



Stewardship of Self

Summary and Goal

We are to prepare our lives so we are always ready to be used by God.

Plan two meetings for your group this week: men's night and women's night.

Pre-enlist someone to share their testimony from their experience with fasting.

Main Passages

Daniel 1:8-16

Session Outline

1. Pressure to Compromise (Dan. 1:8-10)
2. Simple Obedience (Dan. 1:11-14)
3. God's Faithfulness (Dan. 1:15-16)

Theological Theme

God gave the Law to His people so that they might know His character and obey His commands. The Law is a blueprint by which those who love and serve the one true God may find direction and joy in their pilgrim journey.

Christ Connection

Those who are in Christ are saved from the penalty of sin and for the glory of God. The Law of God found in the Scriptures serves Christians as a blueprint by which they can make themselves ready to be useful in the hands of God.

Missional Application

When Christians live in accordance with the Word of God, obeying His commandments and statutes, they adorn the gospel of Jesus Christ. The example of a humble, obedient Christian is often the means God uses to draw lost souls to Himself.

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



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Session Plan

Stewardship of Self

Introduction



Ask everyone to bring their favorite appetizer to the Zoom meeting this week.



What are some reasons that a doctor would write a prescription for a patient?

What responsibility does the patient have in doing everything within his or her power to make sure the prescribed treatment makes the intended effect?

Wouldn't it be nice if the simple act of calling in the prescription automatically applied the effects of it to your body? It doesn't work like that, though. We still have to take steps. We must go and pick up the medicine, pay for it, read the instructions, and follow the instructions, sometimes for days or even weeks.

This is an analogy for Christians and the Bible. It is by the Law of God that those who love and fear God may prepare themselves to be used by God and offer up sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. In our text today, we see these principles lived out.

1. Pressure to Compromise (Dan. 1:8-10)

The exact reason for Daniel's scruples isn't important. What is important to understand is that Daniel and his friends were fully convinced that it would be sinful for them to eat the food and drink the wine that was provided for them from the king. Consider the pressure that they must have felt. There is no doubt that the food would have been excellent in quality. Surely they were hungry from their long journey. Everyone else was eating it. Besides, they weren't in Israel anymore. Shouldn't they do everything they could to stay alive and in the king's good graces? What could it hurt to bend the rules a bit?



What potential dangers might Daniel have faced with this decision? What are some dangers or pressures Christians might face today when they choose to honor God over the world?



What gave Daniel the ability to obey God in that situation? How could he be so steadfast?

- Application: Are you fully satisfied in Christ, or do you seek something beyond Christ to satisfy your heart? What do you believe you need besides Christ to have joy, peace, and wholeness?

2. Simple Obedience (Dan. 1:11-14)

Maybe the most surprising part of this story is the fact that Daniel and his friends actually walked in obedience. Any Christian who has striven to follow the Lord knows how difficult sustained obedience can be, especially when it has to do with abstinence. Yet these men ate only vegetables and drank only water indefinitely.

- What have you found difficult about sustained obedience to the Lord?
- How can Christians today serve the Lord with this posture?
- Application: What is your motivation to serve the Lord? Do you find yourself losing steam or giving up easily? If so, why do you think that is? What needs to change?

3. God's Faithfulness (Dan. 1:15-16)

After the 10-day trial period, the eunuch found that Daniel and his friends looked even better than the others. God is always faithful to accomplish His purposes, but His sovereign will is higher and greater than what we can see and imagine. Thus, Christians walk in obedience to God not for physical reward, but in order to be used by the Father to accomplish His sovereign will across the globe, no matter if that means suffering and sacrifice.

- What lesson or principle can we draw from these events in the life of Daniel?
- What was Daniel's motivation for obedience before God?
- Application: What is your motivation for obedience to God? How has that been challenged by today's study?

Conclusion

- How are you currently seeking to be used by God? What are you willing to sacrifice so that He might use you for His glory?
- How might we as a group seek to encourage one another to live lives that can be used by God in all things?
- Pray for an opportunity to have gospel conversations with those you have been praying for by name.



