



DANIEL: STAND STRONG



Dear Grace Family,

We have a dilemma today. How can we engage our culture without compromising our faith? How can we stay true to God's Word, operate in both grace and truth, and not bow to the pressure of a world system that opposes God's way?

The prophet Daniel was faced with a similar dilemma. As a young man he was carried away from Jerusalem and challenged to honor God in a pagan culture. He faced drastic differences and diversity and endured the immorality and corruption of a shifting culture that closely resembles our own. Daniel not only persevered through the slippery morals and rebelliousness of his own people, but he also remained steadfast when thrust into one of the most decadent cultures in all of history—ancient Babylon.

Daniel stood strong and loved everyone around him—just as Jesus did. We are called to do the same as our culture shifts, but it's not easy to balance grace and truth in the midst of drastic cultural changes. It seems much easier to disengage and try to avoid culture altogether. It's easier to judge and condemn those who don't agree with us. However, that is not what we are called to do or who we are called to be. Instead, we are called to represent Jesus and a different way as we stand firm.

Pastor Farrell

Beyond Sunday...

Each Sunday throughout the month of September, our entire Grace family will focus on events surrounding the story of Daniel and as found in the book of the Bible bearing his name. With that in mind we've developed this devotional tool as an encouragement to help you take the stories and biblical truths spoken through each message beyond Sunday and into your home, school, or workplace.

Consider sharing each devotional and its application questions around the dinner table with your family, over breakfast or coffee with a group of friends, or even as your Life Group meets. At home, we encourage you to engage in the suggested activities so that you grow together spiritually as a family. Our prayer is that this resource will spark conversation and reveal truths that will lead to healthy spiritual growth in you and those you share it with.

A collaborative project by the Communications and Family Ministries Team at Grace Covenant.

Listen to, watch, or share weekly messages on the Daniel: Standing Strong series @ gracecovenant.org.

WEEK 1: STANDING STRONG UNDER PRESSURE

Read Daniel 1:8-21

Written by: Kasie Barrett-DaSilva

Possibly, as you considered Daniel's story and the pressure he faced, you recalled a time when you were pressured to make a choice that would compromise your Christian values and beliefs.

Daniel, under pressure, chose to speak up and ask for a different diet. How can the request for a different diet have any spiritual significance for us? Without a doubt, it does! Here's why: The focus isn't on a different diet, but instead on how Daniel stood firm, staying true to his convictions. He set an example of how to stand strong when knee deep in our culture's ungodly pressures.

A simple diet of water and vegetables doesn't make my tastebuds dance. I'd rather not pay the cost and enjoy my favorite comfort foods. Daniel's decision came with a cost. Knowing he could face the anger of the king; He choose to follow God's way and not defile himself. Choosing to follow God's way involves sacrifice and can often seem very costly.

I recently celebrated my one-year wedding anniversary. One week before my wedding, I was faced with immense pressure. My employer asked me to do something that didn't align with my faith. If I didn't, it could cost me my job. Pressure moved into high gear. Thoughts raced through my mind. How would I be able to contribute to my soon-to-be marriage? How would I pay my rent? How would I bring value to my new season? Pressure robbed me of joy in a time that was supposed to be beautiful.

I knew I had to make a choice. The choice would come with a cost. I chose to trust God and as a result I lost my job. I'd like to say that I handled the pressure as well as Daniel, but I struggled. Thankfully, my story has a great ending. The cost was worth it. In the same way that Daniel and his friends experienced God's favor, so did I. God provided, as He always does.

As I walked down the aisle in my beautiful white dress I was reminded of God's goodness. In the months following I started a new job. I stood strong in the midst of pressure and saw God accomplish amazing things, as He always does.

Questions to Discuss:

1. When reading this passage in Daniel, what sticks out to you?
2. When was a time that you felt pressure to do something you didn't want to do?
3. How did God provide during that time?

Prayer

God, standing firm under pressure can be really hard some days. Sometimes it feels impossible to do what is right when everyone else is not. Please help me to stick to your way, no matter what I face and to continue to trust You each day. Amen.

