

DANIEL - LESSONS ON HOW TO ABIDE IN CHRIST FROM AN OLD TESTAMENT SAINT

Studies in Daniel 1, 3, and 6 - Part three

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THREE TRAITS OF CHARACTER YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT

Daniel 1:8-21 - "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. [9] And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, [10] and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." [11] Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, [12] "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. [13] Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat the king's food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see." [14] So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. [15] At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate the king's food. [16] So the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them vegetables. [17] As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. [18] At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. [19] And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. [20] And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. [21] And Daniel was there until the first year of King Cyrus."

As we looked at Daniel last week, we saw how he *purposed in his heart not to defile himself* (8). You can't live well *accidentally*. You have to plant the flag. You have to *intend with all your might* to please the Lord. Great strength is wasted unless it is *directed at something specific*.

If you have read any of the great biographies of the great theologian, evangelist, *Jonathan Edwards*, you will know that while he was still a teenager he wrote down, solely for his own use, a set of resolutions. He compiled seventy of them before the age of twenty.

Let me read some of them to you: "*Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God. Resolved, that I will live just so as I can think I shall wish I had done, supposing I live to old age. Resolved, never to give over, nor in the least to slacken, my fight with my own corruptions, however unsuccessful I may be. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if I expected it would not be above an hour before I should hear the last trump.*"

The big strong word at the beginning of those magnificent statements isn't "*intended,*" or "*sure hope,*" or "*if I can swing it.*" *Resolved*. You have to say it like cement. You put your whole being into that one word. Imagine getting up early every morning, and before doing anything else, taking the time to prayerfully read over seventy goals of living for the next twenty-four hours of your life.

Lots of Christians *wish* they were more Godly. Lots of Christians *imagine* what they might do for Jesus one day if their circumstances change for the better. That is *not* what Daniel did. Starting *now*, at fifteen years of age - starting *alone*, separated from his land and his heritage - starting in *Babylon*, in the hostile environment that was trying to suck the spiritual life out of his heart - *right there, Daniel purposed in his heart to stay clean.*

Either you live like that for the Lord, or you don't. If you're going to do it, you will do it right now. If you don't, then you won't. But if you don't make up your mind *right now*, you never will. If you don't take the first chance to plant the flag, you won't likely take the second. So Daniel doesn't whine or stall. He bites the bullet cold turkey. He draws the line in the sand. And he does it right away.

As you study the life of Daniel, you will see *three traits of character* that form the foundation of his

commitment to the LORD. These are the *motives* that fuel the *decisions*. You have to *think right* before you can *do right*. If you were to take a spiritual cat-scan of Daniel, here's what you would see on the inside:

1) **IF YOU'RE SERIOUS ABOUT FOLLOWING THE LORD, YOU MUST BE BRACED FOR OPPOSITION FROM THE WORLD**

Remember, Daniel is only fifteen years old. And he's not with his friends from the youth group at the temple. We don't know exactly how much close contact he had with the others in captivity, but it's pretty well certain that for large blocks of time, he was totally on his own.

I wonder when he sat down and asked himself, ***"At what point will you say 'no' to Babylon? Because for sure, unless you're going to constantly say 'how high?' when they say 'jump!', you're going to have to say 'no' at some point."***

Think about that as you watch what's trending on TV or Netflix. Where will you **start** drawing your moral boundaries? If not after thirty "f bombs" or after ten illicit sex scenes, then **when**? At what point do you listen to your Lord who says to pluck out your eye if it leads you to sinful stuff? How gross does something have to become? Or have you thought about any possible uncrossable lines at all? Daniel does the smart thing. He knows his holiness boundaries. And he establishes those boundaries right off the bat.

"But it seems like such a little issue, Pastor Don. Why make such a fuss over some food and drink?" I'm going to go into that food issue in depth in a few minutes, but right now, let me just say, you're right. Those don't seem like huge issues in our eyes. They don't seem worth the kind of moral muscle that Daniel exercises.

But don't miss the important point. You have to start somewhere. If you're prepared to surrender that **first** point of compromise just because it seems **small** what about the **next** compromise, which won't seem much bigger to your clouded judgment? **Once you start backing up morally, there is no stopping place.** Next will come the issue of bowing to Nebuchadnezzar's idol. Then will come the forbidding of prayer to the true God. **So at what point do you start to say no? Daniel's refusal to bend at this first point puts him in a position of strength for point number two, and point number three.**

Understand the way compromise sets itself in the soul. **It is always gradual in its approach.** Compromise gains its **first** victory over your heart by looking too small to merit big attention. It never **begins** with large aspects of rebellion. Sin always **grows** from less to more. And the logic of Daniel's mind is this: **"If you don't say no at the beginning of the process, you will never have the strength to say no further down the road."**

In other words, **the initial choices of holiness are what give strength for future choices of holiness.** You don't start at the deep end. You start at the shallow end.