Expanded Session Content

Stewardship of Self

Introduction

- ? What are some reasons that a doctor would write a prescription for a patient?
- ? What responsibility does the patient have in doing everything within his or her power to make sure the prescribed treatment makes the intended effect?

If you go see your doctor and he detects something awry, he may very well prescribe you some sort of medication or medical treatment. He will ask you which pharmacy you use, and then he will call that prescription in to them.

That, however, is not the end of the process. Wouldn't it be nice if the simple act of calling in the prescription automatically applied the effects of it to your body? It doesn't work like that, though. We still have to take steps. We must go and pick up the medicine, pay for it, read the instructions, and follow the instructions, sometimes for days or even weeks.

This is an analogy for Christians and the Bible. God has made this great help available to Christians, but it doesn't get applied automatically. They must avail themselves to it. They must open it, read it, study it, pray it, and obey it. This is the duty and joy of all those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Not only that, but there is great blessing available to those who walk in faith and obedience, taking God at His Word.

Today, we will think about the nature of the commands of the Bible as we consider the story of Daniel.

Session Summary

It is by the Law of God that those who love and fear God may prepare themselves to be used by God and offer up sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. In our text today, we see these principles lived out. God sent Babylon, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, to conquer Israel due to Israel's sustained apostasy. However, there was a faithful remnant among

unfaithful Israel. Among them were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The king's eunuch chose these four men to enter into a period of trial in the king's court to determine whether they would be worthy to serve the king. When they entered this period they were renamed Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

As we see in this episode, obedience to God's Laws in a fallen world is difficult and often perilous because of the enmity that exists between God and much of His creation. Daniel desired to obey God, but he felt intense pressure to compromise. Still, he and his companions remained faithful and found that God was faithful to them.

1. Pressure to Compromise (Dan. 1:8-10)

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were in a difficult position. Consider that their country had been attacked, their cities besieged. Remember that the Babylonians had ransacked the temple and took vast numbers of Israelites captive from their homeland to Babylon. Imagine thousands of people, men and women, in shackles and chained to one another stumbling along mile after mile. Picture their children running alongside them in rags, hungry and crying. The people of God were being severely punished, and they had no idea what lay ahead of them.

Daniel and his friends were probably surprised and relieved to have their lives spared and then to end up under the care of the king's eunuch, where they could enjoy comfortable living and abundant food. But there was a problem. We don't know exactly what the issue with the food was, but Daniel made it clear that to eat it would be to defile himself. "Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank" (v. 8).



What potential dangers might Daniel have faced with this decision? What are some dangers or pressures Christians might face today when they choose to honor God over the world?

The exact reason for Daniel's scruples isn't important. What is important to understand is that Daniel and his friends were fully convinced that it would be sinful for them to eat the food and drink the wine that was provided for them from the king. Consider the pressure that they must have felt. There is no doubt that the food would have been excellent in quality. Surely they were hungry from their long journey. Everyone else was eating it. Besides, they weren't in Israel anymore. Shouldn't they do everything they could to stay alive and in the king's good graces? What could it hurt to bend the rules a bit?

Determined

The word determined means literally “set upon his heart,” referring to inner resolve. Daniel decided that he would not defile himself with a diet that included non-kosher meat such as horseflesh and pork, or drink wine that had been offered to Babylonian gods.

There is a key word in verse 8 that gives us an idea of Daniel’s mindset: “Daniel determined that he would not defile himself.” It seems that Daniel had only one desire: to walk in obedience to his God. Some may say that this is foolishness, and in the world’s eyes, it is. But Daniel didn’t fear men or death; he feared God alone. Daniel knew the Scriptures, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10). Daniel feared the Lord more than he feared King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel loved the Lord more than he loved his own life. This is foolishness to the world, but it is the wisdom of God.



What gave Daniel the ability to obey God in that situation? How could he be so steadfast?

