? Every day we have an opportunity to build towards a legacy of impact and purpose, but with that comes the courage to take a stand, which, ironically, isn't any easier for us than it was for Daniel. Choosing to put on "the full armor of

God" makes this possible so that no matter what comes our way, we can stand firm, forging a path of faithfulness, determination, and resilience that leads others straight back to God. Our job is simple: remember to suit up and have the courage to take a stand.

**We're not called to be superheroes. In fact, wise choices often form the summation of memorable legacies.**

## 4. REPRIORITIZE PRAYER // HEBREWS 4:15

Compromise is all around—on our jobs, in our legal system, and even in our personal relationships. When properly used, compromise can be a great way to demonstrate love. However, we should never compromise on the Word of God, yet society pressures us to do this very thing. When pressures mount, we can always find strength and comfort through prayer. Jesus was well acquainted with pressures "yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). He still intercedes on our behalf. So, if prayer was a priority for Him, shouldn't it be a priority for us also? Jesus spent much of His time here on earth in prayer, and from it, He drew strength.

**If we follow the same model for our lives, we'll grow stronger, and see more victories as well.**

## 5. IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT YOU! // LUKE 22:42

Throughout Jesus's ministry, He had many opportunities to put Himself and His interests first, and if we're being honest, it would have made life much easier. With no bounty on His head, He could garner favor with the religious leaders and live the "good life." But at what cost? In the garden of Gethsemane with His life on the line, He prayed "not my will, but yours" (Luke 22:42). Even when battling crippling fear, He refocused and strengthened His spirit through prayer. Prayer worked for Daniel just like it did for Jesus, and it'll work the same for us today—if we let it.

**Temptation is real. So is fear. But even more real, even more overcoming is the power of prayer. Jesus realized this. It's time we did, too.**



# LEADER GUIDE

## STUDY 1 STAYING TRUE IN A WORLD FAR FROM GOD

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### INTRODUCTION

The world has always been far from God and even hostile toward Him. In today's culture the distinction between the righteousness of God and the ways of the world seems increasingly more pronounced. Consequently, those who choose to follow Christ stand out. Christians need not fear standing out, but we can embrace it as an opportunity to shine

the light of Christ to those around us. The Old Testament prophet Daniel shows us by his own example how we can stand strong and unashamed.

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### Writer Bio

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## BEFORE YOU TEACH

### **Pray Frequently**

Prayer is always in order, so prior to teaching this session, lift each of your students up in prayer. Make it a habit of doing so on a regular basis. Ask God specifically what He wants each learner to learn from this session. Ask God to prepare you to be what each student needs in this time of teaching.

### **Define Keywords**

Research definitions of key words and develop practical examples of each so that your learners can relate to the material. For example, define, "convictions." Provide some examples of what having strong convictions looks like, and then from there ask your learners to cite examples of things that they themselves have conviction about.

## LOOK BACK

Review the last session, "God Deserves our Thanks." The point of the session was "We have so much to thank God for." Invite learners to share how that session encouraged them to be intentional about giving thanks to God. Ask for testimonies how this impacts their lives.

## TEACHING PLAN

### INTRODUCTION

**GUIDE:** Share that the Greek storyteller Aesop wrote the well known fable, "The Ant & The Grasshopper." The fable tells the story of a playful grasshopper that hounded an ant to play with him. The ant refused, stating that he was gathering food in anticipation for the impending winter. The grasshopper mocked him and continued to attempt to get him to abandon his efforts and play with him. However, the ant held firm and continued gathering food. When the winter came, the ant had plenty of food, while the grasshopper was cold and hungry.

**ASK:** "How would you compare the conviction of the ant with that of the grasshopper"?

**EXPLAIN:** Similar to the ant, God desires for us to have strong convictions and to hold to them even when challenged by opposing views. We will see this in this study about Daniel who despite being far from home he remained faithful to God.

**TRANSITION:** Share **The Point: Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.** Point out that this first session guides us to answer the question: "How can we develop strong convictions?"

**PACK ITEM:** Focus attention on **Pack Item 1: "Staying True in a World Far from God"** poster to review the sessions for this study.

## DIG INTO THE TEXT

### Know Who You Are // Daniel 1:3-7

**GUIDE:** Ask the class what they know about Daniel. Share that the text presents Daniel as a no nonsense prophet who at no point exhibited fear or reservation when it came to standing on his convictions.

