
Lesson Overview

Biblical Passage	Daniel 1:1-21
Supporting Passages	2 Kings 23:1-24:20, 1 Timothy 1:18-19
Memory Verse	Daniel 1:17
Biblical Truth	Living out your faith in the midst of a hostile culture serves as a powerful witness to the power of being in relationship with God.
Biblical Context	<p>Believers who live for Christ do so in a world that is increasingly hostile to their message. The values of the world are diametrically opposed to the values of God's kingdom. So how are believers to live in this confusing and changing world? In this study, we'll examine two sections of Scripture to find answers to that question. First, we'll spend four weeks in the book of Daniel, examining how Daniel and his companions existed as a small community of faith in the midst of a hostile culture. Then, we'll spend four weeks in the book of 2 Timothy, examining the advice Paul gave Timothy of how the young church in Ephesus could stand against those who did not understand them, or even attacked the church directly. As Christ-followers, we are called to stand up to the world. Living a life of faith not only honors God and His great love for us, but it also serves as a vital tool in sharing the life-changing message of God with those who do not know Him.</p>
Learning Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students will explore what it means to act out convictions of faith in an unfaithful world.• Students will identify ways in which their community of believers can stand up for their convictions.
Prayer Suggestions	<p>As you prepare to teach, pray for your students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pray that students will immerse themselves in the deep truths of God's Word.• Pray that students will desire to obey God, even when it's inconvenient.• Pray that students will encourage each other when they face opposition.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

The book of Daniel opens while Israel was in Babylonian captivity. Intrigue and war plagued the Middle East in the seventh century B.C. The Egyptian **Pharaoh** Neco marched north to attack the Babylonian army, which was steamrolling south through Syria. **King Josiah** of Judah feared that if Neco defeated **Nebuchadnezzar's** army, his own country would face an Egyptian occupation. To protect his country, Josiah led the Israelites to face the Egyptians on the fields of Megiddo. There, Josiah was slain. After Neco placed Josiah's son on the throne to act as a puppet leader, he and the Egyptian army marched on to face the Babylonians. However, King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians defeated Neco and the Egyptians, and then marched on to conquer Judah. It was at this time that Nebuchadnezzar deported Daniel and thousands of others to Babylon. By the end of the wars, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar ruled the Middle East.

The book of Daniel is categorized as prophetic literature. Although the book only projects the future as apocalyptic literature, God spoke to the nations through His **prophet Daniel**. Daniel was held up as an example of being a stalwart follower of God during a time of persecution. C. Hassell Bullock points out that Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel's, spoke of Daniel's "righteousness and wisdom" (p. 279) three times in his own book (Ezek. 14:14, 14:20, 28:3). John Goldingay highlights that Daniel was held up as the principal hero of the book of Daniel; as such, his faith and obedience to God is to be emulated (p. 6).

Importance

This passage reminds us of the Essential Truth that **The Future is in God's Hands**. It is easy to become bitter and lose hope in the midst of trials and persecution. Persecution may not always take the form of a deliberate attack on us; it may be as passive as what happened when Daniel was pressured to conform to the Babylonian dietary habits.

Regardless of how society, friends, family, or culture might attempt to hinder us from being Christ's disciples, we must look to the future. While in captivity, Daniel and his companions did not know what the future held for Judah or for themselves. Yet they lived by faith before the God whom they served, believing in His ability to sustain them and ultimately save them. They walked with God in confident obedience without fear of persecution or death because they knew their God.

Even as we await the return of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we have confidence in His salvation. We do not need to fear punishment, persecution, or even death because Jesus has already defeated them. He gives us faith and endurance to weather all of these things.

Interpretation

Daniel 1:1-2 Daniel was born during King Josiah's reign and was raised during the time of his reforms of Judah. When Egyptian Pharaoh Neco killed King Josiah, he placed Josiah's son **Jehoiakim** on the throne (2 Kings 23:34-36). This arrangement was meant to last as long as Jehoiakim sent a tribute of gold and silver to Egypt. This tribute, however, was taken from both the treasuries of the kingdom and the pockets of the people. Jehoiakim's tribute tax pressed his kingdom into poverty and functional servitude. The author of 2 Kings concludes that Jehoiakim was evil and did what was wrong before the Lord (2 Kings 23:37).