Activity:

Blowing Off Steam

There are many things in our life that cause us to feel like we are under pressure. This activity will show a practical way that pressure works followed by some questions that you and your family can work through together. What you will need for this is a tea kettle and some water. Let the water boil and wait for the kettle to whistle. Answer these questions afterwards.

Questions:

1. What causes the tea kettle to whistle?
 - A. When it reaches a boiling point, the pressure causes the tea kettle to whistle.
2. What noise do you make when you are under pressure?
3. What pressures are you facing this week?



WEEK 2: STANDING STRONG WHILE TRUSTING GOD

Read Daniel 3:1-6, 16-18

Written by: Janice Estes

Sometimes it seems that life can throw us many curve balls. We think things are going smoothly, and then “WHAM”, our good season just turned into a bad season. Maybe you didn’t get the medal you played so hard for, maybe you didn’t get that job promotion you worked so much for, or maybe someone you love passed away. We may blame God, or we may even turn from Him. But despite your circumstances, it is in these desperate times that we need to cry out to God, give our full trust to Him, and stand strong in our faith.

Think about what it must have been like for Daniel’s friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when King Nebuchadnezzar told them they must bow down and worship a gold statue or they would be thrown into a fiery furnace? Imagine how they must have felt when they were told this. Knowing the predicted outcome, they stood strong in their faith.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego told King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. Daniel 3:17-18 says, “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” In this verse, we see how strong their faith was. How they were unwilling to worship a statue even if that meant death.

King Nebuchadnezzar was so mad; he told his servants to turn up the heat seven times hotter. Still the men stood strong, and because of their unwavering faith, God kept them safe. In fact, they were able to escape without a burn on their body. When we are willing to stand up for God, He will show up on our behalf.

Questions to Discuss:

1. When reading this passage in Daniel, what sticks out to you?
2. When life throws us a curveball, what can we do to stand strong in our faith?
3. How can we be more like Daniel and his friends?

Prayer

God, thank you for your unwavering love. Please help me stand strong in my faith when life gets hard. Give me the wisdom and strength to overcome all circumstances that I may be faced with. Amen.

Activity:

Have A Good Fall

God gives us people in our life to trust. Whether it is your family or other people in your life, trust in those relationships help to build trust in God. This activity involves a simple trust fall and some pillows. Before you begin, take some time to lay some soft fluffy pillows and blankets on floor to be a cushion in case someone falls. Next, partner off and begin trust falling with them. Each time you catch one of your family members, the person falling takes a step forward, so they fall a little farther each time. How many rounds will you make it?

Questions:

1. Did you have a hard time trusting your family during the game? Why/ why not?
2. Do you think your family trusts you? Why or why not?
3. How does trusting your family affect your trust in God?



WEEK 3: STANDING STRONG THROUGH HUMILITY

Read Daniel 4:4-9

Written by: Scott Raney

Proverbs 16:18 teaches us that “pride comes before the fall.”

There is an old fable about 2 ducks and a frog. The frog wanted to fly south for the winter. He came up with a plan that he was certain would work. He was friends with 2 ducks, and he knew they would be flying south for the winter. He convinced them to hold a stick in their beaks as they flew, and he would hold on with his mouth in the middle of the stick. It was working as planned until they flew over a field and a farmer looked up in amazement. He couldn't believe someone had come up with such a brilliant idea. He yelled up to the ducks, “Hey, who came up with this brilliant idea?” The frog was full of pride, and he knew that he was the mastermind. He finally couldn't take it any longer. He opened his mouth and exclaimed, “I diiiiiiiiiiiiid”. The moral of this story is that the pride of the frog ultimately cost him his life.

Pride has the ability to cost us everything. When we come from the mindset that everything that we have ultimately comes from God, and He is the one who give us wisdom, we live with a healthy mindset.

God was able to use Daniel repeatedly throughout his life because he never lost focus of his reliance on God. Because he lived a life of humility, we see in this week's scripture that God used him to interpret the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar.