**PACK ITEM:** Distribute **Pack Item 2: "Book of Daniel"** handout. Review with learners along with the commentary (p. 104) to gain more understanding about Daniel and his book.

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read Daniel 1:3-7. Also read other translations for a clearer picture of these verses.

**DIGGING DEEPER:** Read "Digging Deeper" (p. 13) to discuss the changing of Daniel's and his friends' names. Ask the question included.

**DISCUSS:** Divide the class into small groups of 2-3. Ask each group to discuss the importance of verses 3-7, and how they contribute to the theme of developing strong convictions. After a few minutes call for responses. Compare and contrast each other's responses. Explain the cultural implications of this time period, specifically as it pertained to defying the king, and the potential consequences that such defiance could bring.

## THE POINT: OUR CONVICTIONS, NOT OUR CIRCUMSTANCES, DEFINE WHO WE ARE.

**EXPLAIN:** Point out that it is believed that the king rarely ever encountered blatant insubordination, which makes Daniel's courage and conviction that much more impressive and inspiring.

### Determine Where You Will Stand // Daniel 1:8-13

**PACK ITEM:** Focus attention on **Pack Item 3: "Map of Babylonian Empire"** poster to provide a bird's eye view of Babylon at that time.

**READ:** Invite a volunteer to read Daniel 1:8-13.

**ASK:** "What do you do in situations where God is telling you to do one thing, but other voices are trying to steer you in a different direction? What sets God's voice apart?"

**EXPLAIN:** Share that Daniel was clear on what King Nebuchadnezzar wanted, but it is equally clear that he ultimately did not care, because he was so focused and dedicated to the instructions that God had given him.

**ASK:** "What do you think was Daniel's concern?"

**EXPLAIN:** Point out that Daniel was not concerned about disappointing the king, but rather he was concerned about disappointing God. He had reached a place in his life where he feared God's disapproval more than anyone else's, which contributed to his strong convictions.

**OBJECT LESSON:** Use the "Object Lesson" (p. 104) and the "Keywords" (p. 11) to highlight the value of vegetables when compared with "empty" foods.

**READ:** Invite a learner to read the paragraph that begins "Daniel, Azariah, Mishael stood . . ." (p. 14) to discuss the result of Daniel's strong conviction not to eat the king's food for 10 days.

**GUIDE:** Emphasize the importance of applying this concept of strong convictions to our daily lives. Invite learners to think of practical examples when strong convictions are necessary in their everyday lives.

**ASK:** "How would a lack of strong convictions on some of those examples be detrimental to

your life?" Would this threat cause you to stand firmer on your convictions?

### Stand Without Compromise //

Daniel 1:17-19

**READ:** Invite a learner to read Daniel 1:17-19.

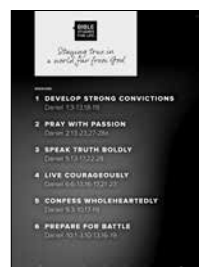
**ASK:** "At what point do you think Daniel was able to rest in the blessings of God, at the beginning of the fast, after ten days, or at the end of the fast? Why?"

**GUIDE:** Use the paragraphs that begin "Intellect and Insight . . .," the two subsequent paragraphs (pp. 14-15), and the commentary (p. 105) to discuss how God blessed Daniel and his friends.

**DISCUSS:** Lead a discussion about different opinions in our culture by guiding learners to brainstorm those opinions. Write their responses on the board. Then direct them to brainstorm statements that would oppose those opinions. Finally, direct learners to gauge which was strongest, the opinion or the opposition. Invite them to explain their response.

**DID YOU KNOW?** Invite a learner to read "Did You Know?" (p. 15) then lead a discussion on the question included.

**SUMMARIZE:** Use the paragraph that begins "Although Daniel learned . . ." (p. 15) to summarize this session.



PACK ITEM 1



PACK ITEM 2



PACK ITEM 3

## CLOSE THE SESSION

**ASK:** “In what ways can we do better in standing by our convictions, specifically as it pertains to our walk with Jesus Christ?”

**CHALLENGE:** Encourage the students to think about their own lives, as well as their current context/situation, and ask God for guidance on how to improve. Also encourage them to use “Live It” (p. 15) to help them have strong convictions going forward.