So, choose to follow the Lord instantly and brace yourself for opposition, because **faith and commitment will always be tested in this world.** And here's the nature of the test: **You always measure a commitment by what it takes to bump it.** If I always choose "A" until "B" comes along, then "B" is the true commitment, not "A". Compromise has to do with the **limits you put on your commitments.** Whatever **alters** your commitment rules your life.

It's the pressure of **alternative options** that reveals love for God. People have high moral

standards until they are deeply in love with someone who is Scripturally off limits to them. ***And it's when they have the power to choose something other than what's right that you see what they really believe.***

People are devoted to Scriptural integrity until there's a fool-proof way to make lots of money with just slight dishonesty. ***And it's when they have the power to choose something other than what is right and get away with it that you see what they're made of spiritually.***

People generally believe that a Christian should let his or her light shine - that it's important to tell the world about Jesus. Then they're with a different crowd. And everyone is having fun and acting in a way that is anything but Christ-like. ***And it's when you have the power to choose whether you will go against the grain of the moment by following Jesus, or compromise to save your own popularity and go with the flow - that's when you show whether you love Jesus or are just playing religious games.***

You simply have to win those individual moments. You have to hammer out the power of your commitment right then and there or you're nothing in the kingdom of God. ***Make no mistake. Jesus said it will cost everything to follow Him:***

Luke 14:27-33 - "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. [28] For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? [29] Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, [30] saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' [31] Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? [32] And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. [33] So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

I know that Jesus was teaching in parables in these verses. But I've often wondered if He didn't mean to actually impart the idea that the simple choice of following Him had to be remade every day, because every day you get out of bed and go to work or go to school, ***there are ten thousand situations coming at you with the specific intention to stand against your spiritual progress.***

And the whole point of Jesus is that you have to ***plan on that and overcome that every time you determine to follow Him.*** A half-hearted or half-baked resolve might as well stay in bed. You will never make it.

2) **IF YOU ARE GOING TO LIVE AS A CHRISTIAN IN THIS WORLD AT ALL, THE HIGHEST MOTIVATING FORCE IN YOUR ACTIONS, PUBLIC AND PRIVATE, MUST BE THE GLORY OF GOD**

Here's the secret of Daniel's success. He fears sin ***more*** than he fears persecution or suffering. The only reason you'd risk a night in the lion's den rather than miss your devotions is you'd rather lose your life than dishonor God - you know - "***Thy loving kindness is better than life***" - like we all read in church this morning without really thinking the words through to their logical conclusion. Jesus said if there is any concern of *self* that means more to you right now than ***God being enthroned in your actions***, you can't follow Him: **Luke 9:22-24** - "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." [23] And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. [24] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it."

That last sentence is the New Testament version of the key to Daniel's strength. Once you understand that the highest form of living is **God centered** and **self denying**, once you know for sure that crucified living opens the door to the life of Christ empowering and rewarding, you will stand strong in the face of compromise.

"Pastor Don, how do you know that Daniel's motive in life was the glory of God. How do you know he wasn't just spiritually grandstanding to earn a good reputation for himself in Babylon?"

Because he passed the ultimate test of holiness of character. **He shuns defilement even when nobody else was looking: Daniel 1:8-12** - "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself. [9] And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, [10] and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king." [11] Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, [12] "Test your servants for ten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink."

Notice how Daniel took the same request to **two different people**. Neither the king, nor the commander knew anything about Daniel's convictions and resolution to purity. Daniel didn't tell the king about it. **It's who you are in secret that counts with God**. Who you are when Christians are watching means nothing. Who you are when you're the only one with your neck on the world's chopping block determines heaven or hell. **That's the person who counts in God's judgement**.

Remember Jonathan Edward's teenage resolution? "Resolved, never to do any manner of thing, whether in soul or body, less or more, but what tends to the glory of God." That attitude is miles removed from, "Why can't I do this? Everyone else does."

But here's the point that relates to living for God's glory alone. If you are a Christian, and are righteous when everyone's watching, your motive may be your own reputation. If you are a Christian, and you are righteous in the eyes of the world, and nobody of faith knows anything about it, **then your only motive is the glory of God and honoring His Name**.

In other words, you may talk and sing about glorifying God, but the only way to prove it is to honor Him when nobody else **does** and nobody else **knows**. Those are the times that show who you really are.

3) **STRENGTH OF CHARACTER COMES FROM REMEMBERING WHO YOU ARE AND RELYING ON THE PROMISE OF GOD'S WORD**

a) **FIRST, rely on the promise of God's Word.** God did more than bring His people into Babylonian captivity. In His great love and mercy, He did two other things:

i) **He warned them in advance that His judgement was coming.** That was so the people would not only feel the pain of captivity, but so they would have the opportunity to **learn the lessons of it**.

