

On Purpose!

by Rich Tozour

Rich Tozour emphasizes the importance of making intentional choices for God, using Daniel's story as a powerful example.

Duration: 1:01:18

Scripture: Daniel 1:1

Topics: "Standing Firm", "Godly Conviction"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Daniel from the Bible. He describes Daniel as an exception among the elite youth of his time. Daniel is given a privileged position in the king's palace, but faces a personal trial when he is offered the king's meat and wine, which goes against his beliefs. The preacher emphasizes the importance of taking a stand and saying no to things that go against God's teachings, using the example of Daniel's refusal to consume alcohol.

Transcript

Oh, now you've got a little room to move your elbows. That's good. How many of you traveled at least five hours to get here? Raise your hand.

Five hours. Oh, maybe you shouldn't raise your hand. That's the group that shouldn't be raising hands.

OK. The rest of you would be maybe not as sweaty and hot and all that. Well, I left Kansas City two days ago, and it was 104 degrees.

And I got to Richmond, and it's 104 degrees. And I was in California last week, and it was 100 and some degrees. And before that, I was in Hawaii.

And now I know you've lost feeling pity for me. So we were in Hawaii for meetings for a month, and then we went to California for three weeks. And then we went back to Kansas City, picked up our trailer, and came this way.

So I'm not avoiding heat anywhere, although Hawaii heat's a whole lot more tolerable than whatever it is that we're experiencing right now. I have two little girls, and the reason I sent them out with their mom right now is because I don't know if you've ever traveled with two little kids under 10 years old in the car for 20 hours. They did really well, but I know they're at the breaking point.

So I told my wife, just take them and have a good time so they don't go through meltdown. So I shouldn't use the word meltdown, should I? It's probably not a good word right now. We're going to go to Daniel chapter 1, if you will.

Daniel chapter 1. Well, I'm so glad you came. I am usually asked a number of questions when people first get to meet us and know our family. Usually the first one is not addressed to me, but I hear guys talk when I come in.

Dude, how tall is that guy? So I will just tell you up front that I'm pretty tall. We come from a big family. There are only three children of my parents' descent.

I'm the oldest, but it's a big family. My dad is 6 foot 7. That's where I got my height. I'm 6 foot 6. My mom is 5' 9".

My two sisters are 5 foot 10 and 6 foot 1. They're in elementary school. No, I just wanted to see if you're awake. OK, no, they're married and have children.

So we have a tall family. Brother Harold mentioned that Will's family's got four kids, and he was trying to give them five. We'd love to have five.

I've got two girls at this point. We've got a boy in heaven. We lost before he was born.

But if the Lord gives us more, we'd love to have him. How many of you come from a family with four or more kids? Oh, lots of you do. Yeah, that's great.

OK, I don't know if you think it's great, but we think it's great. And I would love to have that privilege to have a bigger family. We live in a 40 foot trailer, so I guess the Lord says, well, I'll give them to you spaced out.

So I have spaced out children. Anyway, I have one who's 10, one who's six, one in heaven, and we'll see what we get after that. I am an evangelist, so I go all over the country preaching, doing meetings with young people, doing meetings in churches, usually revival meetings.

And when we jump into a series of meetings, I'm always praying, Lord, what's the right way to start off? And here I'm going to have my time split between you and the college kids. So I want to really direct you in the right way as we start off this morning, or this afternoon. I grew up in southern New Jersey.

I did not go to a Christian school until I was in ninth grade. Prior to that, we didn't even go to a good fundamental Bible preaching church. I was in a liberal church that didn't preach the Bible.

I went to public school. And so how many of you do homeschool? Let's see your hand. OK, a lot of you.

How many in Christian school? Anybody here Christian school? A few of you. How many of you are in public school? OK, so we've got a big mix, a lot of you in homeschool. We homeschool our girls, obviously.

We travel full time. And that has been a blessing for our family. But I know all dimensions now from experience.

I was in public school through eighth grade. I went to Christian school through high school and college. And then now we homeschool our kids.