Daniel’s determination to obey God was unshakable because his allegiance was fully pledged. Daniel, like David, was a man after God’s own heart and desired above all to live a life that was pleasing to Him. Indeed, Daniel’s very life was swept up in God’s rule, beauty, glory, and sovereignty. Daniel knew there was nothing lacking in God, and there was nothing he needed outside of what God would provide for him.

And so it is with Christians today. Those who follow Christ revere Him as a great and glorious Savior. They have tasted and seen that there is nothing lacking in Christ. They have found that in Christ their deepest needs are met and their temporal sojourn is provided for. Yet, Christians do find that their old self, the old heart of stone, wants to bargain. Christians find themselves desiring that which is not good for them. What is the cure? How do Christians being tempted by the things of the world find the straight path leading to the narrow gate again? They turn their eyes upon Jesus and discover anew that there is nothing lacking in their great Savior. There they see that all that is good, beneficial, and encouraging may be found in Him.



Application: Are you fully satisfied in Christ, or do you seek something beyond Christ to satisfy your heart? What do you believe you need besides Christ to have joy, peace, and wholeness?

2. Simple Obedience (Dan. 1:11-14)

Maybe the most surprising part of this story is the fact that Daniel and his friends actually walked in obedience. Any Christian who has striven to follow the Lord knows how difficult sustained obedience can be, especially when it has to do with abstinence. Yet these men ate only vegetables and drank only water indefinitely.



What have you found difficult about sustained obedience to the Lord?

There are all sorts of tricks that we try to play on ourselves in order to modify our behavior. Some of them help and some of them don't. But when it comes to sustained obedience in the Christian life, there is only one way to continue to walk in joyful, humble obedience to the Word of God over a lifetime.

Amy Carmichael, who is a shining example of enduring obedience, wrote something that helps us understand how Daniel was able to continue in obedience: "It is found in seeing Him who is invisible. It is found in looking at the joy that is set before thee. It is found in considering Him who endured. It is found in taking for thine own the words of one who was tempted to wax faint. 'In the day when I cried Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.' It is found in staking thin all upon the lightest word of the Lord, thy Redeemer."¹

Carmichael is referring to the great secret of Christian contentment and obedience. Christians walk in joyful obedience to the one true and living God because their souls are satisfied in Him. They have no need to seek out self-fulfillment. They aren't on a quest to find a source of peace or joy. They are no longer looking for an earthly treasure to cherish. Rather, Christians treasure Christ and rejoice in the gospel. The grace of the Lord is their sufficiency. Their futures are secure with the Father. They have beheld the beauty and glory of the Father. Their hearts are full and souls satisfied. Thus, obedience to Him is not motivated by hopes for something that may come in the future, but it is a thanksgiving for what is already in their possession.



How can Christians today serve the Lord with this posture?

Christians may serve the Lord today with joyful gratitude simply by relishing the gospel and making it the foundation of their lives. The person who knows the depth of mercy that he or she has received needs no prodding to worship, thank, love, and serve the one who showed mercy.

Christians may keep this perspective by preaching the gospel to themselves each day, each hour. Not only did the gospel save them, but it sustains them. Have you ever noticed how Paul always taught the gospel in his letters to the churches? He told the Roman church that he was eager "to preach the gospel to you who are at Rome" (Rom. 1:15). Why would he need to preach the gospel to Christians? Because Christians need to hear the gospel as much as non-Christians do. The gospel message is nourishment and sustenance for our souls.

A wonderfully practical way for Christians to keep their souls warm is to regularly and intentionally draw near to the gospel fire. They can do this

by preaching the gospel to themselves. Preaching the gospel to yourself consists of this: First, cause your heart to be still before the Lord. Then, rehearse some expression of the gospel message. Finally, allow the reality of the gospel message to affect you. As you do that, you will stay warm and tender before the Lord as He works in you and through you. Your sharing of God's Word will have more power, your praying will be more humble and fervent, and your counseling will be more gracious and life giving. Preach the gospel to yourself.



Application: What is your motivation to serve the Lord? Do you find yourself losing steam or giving up easily? If so, why do you think that is? What needs to change?

3. God's Faithfulness (Dan. 1:15-16)

After the 10-day trial period, the eunuch found that Daniel and his friends looked even better than the others.