This changed after Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah and captured Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:1). Jehoiakim once again played the vassal, but he quickly rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, which resulted in the king's sharp retribution. Even before this time, God sent many tribes and many nations against Jehoiakim to act in judgment against him. When Jehoiakim died, his son Jehoiachin became king. Jehoiachin was known to be as evil as his father. When Nebuchadnezzar came upon Jerusalem, Jehoiachin surrendered his city and his kingdom to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was then emperor, ruling over many kings with an empire that spread from Egypt to Babylon.

Jehoiakim was a wicked and rebellious king who betrayed his God, his people, and his ruler. His legacy was the wickedness of his children. Nebuchadnezzar, though, was compared to the many other nations whom God sent to Judah to punish her evil kings who led their people away from God. In comparison to these nations, Nebuchadnezzar and his army were described as a mighty, unstoppable force. Yet despite Nebuchadnezzar's might and military prowess, God alone was sovereign over all. It was God who punished Jehoiakim. It was God who raised Nebuchadnezzar to prominence. It was God who ruled over the history of Judah.

Daniel 1:3-7 Nebuchadnezzar wanted the best men in Judah to be his vassals. As such, he wanted young men who were of noble birth and who were attractive, strong, and intelligent. Daniel, the hero of this book, and three of his friends were identified as capable young noblemen. He ordered these future vassals to be trained in two ways over a period of three years.

First, their hearts and minds were to be filled with the culture and religion of Babylon. Miller points out that Babylon was the capital city as well as the center of education for the Persian Empire. This education would have included mathematics, law, and religion (Miller, p. 62). H. C. Leupold contends that this religious education would likely have had striking similarities to the faith of the Hebrew Scriptures (p. 62). These similarities would have included a Creation story as well as a Flood narrative. It might seem like a harmless event to learn more about biblical events from non-biblical sources. However, these were not simply events in history. These were stories connected with God's self-revelation to humanity through His Word. So while the Gilgamesh narrative (*The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 27th cent. B.C.) also detailed a flood account, their god was wrathful and displayed no intention of saving humanity. This is a drastic corruption of God's activity in Genesis.

Second, the Babylonian provision not only attempted to brainwash these vassals but also to change their actions. Israel already had the books of Moses at this point. The Mosaic laws given by God were meant to act like a fence to protect Israel from the corruption of the outside world. The guidelines for Israel were strict both in action and in diet. The Babylonians thought that they were being nice by providing rich delicacies for the young men to eat. However, these were foods that God prohibited them to eat.

Daniel 1:8-14 When Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, he told him that the key to being a sincere disciple of

Christ was to keep the faith and a good conscience (1 Tim. 1:18-19). This is precisely what Daniel did. His conscience had been formed by his time spent in the Word of God and with God. He did not want to be defiled by meats sacrificed to a false god. He did not want to be idolatrous and evil, as Jehoiakim had been. When Daniel asked the Babylonian official for an exception, he spoke for both himself and his friends (Montgomery, p. 130). The Sovereign God gave Daniel “favor and compassion” from the chief of the eunuchs. Notice that God did not overshadow the official and make up his mind for him. He softened the official to Daniel and his petition. Despite this divine softening, the official was still afraid of his wrathful king.

Daniel feared only the Lord. All the young men were to be trained and fed for three years. Daniel asked only for ten days to serve as a test case. He asked for the opportunity to follow the Lord’s instructions and to be compared to those who were following the king’s instructions.

Daniel 1:15-20 At the end of the ten days, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah looked healthier and more nourished than all of those from among the king’s servants who had eaten the choice foods. As a result, the official allowed the four men to continue obeying God. In return, God blessed them for their obedience. He multiplied their knowledge and understanding of literature and learning. This does not mean that they came to accept the religion and culture of Babylon as their own. Rather, these four were so in tune with God and His Scriptures that they were able to engage in the literature of their captors to understand and explain it. In conjunction with this understanding, Daniel was eventually identified as a prophet. His ability to comprehend and interpret dreams meant that he would be called upon to interpret the king’s dreams (Dan. 2:1-49).

At the end of the three years, the official presented these four young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. As the king tested them, he found the depth of their wisdom and understanding unparalleled. The breadth of their knowledge was not exclusive to knowledge about God. They were conversant in many topics. This wisdom was not a boast, but rather a gift from God (Miller, p. 70). God grants wisdom and understanding to His obedient servants.