So I know a little bit about it. My wife grew up homeschooling on the road. Her dad's an evangelist.

And his name is Lars Westberg. My father-in-law is still an evangelist. He's been in it 20-some years.

He goes to mostly smaller churches, gets partial missionary support. In fact, my wife's brother travels with me. His name is Michael Westberg.

And he and his wife, Candace, normally are with us when we're doing week-long meetings. And he grew up as an evangelist kid, he and my wife, and two other children in the family. So four kids on the road.

They lived in a 35-foot travel trailer, didn't even have their own bedroom. At night when it was time to sleep, they would take turns on the couch. Michael usually felt bad for his sisters.

He doesn't mind sleeping on the floor. So the three girls would rotate every third night. Everybody would get a turn on the couch.

Otherwise, in the morning, they'd just pack their bedroll up. And that was home. So they grew up doing what we do.

You know, and I'll touch on this later. But somebody has said, when you marry a person, you don't just marry a person. You marry a family.

And in my case, was that ever true? Because I got my wife out of this family. I got my partner in ministry out of this family. And so now we really do travel together week after week.

And it's been a joy. When I was in Christian school, I remember my parents announced, next year, you kids are going to go to Gloucester County Christian School. And I said, Christian school? What is that? They said, well, that's a school where they teach you academics, but they also teach the Bible.

In fact, all the subjects, like math and history and English, et cetera, are taught from a Bible perspective. You'll also have chapel every day, which was true in our school. We had chapel every day and Bible class every day.

Well, you know, I didn't really care about all that. But all I want to know was, do they have a football team? So I said, what about sports? And they said, well, we checked. And they have basketball and baseball and soccer.

I remember saying, soccer? Oh, come on, Mom and Dad. That is for sissies. I want to play football.

And they said, well, tough. You're going to a Christian school. And my parents had the philosophy that the parents are the parents.

Thank God they did. So they sent us to get a Christian education. And they backed up what we were being taught in school.

They taught us at home what they wanted us to know from God's word. And my life turned around. I even joined the soccer team and found out it wasn't for sissies after all.

So yeah, well, I don't know if it's a revival, but it was anyway. It was at least a concession on my part. I called it compromise.

But anyway, so I joined the soccer team. I played all four years in the school. And then I played basketball and baseball.

But I found out that we had teachers that loved God and really did love the students. And I thought, man, if I would just seize the opportunity I've got here to learn God's word, this place could change my life. So I wanted to find all the kids in the Christian school that were really sold out, the godly, the spiritual leaders.

How do you do that? I figured, well, I could do the non-subtle approach. I could stand up in class one day and say, OK, if you're a real spiritual giant, if you're a spiritual leader, I'd like to make your acquaintance. I'd really like to be your friend.

That just didn't seem real smooth. You know, that wasn't very suave. So I thought, how do you find the godly kids? So I figured, well, the way to do it is, I'll listen in Bible class.

And whoever knows the answer, certainly they're the spiritual ones, because the person with the biggest Bible knowledge must be the most spiritual person in the school. So I thought. So for a few days, I listened.

And I thought, well, Dan, that guy right there, Dan knows the word of God. Dan's dad was my Sunday school teacher. Danny was in this Christian school from his childhood.

I thought, he's got to be spiritual. He knows all the answers. So I started hanging around with Dan.

And I remember one day, the teacher had to step out of the classroom to take an emergency phone call. She said, now, you're taking a test. You're on your honor.

And as soon as she went out the door, Dan said, hey, anybody get the answer to number 15? I thought, man, I had kids in public school I went to who didn't cheat when the teacher told them not to talk during the test. And Dan's cheat? I thought, well, so much for Dan the Bible Answer Man. I'm not going to hang out with him.

So next thing, I found another kid in the class. His name was Joe. And Joe wasn't as knowledgeable of the Bible as Dan was.

But Joe was a Christian school veteran and so forth. And he seemed to know the Bible pretty well. So I started hanging around with him.