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, saying, “Father God, we thank You for providing us with this opportunity to learn about having strong convictions. May this session plant good seeds that will manifest into better habits for each person. In Jesus’s name we pray and ask all. Amen.”

## OBJECT LESSON

**DO:** Bring in several different types of vegetables to display in front of the class. Also download the benefits of eating the vegetables.

**ASK:** “Why do you think vegetables are loved by some and hated by others? What is the value of eating vegetables?”

**EXPLAIN:** Read the benefits of eating vegetables and share that Daniel decided not to eat the food of the king, as he desired not to defile himself. Instead, he opted to eat vegetables and drink water for ten days. This benefited him physically and now we know why. Encourage learners to eat their vegetables and to pray that God will keep them faithful to His will, and that they will always have the conviction to follow and obey Him.



## COMMENTARY

### DANIEL 1:3-7

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

**The book of Daniel.** 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 to around the third year of the Persian king Cyrus in 536. An outstanding feature of the book that English readers might miss is that it is written in two languages—Hebrew and Aramaic.

**Purposes of the book of Daniel.** A number of purposes can be discerned for the book Daniel wrote. First, as chapters 1–6 demonstrate, Daniel recorded some of the history of a group of the 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 setting of Daniel 1.** Verse 1 states the setting as “the third year of the reign of King Jehoiakim of Judah.” In Jehoiakim’s time, two rival empires dominated the world—Egypt and Babylon—both at opposite ends of the Fertile Crescent, with Israel in the middle. As the Egyptian army moved north toward Assyria, it attacked and defeated Judah, killing its good king, Josiah, at the Battle of Megiddo when Josiah tried to intervene. Josiah immediately was replaced by his son Jehoahaz, but pharaoh Neco, within three months, removed him, transported him to Egypt. At the Battle of

Carchemish, the Babylonians defeated Egypt, conquered the whole of Syria-Palestine, and made Jehoiakim a vassal to the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar.

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

Nebuchadnezzar was the son of King Nebopolassar. He defeated pharaoh Neco of Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish, thereby gaining domination of Syria-Palestine and the Euphrates valley for the Babylonian Empire. Nebuchadnezzar proceeded to put down further revolts in Judah, eventually destroying the Jewish kingdom and its capital city of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar instituted a policy of forced deportation, and took many Jewish captives.

**Daniel . . . Belteshazzar** (vv. 6-7). Babylon commonly imposed new names on foreigners who entered government or public service. **Daniel** means “God is my judge.” His name was changed to **Belteshazzar**, meaning “Protect his life!”—or if a reference to the Babylonian god Bel, then either “May Bel protect his life!” or “Bel’s prince.” Daniel was re-named specifically after the name of Nebuchadnezzar’s god (Dan. 4:8).

**Hananiah . . . Shadrach** (vv. 6-7). **Hananiah** means “Yahweh is gracious” or “Beloved of Yahweh,” but was changed to **Shadrach**, possibly a perversion of the name of Marduk, of the moon god Aku, or of the sun god Rak.

**Mishael . . . Meshach** (vv. 6-7). **Mishael** means “Who is what God is” or “Who is as God,” but was changed to **Meshach**, a name we are not certain of the meaning, but possibly also a reference to the moon god Aku, thus meaning “Who is as Aku.”

**Azariah . . . Abednego** (vv. 6-7). **Azariah** means “Yahweh has helped” or “Yahweh is my help,” but it was changed to **Abednego**, meaning “Servant (or worshiper) of Nebo [Nabu],” the Babylonian god of commerce and money who was the son of Bel.

## **DANIEL 1:8-13**

**Connection to The Point:** Daniel determined he would not let his circumstances redefine who he is 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 (Lev. 3:17; 11:1-47; 17:10-14). Second, was the fact that the food and drink from the Babylonians was 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.

## **DANIEL 1:17-19**

**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). *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). To Daniel something more was given. God gave Daniel understanding of all kinds of visions and dreams. Daniel had the ability to see, understand, and interpret what dreams and visions meant. This will become important in the chapters that follow. Dreams occur while one is sleeping. Visions normally occur when one is awake. The reference here includes not only the dreams and visions that came to Daniel, but also those that came to others.