Daniel 1:21 Daniel remained in Babylon through Nebuchadnezzar’s reign and into the first year of Cyrus’ reign. His counsel provided the kings of Babylon with wisdom and foresight. This did not diminish the wickedness of Babylon, but such would have been far worse without Daniel’s counsel. **Cyrus** brought about the return of God’s people to Jerusalem. His edict would enable the Israelites to rebuild the Temple and for Ezra and Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city.

Implications

Every modern society faces persecution in some form. It might be as drastic as the Roman persecutions or as mild as the dietary changes in Babylon. Despite the passive or active nature, all persecution is rooted in spiritual opposition to believers. What are some areas in which today’s believers conform to the standards of the world instead of the pattern of Christ? How would God rate us as His disciples? Do we hold fast to His Word in order to be transformed into His image? Do we look more like Christ or the world in how we live our lives? When we appear to live like everyone else, the cause is very simple: We are not spending time with God. We cannot expect to live empowered by the Holy Spirit and to be blessed with spiritual insights while we live independent from God.

How are your students persecuted? What passive forms of persecution entice them to conform to the image of

the world instead of living as a disciple of God? As you teach this lesson, consider how can you encourage them to encounter Christ daily so that they will continue to grow in Christ's likeness. As their devotion to God increases, so should their desire to walk in obedience to Him. Encourage your students to become obedient to God in the big and small ways. Remind students that God longs to bless them with wisdom and understanding just as He blessed Daniel and his friends.

Teaching Plan

Connect

Especially for Younger Students: Surviving Reality

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss what reality shows reveal.

Provide a dry erase board and dry erase marker.

Ask: **What are your favorite reality TV shows?** List responses on the dry erase board, and then lead students to vote for their top three shows. Divide students into three groups, assigning each group one of the top three shows. Then, invite each group to discuss the following questions:

- **What challenges does this show present to participants?**
- **What ideals do the participants have as they begin the competition?**
- **How is the participant's true character revealed throughout the show?**

After four or five minutes, call students together to share their answers. Ask: **How do tough situations in life reveal a person's character? How do a person's convictions determine his or her response to these tough situations?** After students respond, share that today's lesson encourages us to stand up for our convictions even when we face opposition to our beliefs.

Especially for Older Students: Influence Me

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will try to convince each other to cross a line.

Provide a roll of masking tape and a stopwatch.

Prior to the session, tape a strip of masking tape down the center of the room. Ask: **What people influence the way that you live? Besides people, what other factors influence you?** (*Possible answers: TV shows, movies, commercials, Internet*) Point out that most of us are influenced by both people and cultural factors such as music, television, or politics.

Instruct students to find a partner. Instruct partners to stand and face each other from opposite sides of the line of masking tape on the floor. Explain that each student has 60 seconds to verbally convince his or her partner to cross the line and stand with him or her on the same side of the tape. (Students are supposed to convince the partner to join them while resisting their partner's efforts to entice them to cross the line.) After 60 seconds, determine whether anyone crossed the line. Ask those who crossed the line: **What did your partner say that convinced you to move across the line?** (Hopefully no one crossed the line at this point because they easily ignored their partner's verbal promises and/or threats.)

Next, instruct students to grasp their partner's forearm. Give each set of partners 60 seconds to pull their partner across the line. After 60 seconds, ask those who crossed over: **Why was it harder to resist your partner's pull than it was to resist their verbal enticements?** After responses, ask: **What does this demonstration reveal about our ability to withstand the influence of others? When are we the strongest, and when are we the weakest?** Share that today's lesson encourages us to resist the influences of people or cultural factors that attempt to pull us away from our devotion to God.

Master Teacher Option: Surviving Reality

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss what reality shows reveal.

Provide a dry erase board and dry erase marker.

Ask: **What are your favorite reality TV shows?** List responses on the dry erase board, then allow the group to vote for their top three shows. Divide students into groups of three to four people and assign each group one of the top three shows. Then invite each group to discuss the following questions:

- **What challenges does this show present to participants?**
- **What ideals do the participants have as they begin the competition?**
- **How is the participant's true character revealed throughout the show?**

After five minutes, call students together. Ask: **How do tough situations in life reveal a person's character? How do a person's convictions determine his or her response to these tough situations?** After students respond, share that today's lesson encourages us to stand up for our convictions even when we face opposition to our beliefs.