And one day, during gym class, the teacher, or the coach, rather, slipped out of the room. And the guys started talking about some things that just weren't appropriate. And Joe was in on it.

I said, what are you guys doing? It doesn't matter if the coach is in the locker room or not. You shouldn't be talking about that. Man, was I getting an education? And it wasn't the kind I was banking on.

I found out that just because you're getting a Christian education doesn't mean that you're a sold-out Christian. And sometimes you think, well, but we're homeschooled. Don't kid yourself, guys.

Just because you're homeschooled doesn't mean you're a sold-out Christian either, does it? Some of you know from your little homeschool groups that you have all kind of young people who know how to fly under the radar. It doesn't matter where you go to school. That will not determine your spirituality.

Now, I am absolutely for Christian education. I really believe that a Christian ought to get a Christian education. But I'll tell you this.

No matter if you're homeschooled or in a Christian school or in a public school, your school is not fundamentally going to determine the kind of person you are. Your foremost influence is going to be your family, your church, but particularly the heart of response that you have to the things of God. I'm going to show you a young man in the scripture today.

He had absolutely no advantage when it came to spirituality. And yet this fellow said, I'm going to stand up for God no matter what it costs me. And that young man's decision not only affected the course of his entire life, it affected all of his countrymen.

His name is Daniel. And you'll find his story in the book of Daniel, chapter 1. I want to ask you to stand with me. Daniel, chapter 1. Daniel, chapter 1, I'm going to begin reading in verse 1. We'll go down to verse 8. Daniel 1, verses 1 through 8. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem, and besieged it.

And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand with part of the vessels of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar, to the house of his God. And he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his God. And the king spake unto Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the prince's children, in whom was no blemish, but well favored, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability.

And he ordained them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank, so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof, they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, unto whom the prince of the eunuchs gave names.

For he gave unto Daniel the name of Belteshazzar, and to Hananiah of Shadrach, and to Mishael of Meshach, and to Azariah of Abednego. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself for the portion of the king's meat, nor for the wine which he drank. Therefore, he requested of the prince of the eunuchs, that he might not defile himself.

Now we're gonna stop right there. That pivotal decision in verse number eight changed the course of Daniel's life. And the key verb there is Daniel purposed in his heart.

The word means to nail, to settle, to fix, to resolve. He purposed not to defile himself. Let me tell you something.

As I went to that Christian school and I found out, very few spiritual leaders, even though the school was rock solid, the school had good separation principles, the teachers were godly people, the curriculum was top-notch, they were encouraging us in the right direction, they were encouraging us to go into full-time ministry. Even so, you can't make students be godly. And sometimes we think, well, you know, okay, so

what we'll do is we'll pull them out of that Christian school environment and we'll homeschool.

And parents, we've all found out, you can't make people be godly. You gotta get ahold of their heart. And that's why you're here this week.

God wants to get ahold of your heart. And I early on learned, you know what? A lot of these kids that grew up in a Christian school and they knew right from wrong mentally, but that didn't matter. It wasn't affecting their decisions.

They were gonna do their own thing because they wanted to do what they wanted to do. And they're not different than any of us because we all, everyone, the Bible says, all we, like sheep, have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his own way.

You have a natural bent from the flesh to go your own way. So do I. But God doesn't want you to do that. And you know, if you don't do that, if you instead say, I choose God's way above my way, you'll be so glad you did.

Now I'm gonna tell you about my Christian school classmates and where they all ended up and kind of the directions they went. Now I'm gonna show you this from the scripture today. If 10 years from now, 15 years from now, 20 years from now, you're serving God, you won't look back and say, hmm, wonder how that happened.

If 10 years from now, some of you are maybe pastoring a church or ladies married to a pastor, maybe you're on the mission field or maybe you're teaching in some kind of Christian school or some kind of ministry, a church ministry. You're not gonna look back and say, wow, I wonder how that happened, I can't believe it. Who would ever thought this? Look, if you go to the marriage altar as a pure person someday, it doesn't happen by accident.

