

- **\*READ I Timothy 4:12\*** Though we might often think of Timothy as being a very young man, the reality is that by the time of the writing of **I Timothy** Paul's son in the faith was more than likely at least into his 30s. I say this based upon the traditional belief that Timothy was around the age of 16 when Paul first met him in **Acts 16** in Derbe and Lystra. Add on about 14 years to the time of the writing of **I Timothy** and we get the estimated age of 30. Now, I would like to think that 30 is still considered decently young even still today, and therefore it makes sense for Paul to encourage Timothy to make sure that others are given no opportunity to look down upon him in his relative youthfulness.
- Specifically, Paul instructs Timothy to more than simple faithfulness. His instructions are for Timothy to actually set an example to all others through his own speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. We might even go so far as to state that Paul expected for Timothy to be a man of excellence in everything that he did as he served the Lord's people. If this was something that Paul expected from this man at this decently young age, then I do not believe it a stretch at all to believe that Paul would expect that same type of excellence from those who are youth even today.
- As we continue in our year long series on Excelling Still More in everything that we do, we want to use this month's lesson to focus on the young people that are among us. Much of our efforts throughout the summer months is geared towards our young people through our VBS studies and our brand new Young People's Weekend that is quickly approaching, so it simply made sense to continue this theme of young focused efforts by taking time this morning to look at what excellent faith among the young followers of God looks like. We are going to look at the great examples of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the Old Testament book of Daniel to help us consider how we, too, can be young followers of God that are excelling in our faiths.

## **Learning Excellent Faith From Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego**

### **I. What They Did:**

#### **A. They refused to defile themselves. (1:8-21)**

1. While much of the Old Testament narrative of Israel takes place in the context of Israel within the land of Canaan, the book of Daniel finds the Jews being captive within the land of Babylon under the rule of pagan kings. Around the year 605BC, King Nebuchadnezzar lays siege over Jerusalem, and the Lord God gives the Hebrews into the hands of these pagans. Many of the Jewish people are brought into the land of Babylon, and the king orders that the best of the youth among the Jews is to be brought to him so that he might be trained for three years before being put into the service of attending to the desires of the king.
2. Among these Hebrew youths are four men named Daniel (around the age of 15), Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These young Jews were given the new names of Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as a means of further integrating them into Babylonian society. This integration also had an affect over their diets for the king gave commands for them to be given *"daily provisions from the royal food and from the wine that he drank."* (1:5) However, Daniel and his friends refused the food and drink that had been commanded of them to eat because they felt it would defile them. (1:8)
3. Initially, this does not sit well at all with the chief eunuch who was over the training of the young Hebrew men. He states that he fears that the king would be highly upset if Daniel and his friends look thinner than the rest of the young men their age. However, Daniel is firm and insists that they at least be given a trial period of 10 days to see how things turn out. The Lord was with Daniel and his friends, and *"At the end of ten days they looked better and healthier than all of the young men who were eating the king's food."* (1:15) The guard continued to only them them vegetables, and the Lord blessed these four young Hebrews with great knowledge and understanding in everything they needed to know. They stood out greatly in the sight of the king. (1:18-21)

## B. They refused to worship the Babylonian idol. (3:1-30)

1. Daniel's influence over the king continued to grow to the point that he was able to request that S, M, & A be put in charge of managing the province of Babylon while Daniel remained close to the king's court. **(2:49)** This was good for these young men of God, but it was a horrible occurrence in the eyes of many of the native Babylonians. They took the occasion in **chapter 3** to accuse these three men of insubordination against the king's decrees.
2. The specific decree at hand was the command for all of the people of the land to fall down and worship this great gold statue that had been built by the king. *"When you hear the sound of the hot, flute, zither, lyre, harp, drum, and every kind of music, you are to fall facedown and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up."* **(3:5)** As followers of the God of heaven, these three young Hebrews did no such thing, and their enemies used it against them. *"These men had ignored you, the King; they do not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."* **(3:12)** The king is very upset by this blatant disobedience and he summons these men to come before him and answer these accusations.
3. The king knows the value of these men and even gives them an opportunity to do as he had commanded by worshipping at the next time of the playing of the music, but they still refuse to do so even though death in a blazing fire has been threatened. *"Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to give you an answer to this question. If the God we serve exists, then He can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and He can rescue us from the power of you, the king. But even if He does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up."* **(Daniel 3:16-18)**
4. Again, the king is filled with rage and demands that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. It became so hot that even the soldiers who threw these men in were killed by the heat. However, these three men were not harmed by the blaze, and there appeared even a fourth man who is described as *"a son of the gods."* **(3:25)** The king and all of his men are amazed, and he calls S, M, & A to come back out to him. They are seen to not be harmed in the slightest bit, and this leads the king to issue decrees that supported the God of Israel. **(3:28,29)**