Explore

Interactive Core Study: Faithful Obedience

(15-20 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will study Daniel 1:1-21 to discover how Daniel and his friends faithfully obeyed God's commands in the midst of a hostile environment.

Provide a copy of the Student Worksheet and a pen for each student. Also provide a dry erase board and marker.

Learning Goal: Students will explore what it means to act out convictions of faith in an unfaithful world.

Ask: **What do you think the phrase "swimming upstream" means?** *(Possible answers: purposefully going against the norm; standing up for your convictions even when it's difficult; doing the right things even when others oppose you.)* Ask: **What are some examples from nature or from life experience**

that illustrate this concept? (Examples: Salmon swim upstream to lay eggs near the place of their own hatching; standing up to someone who bullies others.) Explain that today's lesson shows us that Christians sometimes find themselves "swimming upstream" when they choose remain faithful to God when surrounded by people who don't share their beliefs. Distribute copies of the Student Worksheet and pens to students.

1. Believers should not be surprised when they are surrounded by a hostile culture (Daniel 1:1-7).

Refer to the Lesson Commentary to share with students the situation in which Daniel and his friends found themselves. Emphasize that Daniel and his three friends were not the only young men from Judah taken captive into Babylon, but they were distinguished by their willingness to remain faithful to God even in a hostile culture. Ask: **How would you feel in a similar situation—held captive, surrounded by people who were not like you, and who knew nothing about your God or your faith?**

Enlist a volunteer to read Daniel 1:1-7. Write two column headings on the board: "Life in Judah" and "Life in Babylon." Ask: **What do you think Daniel's life might have been like in Judah?** (Possible answers could include: a life of privilege and prosperity as one of the nobility of Judah; free to worship God; free to choose their friends; free to make choices about the way they lived.) List responses under the first column on the board. Ask: **What do you think Daniel's life might have been like as a captive in Babylon?** (Possible answers include: loss of freedom; loss of respect; no authority over their lives or the lives of others; had to obey orders; no choices about how they spent their time or how they lived.) List responses on the board. Ask: **How do you think being surrounded by a culture that did not know or honor God could have affected Daniel's faith and his walk with God? What gave Daniel and his friends the courage and conviction to faithfully obey God in this hostile environment?** Encourage students to write *hostile* in the first blank on their worksheets.

2. When surrounded by a hostile culture, believers can choose to be faithful to God (Daniel 1:8-14).

Enlist a volunteer to read Daniel 1:8-14. Then, ask: **How did Daniel respond to the changes in his life?** Emphasize that Daniel resolved to remain faithful to God and to continue to obey God even when surrounded by a hostile culture. Use the Lesson Commentary to explain the possible reasons for why eating the king's food and wine would defile Daniel.

Direct students' attention to the center portion of the Student Worksheet, which describes three possible ways that Daniel could have responded to this situation:

- Daniel could have launched a rebellious hunger strike to get his way.
- Daniel could have taken the food and wine from the table and quietly thrown it away.
- Daniel could have asked permission for an alternative solution (Daniel's choice).

Divide students into three groups and assign one possible response to each group. Instruct students to list the advantages and disadvantages of their assigned response.

After three minutes, invite each group to share their analysis with the class. Emphasize that a rebellious hunger strike would have created more conflict between Daniel and his captors, which could have resulted in death. Point out that putting the forbidden food on his plate would dishonor God and ultimately not allow God to show His glory by making Daniel healthier than those who ate the forbidden

foods. Also explain that if they had thrown it away, they would have simply gone hungry and would not be healthy. Stress that the third solution, which Daniel chose, honored God first and also maintained good relationships with his captors, all while allowing Daniel to avoid consuming the forbidden foods and wine. Ask: **How did Daniel's response reveal both his commitment to obeying God and his wise response to this hostile situation?** Encourage students to write *choose* in the blank on the second line of their worksheets.

3. God will protect and reward believers who remain faithful to Him (Dan. 1:15-21).

Enlist a volunteer to read Daniel 1:15-21. Then, ask: **How did God first protect and then reward Daniel and his friends for standing up for their convictions?** (*Answer: God softened the officer toward Daniel so that he treated them favorably, and then God blessed them with wisdom and understanding far exceeding the other young men taken captive.*) **Even though Daniel refused to conform to the Babylonian culture and religion, what was his relationship with the king of Babylon?** Point out that Daniel and his friends were able to serve the king without compromising their faith in God. Encourage students to write *protect* and *reward* in the blanks on the third line of their worksheets.