It happens on purpose. And that's the title for the message today, on purpose. If you're gonna serve God, you won't do so accidentally.

You do so on purpose. Let's bow our heads together in prayer. Father, thank you for this privilege.

It really is a privilege to serve you. I can't imagine anything I'd rather do. I really cannot imagine.

And when I was a kid, I can't imagine anything I would rather not have done than be a preacher. I was scared to death to think about getting up in front of people. But as soon as I surrendered to you, I found out you'll never give us a calling that you won't consequently give a desire to do if we'll surrender to you.

And so I pray this week, as the young people are confronted by issues like prayer, separation unto God, surrendered to the will of God, service for you, I pray that our hearts will be made tender. We don't naturally have hearts of flesh, but I pray you'd take the heart of stone out of our flesh and give us a heart of flesh instead. Give us a soft, supple heart.

And I pray even now, even in this first message, as Brother Will speaks to the college kids and I speak to these teens, I ask that you would use the truth to make men free, to make people free. Dear Holy Spirit of God, you are my God, you are my enabler. Without you, I can do nothing.

I pray that you'd fill this vessel and I pray that you would pour out, pour out the wine of God, the cup of life to all of those who need today a decision that would put them in the right direction. I pray you'd break the

bread of life to us. The Lord Jesus is the bread of life.

And I pray we'd feast upon his person today as well as his written word. We need to hear from heaven and we look to you now for that reason. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thank you, go ahead and be seated. I appreciate Brother Vaughn giving me the opportunity to come. He invited me a long time ago and I began praying about this months back.

And you know, even while I was driving here, I've got a number of messages in mind that I've wanted to preach, but I'm thinking, you know, what's the right order to go in? I had another message in mind as I was sitting there as I got up to start off this session. I thought, no, you know what? I think we need to start off in Daniel chapter one. You're gonna find out this is a powerful and important passage of scripture.

It's one that I planned on preaching to you. I just wasn't sure we'd get to it this early. Went to that Christian school and finally figured out that there were a lot of kids who although their parents were paying good money to get them a Christian education, they were no more interested in being in that school than I'd have been interested in going to jail.

In fact, that's kind of how they looked at it. A lot of them thought, man, this is a prison camp. This is whatever some of you may have said when your parents told you that you weren't gonna be in the school system anymore or you weren't gonna be in the public school system anymore.

And some of you may have felt like, man, my whole life, I'm just, you know, I'm just boxed in. You'd never feel more boxed in than if you were Daniel. Daniel was yanked out of his homeland when he was a young man.

This is about the year 607 BC, some 600 years before Christ. Daniel's homeland of Judah was invaded by the Babylonians. Babylon is in what we know as the region of Iraq today.

The Babylonians came into Daniel's homeland. They invaded his country. Daniel and his people were yanked out of their homeland, and carried off into captivity.

Actually, there were three different groups that would go out of Judah into captivity. This was the first of the three groups to be carried off. And they would do this in ancient times because by taking the people out of their homeland, then that country they had conquered could not easily rise up in rebellion and gain their independence back.

So they'd haul them off into captivity. Now imagine this, being a captive meant slavery. That means being forced to do things that are contrary to your will.

Daniel is a young man. At this time, he was somewhere between 13 and 16 years old. If you're in that age bracket, hold up your hand for a minute.

13 to 16, the huge majority of you, all right? 13 to 16 years old, he's just a young teenager. He's carried off into a pagan land. The Babylonians were known for their riotous living.

They got drunk all the time. They had wild parties. They were immoral.

Sound like any society you know? Daniel was forced to live in a land that was completely pagan. He was yanked away from his homeland, probably never saw his parents again. We don't know whether his

parents were killed or he was just separated from them, but whatever the fact remains that Daniel was separated from his mom and dad for a lifetime.

Now there may have been times you felt like being separated from your parents for a lifetime. You may have even said that. You may have said harsh words to your parents, but I want you to think about, can you imagine being separated from your parents forcibly for the rest of your life? And this isn't the Marines either.