## C. Daniel chose to continue to pray to his God. (6:1-24)

1. Finally, many years later we come to **chapter 6** where we find a new king has taken over, Darius. This king appoints 120 satraps over his kingdom, and these satraps would answer to three administrators, one of which was Daniel (now around the age of 80). God continued to be with Daniel, and he was blessed to stand out above all of the other servants of Darius for *"he had an extraordinary spirit"* which is a phrase that had previously been used in **5:12** to describe his character. **(6:3)**
2. Again, the natives do not appreciate that a captive is in such a high ranking position, so they devise a plan by which he might be ruined because they couldn't get him on any other grounds. **(6:4,5)** Their plan revolves around getting the king to issue a decree that anyone who petitions another god or man besides the king himself would be thrown into the lion's den. Obviously this would appeal to the ego of the king, and we see Darius signing this decree into law. **(6:6-9)**
3. Daniel hears about the decree, and he has a decision to make. He can either continue to pray three times a day to God while facing Jerusalem, or he can stop his petitioning of his God. He decides to continue doing as he had been doing, and his opponents pounce on the opportunity. **(6:10,11)** They go to the king and force him to follow through on what he has decreed even though he is highly distressed that the culprit was his beloved Daniel.
4. Because of the nature of the king's decree, Daniel is thrown into the lions' den, but not before the king offers words of encouragement to Daniel, *"May your God, whom you continually serve, rescue you!"* **(6:16)** The next morning after a night of fasting and sleeplessness, the king returns to find Daniel safe and sound. He rejoices while throwing the troublemakers into the den. **(6:19-24)**

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were able to accomplish some pretty incredible feats of faith at young ages (for the most part) while being faced with dire circumstances. What was so special about them that they were able to do such things? What about their faiths made all of this possible? Consider the following three things from the texts we have just examined.

## II. How They Did It:

### A. They were determined to do what was right.

1. The text that seems to set the tone for the entirety of the book of Daniel is found in **1:8** where the text reads, *"Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank."* Notice that Daniel and his friends' decision to not partake of the king's food wasn't done by accident, but it was completely purposeful. They had made up their minds that they were not going to be continually integrated into this pagan society in this manner.
2. This determination was a result of what must have been some moments of very frank and honest consideration about their new circumstances away from Jerusalem. They were young men (again probably around 15 years old). They were far away from everything they had ever known. They were in a strange place where a different language was spoken and false gods were worshipped. The only way they could keep from losing their identity as young men of the Lord was to absolutely make the decision and determination to not allow of their character or mindset to be changed by what was happening all around them.
3. That exact same determination must be found within the minds of God's young followers of today because we, too, often find ourselves in situations where the negative influences are all around us and very heavy. The school environment, the work place, social settings, and relationships all have the ability to alter who we are by the things that they might influence us to do. Therefore, we must be like Daniel and his friends in making up our minds and being determined that we are going to be different from those around us when they behave in ungodly manners. We must stand up and say "NO" when the situation demands it. Any shakiness or hesitation only opens up the door for the negative influences to overtake us. Therefore we must stand strong and be determined that we will not defile ourselves.

### B. They trusted in God.

1. Secondly, we find S, M, & A delivering one of my absolute favorite responses in all of Scripture (right up there with **Joshua 24:14,15 & Acts 4:8-12; 5:29-32**). They speak very plainly in telling the king that their God is bigger and stronger than he is. He will deliver them if it is His will, and there is nothing that Nebuchadnezzar can do about it. Even if their God decided that He wouldn't deliver them in this moment, they still refused to bow down and worship this idol he had created. I don't believe they were trying to be disrespectful to the king in stating this. It was much more of a simple statement of fact. (**Daniel 6:16-18**)
2. To say this to the face of the man that had the power to kill you took some major courage! However, what naturally comes to my mind are the words of Jesus from **Matthew 10:28**, *"Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."* We must have this type of mindset because there will be times where we might suffer for doing what is right. No, we might not have to choose between living and dying, but we very well might have to choose between some other good quality of life or giving it up. May we have the mindset not only of S, M, & A but also of David when he wrote in **Psalms 56:10,11**, *"In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mere humans do to me?"*

### C. Daniel courageously continued in his good habits.

1. Lastly, those efforts to trust in the Lord during the most difficult of situations will come more easily and more natural when we have been committed to doing them for a length of time

during our lives. While we are seeking to encourage the young people among us by looking at the faith of young men in Daniel, let's notice again that what takes place in **Daniel 6** is concerning a Daniel in his older years. If all of the time stamps of the book hold true and Daniel was around 15 when he first came to Babylon, then Daniel would be at least 80 when he is confronted with the decision of whether or not to continue his petitioning of God.

2. Yet, it seems as if there wasn't really much of a decision to be made. Notice what the text tells us in **Daniel 6:10**, *"When Daniel learned that the document had been signed, he went into his house. The windows in its upstairs room opened toward Jerusalem, and three times a day he got down on his knees, prayed, and gave thanks to his God, **just as he had done before.**"* The portion I want to focus on is the last phase in this verse. Daniel did what he did because he had been doing it for a long time before. This can easily be recognized as a habit of Daniel for presumably quite some time.
3. Our lesson from this is quite simple. If we want to be able to live courageously in our older age then we can help ourselves by developing great godly habits in our youth. If we want to be able to continue to pray later in life, then start praying regularly now. If we want to be able to continue to be committed to daily Bible reading, then we need to start now. If we want to be able to say no to the temptations of the evil one that seek to ensnare us, then we better start saying no right now. There is no better time to start living in a godly manner than the present, and we would help ourselves out tremendously by developing these good habits right now in the years of our youth so that they will be well established in our later years.

There are a number of Bible stories that we have heard from our youngest years that stand out to us for the incredible things that were done, but I hope that as we get older and more mature that we begin to see not just what happened, but what actually made such things possible. We all know about the great faith of Daniel and his friends and what they did, but it is my hope that our considerations this morning will help to encourage, equip, and motivate us as we strive to show ourselves as strong people of faith, even strong young people of faith in everything that we do.