Remind students that when we boldly live out our faith in God and hold firmly to our convictions, we will frequently find ourselves surrounded by people who oppose our faith. Emphasize that Jesus warned the disciples—and He warns us through His word—to expect opposition from the world because the world hates Him. Remind students that God will always stand with us against such opposition when we boldly cling to our faith in Him. Say: **Because we know that The Future is in God's Hands, we can faithfully obey Him even when we are surrounded by a culture that is hostile to our faith in God.**

Master Teacher Key Study: Faithful Obedience

(15-20 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will study Daniel 1:1-21 to discover how Daniel and his friends faithfully obeyed God's commands in the midst of a hostile environment.

Print one copy of the Master Teacher Key Study for your use. Provide a copy of the Student Worksheet and a pen for each student.

Learning Goal: Students will explore what it means to act out convictions of faith in an unfaithful world.

Pass out pens and copies of the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Then, use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Daniel 1:1-21.

Especially for Younger Students: I Will Stand

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will compare Daniel's experience in standing up for his faith to the experiences of Paul, Silas, and Stephen.

Provide a dry erase board and dry erase markers.

Learning Goal: Students will explore what it means to act out convictions of faith in an unfaithful world.

Write the following column headings on the board: “Daniel,” “Paul and Silas,” and “Stephen.” Briefly review today’s lesson by listing the answers to the following questions on the board under the “Daniel” heading.

- **From whom did he receive opposition to his faith?**
- **How did he stand up for his convictions?**
- **What protection did God extend to him?**
- **What reward did he receive for his faithfulness?**

Emphasize that God doesn’t always “protect us” and “reward us” for standing up for our convictions in the same way that He protected and rewarded Daniel and his friends. Divide learners into two groups. Assign Group 1 to read Acts 16:16-30 (Paul and Silas). Assign Group 2 to read Acts 6:8-15 and Acts 7:54-60 (Stephen). Encourage each group to read their assigned passage and then list answers to the same questions in the appropriate column on the board (answers are provided below).

Answers for “Paul and Silas”: *Opposition came from the owners of the slave girl and the local Roman authorities. They stood up for their faith by casting the demon out of the slave girl so that they could preach the gospel. God allowed them to be beaten and jailed but not killed. God sent an earthquake to break their chains—then Paul and Silas led even their enemies to Christ.*

Answers for “Stephen”: *Opposition came from the Jewish religious leaders. Stephen continued to preach the gospel despite their persecution. God protected Stephen’s faith—he never abandoned his convictions. Stephen saw Jesus standing in heaven to receive him.*

Compare Daniel’s experience with what Paul, Silas, and Stephen experienced. Ask: **Why do you think that God allowed these men to suffer when they stood up for their convictions?** Point out that in both situations, other people came to know Christ as Savior. Ask: **How can we learn to trust God even when His protection and rewards are not what we expect?** Encourage students to consider how their response to suffering for standing up for their convictions can lead others to Christ.

Especially for Older Students: Taking a Stand

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss why the world has such great animosity for Jesus.

Learning Goal: Students will explore what it means to act out convictions of faith in an unfaithful world.

Ask: **What two choices did Daniel ultimately have when the demands of his captors clashed with his faith in God?** *(Daniel could choose between pleasing people or pleasing God.)*

Ask: **Why do you think that Christians today frequently find themselves in the position of having to choose whether to please God or please people?** After students respond, enlist a volunteer to read John 15:18-19. Emphasize that the world hates us because it first hated Jesus.

Next, ask: **Why does the world hate Jesus?** After students respond, enlist a volunteer to read John 15:22. Point out that when Jesus came, He revealed humanity’s sinfulness.

Remind students that Paul preached the gospel for many years before being arrested, imprisoned, and ultimately executed for preaching Christ. Explain that he was imprisoned in Rome and was awaiting

execution when he wrote his letter to the Philippians. Enlist a volunteer to read Philippians 1:27-28. Ask: **What instructions did Paul give in these verses?** (Answers: 1—Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. 2—Stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man. 3—Don't be frightened by those who oppose you.) **Why do you think that Paul stressed the need to “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man”?** Emphasize that believers can encourage and strengthen each other by standing up for Christ together. Point out that when believers join together to stand up for their convictions, they shout Christ's message to the world.