Without the advance warnings the people might miss out on all the corrective benefits and simply attribute their suffering to the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Then they would not only suffer, but suffer for nothing. Stay in the Word during trials. You can still learn and grow there.

- ii) ***He gave them promise of His protection and ultimate deliverance from their captors once God's purifying work was done.*** This was to keep the people from despair and to help them to look again toward their future.

So, years before Nebuchadnezzar even came on the scene, God gave advance promise of His protection and care during their Babylonian captivity: ***Isaiah 43:1-2*** - ***“But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. [2] When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”***

Now those certainly are beautiful verses of Scripture. I've actually heard some worship choruses that apply some of those Old Testament promises pretty carelessly. ***Actually, those words were specifically spoken by the Prophet Isaiah in reference to the future captivity of God's people under the power of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon.***

“Though you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched.” However precious you find those words, ***imagine what they would mean when remembered by three men - Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego - in the fire furnace!***

Remember this lesson all your life. When facing the fire of the world, when you're tempted to lose heart, when friends pressure you into conforming to ***their standards for your life*** - whatever you do, ***don't face those situations armed with nothing but your own will-power.***

Call to life the Word of God treasured in your heart! That's why you must read it every day. It doesn't necessarily give you goose bumps every time you pick it up. ***But your spiritual future hangs on whether or not you get it into your system and mind!***

- b) ***Remember who you are in Christ.*** We know from the teaching of Jesus that eating food isn't what makes a person clean or unclean: ***Mark 7:14-16*** - ***“And he called the people to him again and said to them, “Hear me, all of you, and understand: [15] There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him.”***

That's pretty straight forward. Food doesn't contaminate the heart. Paul said God has given all things for us to enjoy. Peter's heavenly vision told Peter not to separate foods into categories of clean and unclean because God made it all.

Then what is Daniel doing here? And why does God seem to honor it? Daniel was raised to remember a very important event in the life of Israel. Next to the fact of their ***calling*** in Abraham, the next most frequently reminded fact about God's people was the fact that they were a ***delivered*** people. They were to remember that they were brought ***out of Egypt*** into their ***own land.***

Now, a lot of other related truths went along with that deliverance. Their God was separate from the gods of the nations. Their deliverance firmly established in their minds their

separate identity from the nations all around them.

After they were delivered from Egypt, God got His people together and gave them regulations about food: **Leviticus 11:45-47** - **“For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.” {46} This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters and everything that swarms on the earth, {47} to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten.”**

Notice, all these regulations about diet were tied in with their ***deliverance from Egypt (45)***. The laws were to be ***visible reminders*** of their identity. These are not ***health regulations***. God wasn't recommending a ***diet***. When they were tempted to despair, when their enemies looked too strong to overcome, when they doubted the presence of God, ***they still had to eat - and built right into their eating habits was the God given reminder of His great, merciful, faithful, delivering power!***

God, in His grace, gave them ***visible, outward marks of His possession so that they would have something to live up to***. What He was to be for them ***inwardly***, He gave them a sign of ***outwardly***.

Now, later on in their history, the people turned these laws into something they were never designed to be. They were never given as ***a code of works by which the people could earn their standing with God***. That was the work of the Scribes and Pharisees.

And these signs were never given to be ***replacements for a vital, living, inward relationship with God***. That's what David was referring to in those famous words in **Psalms 51:16-17**: - **“For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. {17} The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”**

So these regulations were never given to ***earn deliverance***. The people were given the regulations ***after*** God had delivered them from Egypt to ***remind them*** of the fact that they were a delivered people. And the regulations weren't given to ***replace*** a living relationship with God. They were empty and pointless when removed from the context of ***loving, thankful, personal experience of God***.

So here's the question - ***Why does Daniel care so much about keeping these regulations in Babylon?*** In a nutshell, Daniel cares so much about these regulations because he is in the middle of a foreign land. He is surrounded by ***foreign gods, foreign customs, temptations to compromise, and seductions of power and affluence***.

In these ancient dietary laws Daniel sees a ***handle to the past, a link to his God, and a visible means to remind himself and others of where his heart is***.

Do you get it? These ancient dietary laws were ***the first chance he had to plant the flag - the first chance he had to openly declare himself***. And he wasn't going to miss out.

You see, one day soon Daniel will be locked overnight in a den of lions. He will be needing that dietary reminder that the God he honored was the God who brought His people out of Egypt - ***the delivering God!*** Daniel would need the power and faithfulness of that same God in the future.

All sorts of people claim promises. But there is more to victory than just claiming promises from God's Word. The first step is demonstrating ***why those promises have anything to do with you in the first place.***

Develop a life that is ***shaped by the Word*** and you'll have no problem relying on the ***promise of the Word.*** Three traits of character you must possess if you would stay true to God in a dirty world:

- a) **Brace yourself for opposition.**
- b) **Make the highest motive of your life God's glory rather than your comfort**
- c) **Remember who you are and rely on God's promise.**