What lesson or principle can we draw from these events in the life of Daniel?



What was Daniel's motivation for obedience before God?

Let's start with a lesson that we should not draw from this account. It is an error to generalize what happened with Daniel to formulate a theology that claims that God will physically prosper a person if they have faith and walk in obedience. That teaching is called the "prosperity gospel," and it is a false gospel that prevents people from believing the true, biblical gospel.

While God did bless Daniel physically and materially in this story, he oftentimes leads His children into suffering and persecution. For example, when Stephen obediently preached the gospel of Jesus Christ with great faith before the Jewish religious leaders, he was stoned to death (Acts 7). Was God faithful to Stephen? Of course! God justified Stephen and saved his soul, and then He gave Stephen the boldness to preach the gospel in a very difficult situation. God gave Stephen the words to say, then God allowed Stephen to see Christ standing at the right hand of the Father. Finally, God received Stephen's soul into His presence upon his physical death. Great is His faithfulness!

God is always faithful to accomplish His purposes, but His sovereign will is higher and greater than what we can see and imagine. Thus, Christians walk in obedience to God not for physical reward, but in order to be used by the Father to accomplish His sovereign will across the globe, no matter if that means suffering and sacrifice.



Application: What is your motivation for obedience to God?
How has that been challenged by today's study?

Conclusion

The story of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah is a helpful example for Christians today. Not only is the story inspiring, but it is also instructive and should serve to spur followers of Christ on to good works. Daniel walked in faithful obedience to God because of his allegiance to and love for the one true and living God. Nothing Babylon offered or took from him shook his confidence in God. Similarly, Christians are a redeemed people who have experienced the grace and mercy of the God of Abraham in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Nothing this world offers compares with the treasure that is found in Christ.



How are you currently seeking to be used by God? What are you willing to sacrifice so that He might use you for His glory?



How might we as a group seek to encourage one another to live lives that can be used by God in all things?



How might living this way give us opportunity for gospel conversations with those who don't yet believe in Jesus?

Prayer of Response

Close in prayer, asking God to use our group for His glory. Ask Him to help us to sacrifice in whatever way He calls us, so that we might steward all of our lives for His purposes.

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Daniel* by Daniel Akin
- *Be Resolute* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Daniel* by J. Vernon McGee

For Next Week

Session Title

- Stewardship of Relationships

Main Passages

- 1 Timothy 1:18-19

Session Outline

1. Appropriate Instruction (1 Tim. 1:18a)
2. Fight the Good Fight (1 Tim. 1:18b)
3. State of Being in the Battle (1 Tim. 1:19)

Memorize

Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank.

- Daniel 1:8a

Daily Readings

- Monday - Daniel 1:8-16
- Tuesday - 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
- Wednesday - James 1:12
- Thursday - 1 Peter 3:15
- Friday - 2 Peter 1:3-8
- Saturday - Luke 9:23

Historical Context of Daniel

Purpose

The theme of the book of Daniel is the hope of the people of God during the times of the Gentiles. The phrase, “the times of the Gentiles,” used by Jesus (Lk 21:24), refers to the time between the Babylonian captivity and Jesus’s return. It is a time when God’s people live under ungodly world dominion. The book promotes hope by teaching that at all times “the Most High God is ruler over human kingdoms” (5:21). Daniel’s purpose was to exhort Israel to be faithful to the sovereign God of Israel during the times of the Gentiles. He accomplished this by recounting examples of godly trust and prophecies of God’s ultimate victory.

Author

The critical view of the book of Daniel suggests it was written by a second-century BC Jewish author, not the historical Daniel. This view is largely based on a naturalistic perspective that denies the possibility of the authentic foretelling found in Daniel. On the other hand, the traditional view maintains that Daniel the prophet did indeed write this book sometime shortly after the end of the Babylonian captivity (sixth century BC). Internal testimony supports this claim. In the text itself, Daniel claimed to have written down visions given by God (8:2; 9:2,20; 12:5). Passages which contain third-person references to Daniel do not disprove his authorship. After all, authors commonly refer to themselves in the third person, as for instance Moses does in the Pentateuch. Moreover, God speaks of himself in the third person (Ex 20:2,7). Finally, Jesus Christ attributed the book of Daniel to Daniel himself (Mt 24:15; Mk 13:14).