Transform

Deeper Discussion

(5-10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss the kinds of hostility that Christians face.

Learning Goal: Students will identify ways in which their community of believers can stand up for their convictions.

Use the following prompts to lead students in a discussion that allows them to consider how they can live in faithful obedience to God in a world that is hostile to their faith.

- **What types of hostility have you faced as a Christian? Were you surprised? How did you respond?**
- **How can a group of believers encourage each other to remain faithful to God when they are ridiculed, threatened, or persecuted for their faith?**
- **When have you been pressured to compromise your convictions? How did God use that situation to grow your faith and cause you to stand firm?**
- **How has God rewarded you for standing up for your convictions?**

Share that students will face opposition to their faith in God throughout their lives. Emphasize the importance of standing up for their convictions instead of abandoning their faith. Conclude by praying that God will use these times of testing to draw them into an even greater relationship with Him, which will strengthen their faith and give them the boldness to continue to tell others about Him.

Especially for Younger Students: Standing Together

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will list ways to help each other stand strong in the faith.

Provide a dry erase board and dry erase marker.

Learning Goal: Students will identify ways in which their community of believers can stand up for their convictions.

Ask: **What are some types of compromising or hostile situations that you have encountered when standing up for your convictions and your faith?** List responses on the dry erase board. Encourage students to list small hostilities (such as: *derogatory comments that others might make when you talk about God, prayer, reading the Bible, faithfulness to your church, temptation to enter into gossip or listen to a dirty joke, speaking badly about someone else*) as well as greater hostilities (such as: *losing friends, pressure to do something that your faith prohibits, opposition to your faith from other family members, public ridicule or humiliation, being forbidden to speak of faith in specific settings*). Continue until students have listed 10-15 different situations.

Next, divide students into four groups. Assign each group two or three situations listed on the board. Then, instruct groups to discuss the following questions:

- **Why should we expect this type of hostility (or opposition) to our faith?**
- **How can we as a group of student believers stand up for our convictions when facing this situation?**
- **What are some ways that God can use this situation to strengthen our faith in Him?**
- **How can God use this situation for His glory?**

Call groups together to share their answers. Then, ask: **Why is it important for us to stand together like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah when standing up for our convictions? What happens when we don't support each other in this way?** Conclude by leading students in prayer that they will encourage and support each other when they face opposition to their faith.

Especially for Older Students: Taking a Stand

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will consider how to overcome their fears about faithfully obeying God.

Provide a dry-erase board and markers.

Point out that the Bible records the decision that Daniel and his friends made, but not how they felt as they made that decision. Ask: **What fears and doubts do you think these young men faced as faithful followers of God in Babylon?** List responses on the board. Ask: **What made them decide to be faithful to God when apparently no others joined them?** Allow students to respond, and then emphasize that Daniel and his friends loved God and wanted to honor Him more than they feared the actions of their captors.

Say: **Before we can boldly stand strong for our faith in God, we have to identify the challenges we face, confront our fears, and decide how we will respond.**

Lead students to discuss these questions with a partner or in small groups of three to four people:

- **In what areas do you feel the most pressure to compromise your faith in God by conforming to the ways of the world?**
- **What do you fear will happen in you stand up for your faith by refusing to conform?**
- **What can you do to strengthen your commitment to stand up for your faith?**
- **How can we support each other in this stand for faith?**

After four to five minutes, call students together and invite volunteers to share a summary of their discussion. Conclude by encouraging students to pray with their partner or group for the courage to stand firm in their faith when pressured to conform to the world. Close by praying that students will continually seek ways to strengthen each other as they stand together for their faith in God.

Master Teacher Option: Taking a Stand

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will consider how to overcome their fears about faithfully obeying God.

Provide a dry-erase board and markers.

Point out that the Bible records the decision that Daniel and his friends made, but not how they felt as they made that decision. Ask: **What fears and doubts do you think these young men faced as faithful followers of God in Babylon?** List responses on the board. Ask: **What made them decide to be faithful to God when apparently no others joined them?** Allow students to respond, and then emphasize that Daniel and his friends loved God and wanted to honor Him more than they feared the actions of their captors.

