**OPEN THE CONVERSATION**

Take some time to build relationships with the students:

1. Ask for each student’s high and low from the week.
2. Optional RBQ: Would you rather always blend in with the crowd or always stand-out? Why?
3. Optional Icebreaker Game: “Copy Cat”
* A person is chosen to leave the room.
* A player in the circle is chosen as the leader who will start a rhythm. Using their hands or feet, players clap, snap, or otherwise develop some kind of rhythm. (OR you can play with more subtle things like gestures or posture etc. vs. a rhythm)
* Everyone in the circle copies the leader as quickly as they can.
* Whoever is leading the group, changes their activity every few seconds and the rest of the group must follow suit, mimicking what they do while not giving away who the leader is.
* The person who has been out of the room returns and tries to figure out who is leading the group within three guesses.
* If they guess correctly, the leader becomes the one to leave the room and the previous guesser chooses the next group leader.
* If they can’t guess in three guesses, they choose the next person to leave the room and someone else becomes the leader for the circle.

Lesson connection: The key to winning this game for those in the circle is to be good at blending in with the crowd and not doing anything that would cause the leader to stand out and get caught. In today’s lesson, we’ll consider the opposite. When is fitting in with the crowd something we should actually avoid?

**INTRODUCTION**

The story of Daniel and the lions is one of the most powerful examples in the Bible of standing firm in faith, no matter the cost. In a world where living for God can bring opposition or pressure to compromise, Daniel's story teaches us that obedience to God is more important than the approval of people, and that God is faithful to those who are faithful to Him. As we dive into this story, we’ll explore what it looks like to trust God in the face of challenges and how His faithfulness gives us the strength to remain steadfast, no matter the circumstances.

**Have you ever been in a situation where you had to choose between following God and fitting in with others? What did you do, and how did it feel?**

***READ DANIEL 6:1-23***

1. **Why do you think living for God often draws opposition from others?**
2. **What does Daniel's obedience to God teach us about trusting God, even when it's risky?**
3. **In what ways do you think the culture today pressures us to compromise our faith? And how can we prepare ourselves to stand firm in our faith like Daniel did, even when it's difficult?**
4. **Daniel faced the lions’ den because of his obedience. What are some consequences we might face for obeying God today?**
5. **How does knowing God is always faithful, even in difficult situations, help you in your daily life?**

**WRAP UP**

**Put** **today’s** **lesson** **into** **action**: **How can we as a group seek faithfulness to God over fitting in with the crowd around us?** *Ask for any prayer requests and pray for one another.*

**EXTENDED CUT**

**Why do you think living for God often draws opposition from others?** In John 15:18-19, Jesus tells his disciples, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." Living for God often draws opposition from others because His ways are not the same as the ways of the world. Just like Daniel and his friends, when we choose to follow God, we will stand out from the crowd around us. As we learn to live according to his kingdom rather than our own, we’ll inevitably find ourselves at odds with those around us who don’t follow God. While this can be uncomfortable and may even result in some responding toward us with hostility, we can take comfort in remembering that we are following the example of not just Daniel, but Jesus himself, who faced opposition but remained faithful!

**What does Daniel's obedience to God teach us about *trusting* God, even when it's risky?** In his response to the decree, Daniel modeled for us what it looks like to trust God even in the face of great personal risk. Daniel knew the decree that praying to anyone but the king would lead to death in the lions' den, yet he continued to pray to God three times a day, just as he always had. He persisted in doing what was right, showing that he feared and loved God above all else. That’s not to say that he never felt any fear about what might happen. Being human, it’s fair to think he probably did experience some of that! But Daniel trusted that no matter the outcome, good or bad, God would take care of him. Either bringing him home to heaven or protecting his life from the lions. Daniel trusted that God’s plans for his life were best. That honoring God by being obedient was worth it, even if it cost him his life. Daniel’s ability to trust God in such difficult circumstances was ultimately based on his knowing and believing in God’s character. Because Daniel believed God to be powerful, good, wise, and loving, he could trust his care of him in the most challenging situation.

**In what ways do you think the culture today pressures us to compromise our faith? And how can we prepare ourselves to stand firm in our faith like Daniel did, even when it's difficult?** There are a lot of different ways that culture today pressures us to compromise our faith. Where God calls us to love others more than ourselves, we live in a culture that often promotes self-love as the key to happiness. While God makes it clear that he is the way and the truth, we live in a culture that teaches truth as relative. And God’s value and call for us to live a life of purity, clashes in big ways with the culture we live in today. Yet, Romans 12:2 urges us, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." It’s easy to compromise the truth when we feel threatened. But God’s desire is that we would be able to stand firm like Daniel. And this verse reminds us the key to doing that is to have our minds renewed by Him! Through things like prayer, reading Scripture, and surrounding ourselves with a supportive community of believers, we learn what is true, and we train our minds to stay focused on the truth. We grow in our ability to wisely discern areas we might be tempted to compromise and are strengthened to remain faithful, even when it's challenging.

**Daniel faced the lions’ den because of his obedience. What are some consequences we might face for obeying God today?** Today, obeying God can lead to consequences such as being excluded, ridiculed, or misunderstood by others. Standing up for what you believe in might mean losing friends, facing pressure to conform, or even being bullied. Jesus gave us hope in the face of these challenges in Matthew 5:11-12, saying, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven." Like Daniel, we might face difficult situations for our faith, but we can take heart knowing that God sees our faithfulness and promises an eternal reward that will far outweigh any fleeting joy of acceptance.

**How does knowing God is always faithful, even in difficult situations, help you in your daily life?** Knowing that God is always faithful provides us with the kind of peace and hope that can transform the way we live our daily lives! In a time when many are struggling with anxiety, weighed down by constant fear and worry, we have the sure hope of Jesus as an anchor for our lives. Jesus reminds us of this in Matthew 6:25-34, when he talks about how God looks after the birds of the air and the flowers in the field. God faithfully looks after these, providing what they need, and he will faithfully look after us! As things come up in our daily life that might be stressful or cause us anxiety, we can turn to God instead and have confidence in his care for us. In the face of challenges or uncertainties, we can trust that God will never abandon us. And even in our hardest moments God is at work for our good, just as he promises in Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." When we believe this to be true, we’re able to navigate each moment with hope, knowing that God is in control and has a plan for our lives that we can trust.