This isn't him going into the military. This is being forced to serve in a pagan land under a pagan king who has just come in and absolutely trashed your homeland and forced your people into servitude. The amazing thing is Daniel is, in the providence of God, allowed what would be considered at that time a cushy position.

He is given the opportunity to be groomed to be one of the men in the king's palace, one of the representatives in the palace. From a human perspective, this would seem to be, if you're gonna have to get a job in slavery, this is the job you want because you're in the king's palace. And notice, I'm gonna give you in verses one through four, as we go through this passage of scripture, chapter one, I want you to see four things.

First thing I want you to notice, actually verses one through seven, I'm gonna call it Daniel's portrait. Daniel's portrait. Now you say, I don't see a picture in my Bible, Rich.

No, you don't have a physical picture, but you've got a verbal description. So we're gonna look at Daniel's portrait. And then we're gonna take a look at Daniel's purpose in verses eight and nine.

And I'll give you the outline as we go. If you'd like to take notes, I'll make it easy for you. We'll come back to these.

But we'll look at Daniel's purpose. We'll look at his proving. And finally, Daniel's promotion.

Those four things. So first of all, Daniel's portrait. You know, I've marked my Bible here with a picture of some young people that I met a couple months ago.

This was taken in 2005. This is Patrick and Emily O'Brien. Both of them graduated from Ambassador Baptist College in North Carolina, and they want to be missionaries to Newfoundland.

And I'm going up to Newfoundland in about a month. Actually, I think, yeah, they're going to Newfoundland. I'm going up to Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick next month.

So they said, hey, would you pray for us? So I said, sure. And they didn't have a prayer card, so they gave me this picture of them. And they got married about a year ago or so.

And they said, every time you look at our picture, would you pray for us? Sure. So, you know, now I've got their picture, and it's amazing. A picture tells you a lot about people.

I mean, they're about the same height. They're the same race. They have the same hair color.

They look like a great match. And you look at them, and boy, they have a wholesome look about them. They look sharp.

Whenever you look at a picture of somebody, you get this, at least paint a mental picture in your mind. What must they be like? Sometimes, have you ever heard somebody on the radio, maybe an announcer or a sportscaster, and then you actually meet them in person, and they don't fit anything like what you were imagining in your mind? It's amazing. Sometimes I've heard of people that I've listened to as preachers on the radio, and I didn't have any idea what they look like.

And then to meet them or see them in a picture or meet them in person, think, that isn't what I pictured at all. There are some preachers, they say, you know, I have a radio voice. What's that mean? They wouldn't be good on television.

That means they're good to listen to, but maybe not good to look at. Well, I've often felt like that. You know, you think, well, I wish I could picture, what were these people in the Bible like? Notice a couple things about Daniel.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, unto Jerusalem and besieged it. Now, first of all, his nationality. What nationality was Daniel? Irish, German, Italian, what was he? He was Hebrew, he was Jewish.

You say, well, that's a privileged position. I mean, they're God's chosen people. Yes, they are.

And what's going on over between Lebanon and Israel right now? Same thing that's been going on for years. Worse, the world has been at war with the Jews throughout its history. Why? Why are people so antagonistic against Jewish folks? Because they are God's chosen people.

And Satan has done everything he can to attack that race. That doesn't mean everything Israel does is right. That doesn't mean everything Israel does is approved by God, but they are nonetheless his chosen people.

And so Daniel was a Hebrew, and you say, wow, what a privilege to be a child of God. But they were a marked people. But you see, the troubles they'd come into in this timeframe were not because they were Jewish, but because of their sins against God.

Their people, their leaders, had not followed God's word for years, and they were paying the consequences. This fellow, Jehoiakim, who was king over Judah at the time, you may remember him, he was a son of Josiah. Josiah had been a good king, but Jehoiakim was a rebel.

He was awful. He worshiped false gods, worshiped pagan idols. In fact, he was so bad that one time, Jeremiah the prophet had written a prophecy from God denouncing the sins of Judah.