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Take Home Activity

Family Devotion

(10-15 minutes at home, easy set-up)

Distribute copies of the Family Devotion to students and encourage them to share the devotion with their family.

A copy of the Family Devotion will be included in your lesson PDF download.

LIVING FAITHFUL IN AN UNFAITHFUL WORLD: THROUGH THE EYES OF DANIEL AND TIMOTHY

LESSON 1: FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE

Biblical Passages: Daniel 1:1-21

Memory Verses: Daniel 1:17

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.
And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

1. Believers should not be surprised when they are surrounded by a _____ culture (Dan. 1:1–7).
2. When surrounded by a hostile culture, believers can _____ to be faithful to God (Dan. 1:8–14).
3. God will _____ and _____ believers who remain faithful to Him (Dan. 1:15–21).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What types of hostility have you faced as a Christian? Were you surprised? How did you respond?
- How can a group of believers encourage each other to remain faithful to God when they are ridiculed, threatened, or persecuted for their faith?
- When have you been pressured to compromise your convictions? How did God use that situation to grow your faith and cause you to stand firm?
- How has God rewarded you for standing up for your convictions?

	Launch a hunger strike to get his way	Take food & wine from table and quietly throw it away	Ask permission for an alternative solution
PROS			
CONS			

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT . . .

“Faith is not only necessary to salvation, it is also necessary to live a life pleasing to God. Faith enables us to claim the promises of God – but it also enables us to obey the commands of God. Faith enables us to obey when obedience is costly or seems unreasonable to the natural mind.”—*Jerry Bridges*

FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

Introduction: In many parts of the world, Christians find themselves surrounded by a culture that displays their hostility to God in many ways: ridiculing people for their obedience to God, denying employees the freedom to express their faith at work, prohibiting prayer events at school, arresting and even killing those who boldly share the gospel. In today's lesson, Daniel's obedience to God's commands while living in the hostile Babylonian culture reveals how we can remain obedient to God in our hostile culture.

1. Believers should not be surprised when they are surrounded by a hostile culture (Daniel 1:1–7).

Biblical Background: God had warned Judah that He would judge their unfaithfulness to Him by allowing them to be taken captive by a foreign nation. Unfortunately, King Jehoiakim and his son, King Jehoiachin, refused to heed those warnings. Both father and son were evil and did what was wrong before the Lord. As a result, God allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to overtake Jerusalem and carry the nation's wealth and noteworthy young men back to Babylon (vv. 1-4). Many of Judah's young men, including Daniel and three of his friends, were taken captive, given Babylonian names, and surrounded by Babylonian culture and religion (vv. 5-7).

Illustration: Tim Tebow, former Florida Gator quarterback and Heisman Trophy winner, displayed his faith in God by including Bible verses in his eye black. As a result, the NCAA Football Rules Committee enacted a ruling that eye blacking could no longer include any "words, numbers, logos or other symbols." When our culture is hostile to the gospel, we can expect opposition and restrictive rules and laws.

Application: As Christians, we might often find ourselves surrounded by people who do not share our faith in God. Instead of being surprised by this development, we should remind ourselves that Jesus told us that the world will hate us because it hates Him.

2. When surrounded by a hostile culture, believers can choose to be faithful to God (Daniel 1:8–14).

Description: As a stranger in a strange land, Daniel could cling to the God in whom he had placed his faith or he could abandon his faith and become just like the Babylonians. Daniel "resolved that he would not defile himself" by eating the wine and meat provided by the Babylonian king (vv. 8-9). At Daniel's request, the chief of the eunuchs allowed him and his friends to consume only vegetables and water during a ten-day trial period (vv. 10-14). Daniel and his friends chose to be faithful to God's commands even in the midst of a hostile environment.

Illustration: Despite the opposition of many who claim the event violates the separation of church and state, the annual See You at the Pole events unite millions of students each year. This student-led prayer event allows students, parents, teachers, and community members across the nation to gather at their

school's flagpole prior to the school day to pray together for their school. These students have chosen to make their faith in God known by participating in this event.

Application: The road to compromise begins with just one small step, which soon becomes multiple steps that lead to totally caving to the pressure to abandon our faith in God. When we determine to remain faithful to God in small ways as well as in big ways, we are building a strong faith that will stand firm in the face of all opposition.

