

## Daniel Got It Right

Lesson 01 in the series, "Countercultural"

### I. As a young man Daniel was forced to live in a culture hostile to his faith.

"King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon... ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. "Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men," he said. "Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good judgment, and are suited to serve in the royal palace. Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon." The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for three years, and then they would enter the royal service. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego."

-Daniel 1:1-7 (NLT)

*Note:* Nebuchadnezzar's goal was to assimilate promising captives into Babylonian culture; Babylonian education would change the way they think, Babylonian food would change their lifestyle and Babylonian names would change their loyalty to the god's of Babylon.

"But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods. Now God had given the chief of staff both respect and affection for Daniel. But he responded, 'I am afraid of my lord the king, who has ordered that you eat this food and wine. If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded.' ... 'Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water,' Daniel said. '...see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king's food. Then make your decision in light of what you see.' The attendant agreed... At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others. God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom... When the training period ordered by the king was completed... no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah... Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom." -Daniel 1:8-20 (NLT)

*Life Application:* We must be people of faith and conviction.

"Be on guard. Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous. Be strong." -1 Corinthians 16:13 (NLT)

*Life Application:* We must live out our faith and convictions with wisdom and tact.

"Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone."

-Colossians 4:5-6 (NLT)

### II. As an old man Daniel was forced to live in another culture hostile to his faith.

"Darius the Mede decided to divide the kingdom into 120 provinces, and he appointed a high officer to rule over each province. The king also chose Daniel and two others as administrators to supervise the high officers and protect the king's interests. Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire. Then the other administrators and high officers began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling government affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize or condemn. He was faithful, always responsible, and completely trustworthy. So they concluded, 'Our only chance of finding grounds for accusing Daniel will be in connection with the rules of his religion.' So the administrators and high officers went to the king and said, 'Long live King Darius! ... Give orders that for the next thirty days any person who prays to anyone, divine or human—except to you, Your Majesty—will be thrown into the den of lions. And now, Your Majesty, issue and sign this law so it cannot be changed, an official law of the Medes and Persians that cannot be revoked.'" So King Darius signed the law. But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God."

-Daniel 6:1-10 (NLT)

*Life Application:* We should be known for our good lives and our dedication to God.

“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” -1 Peter 2:12 (NIV)

*Note:* Daniel prayed to God in frightening, changing circumstances because God’s love, justice and mercy **NEVER** change. “O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands. But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations... In view of all your faithful mercies, Lord, please turn your furious anger away from your city Jerusalem... All the neighboring nations mock Jerusalem and your people because of our sins and the sins of our ancestors... O my God, lean down and listen to me. Open your eyes and see our despair. See how your city—the city that bears your name—lies in ruins. We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy.” -Daniel 9:4, 5, 16, 18 (NLT)

“Then the officials went together to Daniel’s house and found him praying and asking for God’s help. So they went straight to the king and reminded him about his law... ‘That man Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, is ignoring you and your law. He still prays to his God three times a day.’ Hearing this, the king was deeply troubled, and he tried to think of a way to save Daniel. He spent the rest of the day looking for a way to get Daniel out of this predicament... at last the king gave orders for Daniel to be arrested and thrown into the den of lions. The king said to him, ‘May your God, whom you serve so faithfully, rescue you.’ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den. The king sealed the stone with his own royal seal and the seals of his nobles, so that no one could rescue Daniel.” -Daniel 6:11-18 (NLT)

*Life Application:* We should expect hostility when we stand firm in our faith and convictions.

“If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first. The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you.” -John 15:18-21 (NLT)

“Very early the next morning, the king got up and hurried out to the lions’ den. When he got there, he called out in anguish, ‘Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you serve so faithfully, able to rescue you from the lions?’ Daniel answered, ‘Long live the king! My God sent his angel to shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight... Then King Darius sent this message to the people of every race and nation and language throughout the world: ‘...I decree that everyone throughout my kingdom should tremble with fear before the God of Daniel. For he is the living God, and he will endure forever. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and his rule will never end. He rescues and saves his people; he performs miraculous signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth. He has rescued Daniel from the power of the lions.’” -Daniel 6:19-27 (NLT)

*Life Application:* “But even if you suffer for doing what is right, God will reward you for it. So don’t worry or be afraid of their threats. Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your Christian hope, always be ready to explain it. But do this in a gentle and respectful way. Keep your conscience clear. Then if people speak against you, they will be ashamed when they see what a good life you live because you belong to Christ.” -1 Peter 3:14-16 (NLT)

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## Connect Group Questions

1. Read Daniel 1:1-20, 1 Peter 2:12 & Colossians 4:5-6. What does it look like to live wisely among unbelievers? How did Daniel do it? How can we live out our faith at work? ...in our neighborhoods? ...with our relatives?
2. Read Daniel 6:1-27. Why did Daniel refuse to obey Darius' edict? Have you ever had to choose between being loyal to God or loyal to someone else? If so, what happened? How did you respond?
3. What is the difference between a conviction and an opinion?
4. Read Matthew 5:10-12, 2 Timothy 3:12 & 1 Peter 3:14-16. Are you surprised that suffering is predicted and expected for Christ's followers? Christians all over the world are routinely subjected to injustice, beatings, harassment and even death. Why have we been spared much suffering in America? Many Christians believe that there is a war on Christianity going on in our culture right now? What do you think?
5. Spend some time as a group praying for our culture, our church, each other. Ask God to use us as effective ambassadors of His Good News, to have boldness to speak up when we should and wisdom to know when to keep silent. Pray that He will give us a hunger for His Word and protection from sins that will compromise our witness. Pray also that He will give us a burden for lost people who are far from Him and the right words to explain the reason for our hope.

6. Discuss the following quotations:

"From barbarian to civilization requires a century; from civilization to barbarian requires but a day." -Will Durant, American writer, historian and philosopher

"Having convictions can be defined as being so thoroughly convinced that Christ and His Word are both objectively true and relationally meaningful that you act on your beliefs regardless of the consequences." -Josh McDowell, Christian apologist, evangelist and writer

"Tolerance is not a spiritual gift; it is the distinguishing mark of postmodernism; and sadly, it has permeated the very fiber of Christianity. Why is it that those who have no biblical convictions or theology to govern and direct their actions are tolerated and the standard or truth of God's Word rightly divided and applied is dismissed as extreme opinion or legalism?" -John Stott, Anglican pastor and evangelical leader

"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." -Paul in Romans 12:2 (NLT)