Jehoiakim didn't like it, so he took a pen knife out, and anything he didn't agree with in Jeremiah's message, he began to cut it out of the scroll and throw it on the fire. By the time he was done, he had cut up the whole thing and thrown the whole scroll of scripture on the fire. Now, you wouldn't do that, would you? I mean, can you imagine taking out a pair of scissors? I don't like what the Bible says.

Now, you probably wouldn't do it with scissors, but you may do it in your heart. Oh, you know, but that was back then. Come on, man.

Oh, but that's my parents. You know, they're just kind of old-fashioned. Oh, come on, what's wrong with it? Well, the Bible doesn't say, thou shalt not listen to rock music.

You're right, it doesn't. Neither does it say, thou shalt not spike thy hair in color of purple and green and orange, and thou shalt not pierce thy tongue on thy navel and attach them with a chain. It doesn't say that either.

But you know what? You can figure out God's principles by studying God's truth. And so, Jehoiakim was a wicked, blatantly God-defying king, and God said, it's enough. These people are going into captivity.

It wasn't just Jehoiakim. This had been going on for some time. So Daniel and his people are in trouble because they've been defying God.

Listen, folks, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.

But he that soweth to the Spirit shall the Spirit reap life everlasting. Sometimes we think, oh, you know, the Bible and preachers, they're just so negative. God didn't want to be negative in your life at all.

He says, if you sow to the Spirit, you'll reap of the Spirit. You'll reap life everlasting. God wants you to reap good things.

But if you're sowing bad seed, you can't reap good crops. Daniel and his buddies were carried into a place where paganism abounded. They were raised in a godless society.

They were Hebrews. They were captives. There was something else we know about his portrait.

His nationality was Jewish. He was a captive. He was led into captivity.

But notice what kind of guy he was like. What would Daniel have looked like? We don't know exactly, but you get an idea in verse four. Notice the king had said to his servant Ashpenaz, I want you to pick out the choicest young men to stand in my palace.

Notice the physical description he gives in verse four. Children, in whom was no blemish, but well-favored and skillful in all wisdom and cunning in knowledge and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. All right, now, Daniel was among this group chosen.

So he had to meet these criteria. So what were the requirements? First of all, it says children. Now, the word children there is not little bitties, thumb-sucking kids.

That's the word for young people. Like we say, okay, we're gonna have, we're gonna have a young people's meeting. Well, that could include you guys and girls, you and your teens, or that could include little kids.

But youth, that includes a lot of ages. Daniel and his buddies were teenagers. We know from scripture, sorry, we know from history somewhere between 13 and 16, the early part of their teen years.

And you think about pressure. I mean, some of you, some of you go to public school and you're Christians and you take a stand for the Lord, and you know what it's like to have people pressure you. But imagine this is a completely pagan society, and now it's the pressure not only of public school peers, this is the pressure of a pagan potentate, a pagan king who is trying to get these young men to be brainwashed in the country's philosophy and to fit into its culture.

So they had to be young men. They were children, young teenage men. They were in the prime of their life.

Daniel would have been physically fit. He would have been probably a very athletic type fella. The king is gonna pick for his palace the people he thinks would best represent the king.

It says they were children and he was no blemish. No physical imperfections. You know, it wasn't unusual back then that people might have an ear hacked off in a combat or in an act of war.

They might have a big scar on their face from a knife fight or a sword fight, being in battle. They might be like teenagers and have acne. Daniel had no blemish.

In fact, girls, if you'd seen Daniel walk into a room or any of these guys, you might've thought to yourself, hubba hubba, pretty nice looking fella. Handsome dude. Now you might not have said it, but you might've thought it.

See, they were handsome. But not only that, children in whom was no blemish but well-favored. What's that mean? It's about liked.

Daniel was the kind of guy, he had personality. He wasn't the kind of fella who was awkward. He wasn't shy in a crowd.

He was personable, well-favored. And also it says skillful in wisdom, cunning in knowledge and understanding science. They were intelligent.