3. God will protect and reward believers who remain faithful to Him (Daniel 1:15–21).

Description: God rewarded the faithfulness demonstrated by Daniel and his friends by granting them favor from their captors, great health through a diet that honored Him, and mastery of the learning required by their captors (vv. 15-17). Ultimately, even the king of Babylon was impressed that their knowledge exceeded the knowledge of all his magicians and enchanters ten times over (vv. 18-21).

Illustration: When Truett Cathy, founder of Chic-fil-A, decided that all restaurants would be closed on Sundays, many people felt that his decision would jeopardize his success in such a competitive market. But he stood by his decision to glorify God and to ensure that his employees had the day free for “family, worship, fellowship, or rest.” God has rewarded his faithfulness by allowing Chick-fil-A to “generate more business per square foot in six days than many other quick-service restaurants produce in seven.”

Application: Even when we face people who are hostile to our faith in God, we cannot forget that God remains in complete control. When we cling to our faith, He has the ability to protect us from others while rewarding our faithfulness.

Conclusion: We can expect to face opposition to our faith—sometimes mildly annoying, sometimes fiercely aggressive, and even occasionally life threatening. We can choose to remain faithful to God in the face of such opposition because we know that **The Future is in God's Hands**.

LIVING FAITHFUL IN AN UNFAITHFUL WORLD: THROUGH THE EYES OF DANIEL AND TIMOTHY

LESSON 1: FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE

Biblical Passages: Daniel 1:1-21

Memory Verses: Daniel 1:17

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.
And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

1. Believers should not be surprised when they are surrounded by a _____ culture (Dan. 1:1–7).
2. When surrounded by a hostile culture, believers can _____ to be faithful to God (Dan. 1:8–14).
3. God will _____ and _____ believers who remain faithful to Him (Dan. 1:15–21).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What types of hostility have you faced as a Christian? Were you surprised? How did you respond?
- How can a group of believers encourage each other to remain faithful to God when they are ridiculed, threatened, or persecuted for their faith?
- When have you been pressured to compromise your convictions? How did God use that situation to grow your faith and cause you to stand firm?
- How has God rewarded you for standing up for your convictions?

	Launch a hunger strike to get his way	Take food & wine from table and quietly throw it away	Ask permission for an alternative solution
PROS			
CONS			

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT . . .

“Faith is not only necessary to salvation, it is also necessary to live a life pleasing to God. Faith enables us to claim the promises of God – but it also enables us to obey the commands of God. Faith enables us to obey when obedience is costly or seems unreasonable to the natural mind.”—*Jerry Bridges*

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“Currahee!” The 101st Airborne Infantry made this word famous during World War II. “Currahee” is a Cherokee Indian word meaning “stand alone.” It has special meaning to the men of the 101st because they were dropped out of airplanes behind enemy lines. They had to fight their way through enemy-controlled areas so that they could provide a safe area for Allied forces to enter and take over the enemy territory. These soldiers were some of the bravest men in the Army and became heroic examples of American courage. But their job was nearly impossible—the majority of them were killed during the war.

Read Daniel 1:1–21 together as a family. Although Daniel and his friends didn’t volunteer for this mission, they found themselves behind enemy lines. When King Nebuchadnezzar’s army attacked, they were forcefully removed from their families and their homeland and taken to the home of their country’s greatest enemy. Then, their captors tried to force them to break the laws that they had been taught since childhood. Daniel and his friends didn’t know if they would see their homes or families again. Yet rather than surrendering to the circumstances, Daniel and his friends continued to be obedient to God’s commands and lived to honor Him through their service to the king.

Daniel and his friends discovered that it wasn’t easy to stand up for their faith by obeying God when the culture surrounding them expected them to live by its standards. And just as they were surrounded by a culture that did not honor God, we find ourselves surrounded by a culture that shows increasing hostility to those who believe in God. Like Daniel, we may one day find ourselves in a situation where we have no choice but to take a deep breath, muster up some courage, and stand up for our commitment to live by God’s commands. And when we do, we—like Daniel and his friends—will find that God will honor our commitment to Him.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are some things in your life that cause you to believe that you are standing alone when it comes to following Christ?
2. Whom can you call on to stand with you?
3. What are some ways that you and other Christians can support one another in your school or workplace?
4. Praying for strength to follow Christ daily is an important practice. Whom can you ask to pray for you and with you?
5. What are the benefits to standing up for Christ when you are being persecuted?