Setting

The historical setting of the book of Daniel is the Babylonian captivity. The book opens after King Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege of Judah (605 BC) when he brought Daniel and his friends to Babylon along with other captives among the Judean nobility. Nebuchadnezzar assaulted Judah again in 597 and brought ten thousand captives back to Babylon. In 586 he once again besieged Jerusalem, this time destroying the city, the holy temple, and exiling the people of Judah to Babylon. Daniel’s ministry began in 605 when he arrived at Babylon with the first Jewish captives, extended throughout the Babylonian captivity (which ended in 539), and concluded sometime after the third year of Cyrus the Great, the Medo-Persian king who overthrew Babylonia (see Dn 1:21; 10:1).

Special Features

Daniel, whose name means “God Judges” or “God’s Judge,” was a sixth-century BC prophet living in exile in Babylon. Daniel recounts key events firsthand that occurred during the Jewish captivity and also shares visions that were given to him by God.

Extended Commentary

Daniel 1:8-16

1:8. Daniel decided that the royal food and wine carried defilement. Readers of this text should not assume that the alcoholic content of the wine was at issue here. Actually, the boys faced double defilement. First, the food was not kosher (Lev. 3:17; 7:26; 17:10-14; 19:26). Second, this food might have been offered to idols, a problem that we encounter in the New Testament as well. Commonly in ancient pagan religion, portions of food and wine were first offered to household deities. The eating and drinking of that food implied some recognition of those deities. Exodus 34:15 clearly forbids this, and Hosea predicted that citizens of the kingdom of Israel would face this problem (Hos. 9:3-4), a prophesy Ezekiel himself experienced (Ezek. 4:13-14).

But if we spread new covenant theology back into the old, we might conclude here that Daniel's attitude was an even more important issue than his diet. He resolved not to defile himself, and he requested that this wish be granted. But why did he object to the food while showing no concern for the name change or the pagan education? Most likely because the latter two did not directly defy Jewish law. No rebellion. No hunger strike. Breeding shows through as Daniel courteously asked for a special exemption. In this verse, very early in our book, we see this great prophet/statesman display the courage of his convictions.

1:9-10. For the second time in our book, the sovereignty of God controls Daniel's situation. First he delivered Judah to Babylon; now he works in the heart of Ashpenaz to produce kindness (*hesed*) and sympathy (*rahamim*) toward Daniel. This latter word could very well take the English expression of the KJV, "tender love."

However, when one serves a pagan king, one does not change the rules at a whim. Kindness is one thing; risking one's head for that kindness is quite another. Asphenaz's fear was well-grounded as we learn in chapter 3. It turns out that he had not determined the diet (although he apparently issued the names), but the menu came directly from the throne. His logic was flawless given the information he had: If Daniel and his buddies showed up at some future inspection looking weak and pale, it was his head on the block (or some Chaldean equivalent).

Since we noticed Daniel's attitude, let's not miss the changed heart of Ashpenaz. Surely he could have simply turned down the request by saying, "Rules are rules." But he explained to Daniel why he thought this might not be a good idea for any of them. How often in Scripture we see that God raises up friends and protectors from unusual places. Certainly Joshua hardly expected his spies to find aid in the house of a harlot any more than Balaam anticipated God's revelation from his braying donkey. In Daniel's case, we should probably assume that the initial request was not granted.

1:11-12. Well, Daniel tried; now it was probably time to shut up and get with the program. Not likely—that was not Daniel's style. He simply moved to Plan B, a test run on a vegetarian diet. This appeal did not go to Ashpenaz but to the guard whom the chief official had appointed. The

KJV gives him the name Melzar, but almost all scholars now agree that is not a proper name but simply the word for steward. But not just any steward; the definite article (unusual for Hebrew proper names) identifies him as the steward.