So these were well-liked, intelligent. I mean, these would have been on the principal's list, not his prayer list, on the principal's list, you know, honor roll. They would have been straight A students.

They had ability in them to stand in the king's palace. That means there was confidence. They weren't the kind of guys who imagine some foreign emissary coming from another country.

And these young men are posted in the palace there to represent the king. Well, can you imagine some little awkward guy over in the corner of the palace and, hi, welcome to Abakinez's palace. This is something I could get you.

You want some water or something like that or something? Now, can you imagine that, standing in the king's palace? No, these were young men, they were sharp. These would be fellas like guys that are coming out of some military academy, some business school that are trained to represent either a country or a company well. These fellows had to be cream of the cream, creme de creme, they were cream of the crop.

They were the choicest of the young men. But notice also, it says they had ability in them that they might teach them the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. They had to learn the culture of Chaldea and they had to learn the Babylonian language.

How many of you know a language other than English? I know some of you do, I heard it earlier. Okay, how many of you know Spanish? All right, I don't, so we'll have to stick to English. All right, how many of you know German? Anybody know German? All right, French, French, Japanese, okay.

Now listen, if you ever learned another language, it's easy to do when you're a little kid. It's harder to do when you get into your teen years. I remember taking Spanish when I was in high school, ninth grade, and you know, you think so much in your language that when you're learning another language you get it all scrambled up.

Daniel and his buddies, they not only spoke the Hebrew language, but they had to learn this Aramaic, this Babylonian language, Chaldea, and it was similar to their language. Now this is what's really confusing. I've got a brother-in-law, he grew up as a missionary kid in Peru.

He speaks fluent English and Spanish, but he says, you know, I had a Bible study at my church, and he said most of the people that came were Portuguese speaking, Brazilians. He said, a funny thing is they understand me, I don't understand them. Now I've heard that before, Portuguese speakers seem to understand Spanish speakers, but Spanish speakers seem to have a difficult time understanding Portuguese speaking.

Hebrew and Chaldea were very similar, but they were two separate languages, so you had to learn, you had to be sharp. Now why am I taking the time to point all that out? Sometimes I've been in churches where it seems like the kids that were really sold out to the Lord were the kind of kids that the other members of the youth group might think, well, you know, they're just trying to make their mark. They just, you know, they really don't excel at sports, they don't really excel in talent, they don't really excel in their looks or anything, so they just sell out to God.

Now wait a minute. First of all, I'm grateful that God says, you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world that confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world that confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised that God chose, and things which are not to bring to naught things that are that no flesh should glory in his presence. That's in 1 Corinthians 1, 26 through 29.

God says he uses common, ordinary people most of the time. Why? Thankfully, he doesn't say no wise men. He doesn't say not any mighty men, but few.

Why? Because so often people with brains and talent and looks get stuck on themselves. Now that should not be the case. You may be the smartest.

You may be the best looking. You may be the most confident person in your youth group, but you also ought to be the most sold out to Jesus Christ. Every one of us ought to be sold out to him because the Bible says, what does thou have that thou does not receive? In him we live, and move, and have our being.

The next breath you take is by the gift of God. That ought to be motivation that we sell out to God. But Daniel and his crowd, most of them, these are the upper crust.

These are the elite of the youth. And so many of them, that was a stumbling block too. But there's one exception.

His name is Daniel. As you keep reading, we find out not only his national background and his physical description, but his personal trial as well in this portrait. His personal trial.

If you notice in verses five through seven, it's described to us. The king appoints him this daily provision of the king's meat and of the wine which he drank, so nourishing them three years that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now, can anybody figure out what might be the problem with the king's meat and drink? What might be the problem? I want you to interact with me.

Who's got an idea? What could be a problem with his food and drink? Yes, sir. Okay, yeah, now the meat might be pig. You say, I like pig.