King Nebuchadnezzar had the choice to live his life in humility as well. Unfortunately, he didn't. Because he didn't choose a mindset of humility, he ultimately suffered humiliation.

Just because we may “have it all” doesn't mean that in God's eyes, He sees it the same. Matthew 6:19 reminds us that all that we have eventually turns to moth and rust.

When you choose to be prideful, you are choosing to be

self-dependent and not God-dependent. The story of Daniel gives us a great example of what life looks like when we are God-dependent.

Questions to ask:

1. When reading this passage in Daniel, what sticks out to you?
2. When was a time that you were faced with choosing between pride and humility?
3. How can you live God-dependent this week?

Prayer

God, we are sorry for the times that we have allowed pride to creep in. Please help us to choose humility and to remember that all we have has come from You. Amen.

Activity:

Bon Appetit

Please discuss these questions prior to the activity.

1. What is a servant?
2. What makes a good servant?
3. How does the person to your right serve your family well?

Parents get the opportunity to serve their families every single day, so we want to mix it up a little bit. This activity gives the children an opportunity to serve their families dinner and pick up after dinner is over. This may be something you need to plan for, so go ahead and pick a day this week and let the kids run the show! (If they are old enough to cook dinner, you can go that route as well!) This gives the kids an opportunity to experience humility in a practical way and experience what a parent does every day.



WEEK 4: STANDING STRONG THROUGH CONSISTANCY

Read Daniel 6:3-5

Written by: Julia Register

In thinking back over the 46 years of my life, there is little doubt that I've had a love for music for as long as I can remember. I began to play the piano when I was 7 and took lessons until I graduated from high school, always working to improve my skills.

After a two-year break, I resumed lessons and worked to master more difficult songs. In order to graduate with an instrumental music degree, I was required to memorize what amounted to an hour's worth of advanced pieces. I worked hard on each piece for several hours a day, for several months, until I memorized all the music and successfully performed my solo recital to earn my degree.

Fast forward to a more recent time when my husband and I were cleaning, organizing, and preparing our home to sell. In the process my husband found the cassette tape of my senior piano recital, along with all the music for all the songs I had prepared. It had been years since I had looked at this music, let alone try to play it! I decided to put myself to the test.

As I sat down at the piano, I soon learned that, although reading music is "just like riding a bike", playing it definitely is not!! I could hardly play any of the music I had previously mastered even though the music was in front of me. If this was true, then I knew I certainly wouldn't be able to play from memory. I also knew something else was very true. If I had been consistent in playing these songs throughout the years, I would still be able to perform them today.

In Daniel 6:3-4, we see that Daniel modeled consistency to the point that no mistakes could be found! To the king and his officials his life seemed flawless. This is so different from my piano story. Anyone who heard me try to play those difficult songs after years of neglecting time at the keyboard, would have found plenty of mistakes to point out. When it came to these difficult pieces of music, I lacked consistency. Here's my encouragement to you. Stand strong and be consistent when and where it counts.

Questions to discuss:

1. When reading this passage in Daniel, what sticks out to you?
2. Can you identify areas of your life where you realize consistency is missing?
3. Where might you need the practice of consistency in your spiritual life?

Prayer

God, we are sorry for the times that we have not been consistent in our life-in the little things and in the big things. Please help us to practice consistency in the things that matter most, especially when it comes to our relationship with You. Amen.

Activity:

The Constant Struggle (Let's Get Consistent)

Small steps, small steps, small steps, big results.

This week we are encouraging our families to practice consistency throughout their week by participating in our daily devotions plan. The goal is to hit at least 4 days of spending time with God. This can either be personal time and then everyone comes together to share, or it can be a collective conversation, whatever works for your family! Check off each day that you complete and come back at the end of the week to answer some questions!

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Questions:

1. Did you complete 4 out of 7 days?
 - A. God wants us to be consistent in Worship, Prayer, Reading his Word, and Serving Others. Which of these do you struggle the most at being consistent in?





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