The Hebrew text for vegetables refers to food grown in the ground. Calvin suggests that Daniel may have had a special revelation from God to propose this particular request. Obviously, this is no proof text for a vegetarian diet. On the other hand, those of us who have adventured on occasion into no-star restaurants know that a salad is considerably safer than the blue-plate special.

1:13-14. Any legitimate assessment requires verification of the results. Daniel, considerate of Ashpenaz's concern, invited a direct comparison with those who ate the specialty of the house. Daniel had no fear that God would not honor his stand on defiled food, and he fully expected to do well during exam week. The text does not tell us that God worked in the steward's heart as well, but certainly he took as great a risk as Ashpenaz since it would be no trick to trace any failure in this project directly back to him.

Jerome spelled it out for us in the fourth century: "His faith was so incredibly great that he not only promised he would be in good flesh by eating the humbler food, but he even set a time-limit. Therefore it was not a matter of temerity but of faith, for the sake of which he despised the sumptuous fare of the king" (Jerome, p. 22).

1:15-16. No surprise here. When people take a stand for God and follow the principles of his Word, they will always pass the test with flying colors. Let's not insert a miracle here since one is hardly required. Virtually any nutritionist today would probably verify that a diet of vegetables and water would beat red meat and alcohol in any culinary schedule. Now the experiment becomes the norm, and the steward takes the royal fare back to the chef.

As we rejoice in God's blessing on Daniel and his three friends, we also have to wonder why we learn of no other resistance to pagan defilement. Certainly it is possible that others followed Daniel's example, but the first chapter does not suggest that kind of conclusion, nor does the rest of the book smoke out any other champions of faith. We don't need to wait until the section on application to recognize the lesson here: Christians need the courage to resist worldliness.²

References

1. Carmichael, Amy. *His Thoughts Said... His Father Said...* Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: CLC Publications, 1999.
2. Gangel, Kenneth. *Daniel*. Edited by Max Anders. Holman Old Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001.

Author Bio

Amy Carmichael (His Thoughts Said... His Father Said...)

Amy Carmichael was the eldest daughter of a large Christ-centered family in Millisle, Ireland. She learned at any early age that “nothing is important but that which is eternal.” This understanding proved to be a foundation for her service to the Lord among the mill workers of Ireland, the Japanese briefly, and in India where she began her ministry to children in 1895 and where she remained until her death in 1951.

Kenneth Gangel (Daniel)

Dr. Kenneth O. Gangel (1935-2009): A prolific author and an experienced leader has been influential in the field of Christian education for over forty years. He’s written numerous articles and over 50 books, while pastoring, teaching, raising a family and leading schools. His impact reaches around the world through students, co-authored books, and working with leaders of churches and schools.

Max Anders (Daniel)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling 30 Days to Understanding the Bible, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume Holman Bible Commentary series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Daniel Akin (Exalting Jesus in Daniel)

Daniel L. Akin is the president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. He holds a Ph.D. in Humanities from the University of Texas at Arlington and has authored or edited many books and Bible commentaries including Ten Who Changed the World and A Theology for the Church.

Warren Wiersbe (Be Resolute)

Warren W. Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church and general director of Back to the Bible, has traveled widely as a Bible teacher and conference speaker. Because of his encouragement to those in ministry, Dr. Wiersbe is often referred to as “the pastor’s pastor.” He has ministered in churches and conferences throughout the United States as well as in Canada, Central and South America, and Europe. Dr. Wiersbe has written over 150 books, including the popular BE series of commentaries on every book of the Bible, which has sold more than four million copies. At the 2002 Christian Booksellers Convention, he was awarded the Gold Medallion Lifetime Achievement Award by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association. Dr. Wiersbe and his wife, Betty, live in Lincoln, Nebraska.

J. Vernon McGee (Daniel)

Dr. J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988) spent more than 50 years teaching the Bible on his “Thru the Bible” radio broadcast. He pastored for more than 40 years and has authored many best-selling books, including Doctrine for Difficult Days.