All right, what's he talking about? Why would that be a problem to a Jewish person? That's unclean. Now, we know what that means, but I wanna make sure you do. That doesn't mean somebody dropped their bacon on the ground and it got dirty, unclean.

Today, Jewish people consider food that's acceptable to their diet, they call it by a term with a K. What's the term? Kosher, yes. There was clean food, there was unclean food. Unclean food was anything that was not acceptable to a Jewish diet.

And by the way, whenever God says thou shall not, it's always for our good and his glory. So the dietary laws God gave them were good for their health. They were also good to make them distinct from all the people around them.

There were some things God said, don't eat. We think of pigs, anything, ham, bacon, pork, whatever, sausage, they weren't to eat it. But it wasn't just pigs.

It was fish without scales. It was animals that maybe divided the hoof but didn't chew the cud, or that chewed the cud but didn't divide the hoof. They weren't to eat those things.

There were certain birds they weren't supposed to eat. God gave them a very stringent dietary law. Why? For their good and for their distinction.

Now, Daniel could have thought like somebody else, well, you know, we don't wanna offend the king. This is what he's putting in front of us. We're gonna find out, Daniel speaks up.

No, he does so respectfully. King's diet was a problem. Some have suggested, well, also perhaps the food was offered to idols.

That may be a problem too. What about the drink? What's the king got here for a drink? Wine. Okay, so you say, but wait a minute.

Didn't Jesus turn water into wine? That's a fair issue to raise. Well, did he or didn't he? Well, yes, but you need to know something about wine. You see, the Babylonians intentionally got their wine to the point of fermentation so they could get drunk.

Interesting. I was one time with some friends, we were playing a game of Trivial Pursuit. Actually, we were just going through the cards for the game of Trivial Pursuit just to test our knowledge.

And one of the cards raised this question. What was originally called Dr. Welch's Unfermented Wine? Anybody know the answer? Welch's Grape Juice. Isn't that interesting? It was originally called Dr. Welch's Unfermented Wine.

So I thought wine had to be alcoholic. No, wine is principally the fruit of grapes. It's grape juice.

Well, what happened though, is you leave it around for a while and it would get fermented. And when it would get fermented and these sugars would start to cause, well, an intoxicating effect in this stuff. I remember a pastor's wife, friend of ours in Canada, she said a neighbor of hers had dropped by with some apple cider one day.

And she lived in Ontario at the time. She said, Ann, I want to give you some apple cider. She said, apple cider? She said, I don't drink.

Oh, she said, no, Ann, it's not hard cider. It's just apple cider. It's just, have you never had it? And she said, well, no.

She said, oh, it's wonderful. You'll really enjoy it. So Ann said, well, thank you.

And she put the cider in the fridge and somehow it got pushed to the back and forgotten until about a month later. And one day Ann found the cider in her fridge and she said, oh, oh my, my friend brought that by and I haven't drunk it. I don't want to offend her.

So she poured herself a glass and she took a swig of it and said, whoa! That had a kick to it. And she thought, wow, but that is pretty good. So she poured herself another glass and she downed it.

And then she poured herself another glass. Well, about that time there was a knock at the door and this lady came over and she said, well, come on in, it was her friend. She said, Ann, what are you doing? She said, oh, I'm drinking that cider that you brought me.

She said, cider? What cider? She said, you remember last time you were here? She said, Ann, that was a month ago. You're just getting to it now. Oh, yes, dear.

She said, I'm sorry, I got pushed back to the back of the fridge, but it really is good. And she was giddy. And her friend came over and said, Ann, let me smell that.

She said, oh! She said, it's hard. She said, what do you mean hard? She said, you're drunk. She said, I'm not drunk.

She said, I'm a pastor's wife. She said, I don't care if you're a pastor's wife or not, you're drunk. About that time the pastor walked in.

He said, hello, ladies. Hello, pastor, said the neighbor. Hi, honey, said the wife, who was now under the influence.

And her friend said, so pastor, what do you think about your drunken wife? He said, my what? She said, your wife is drunk. He said, what on earth? She said, oh yes, I brought her some cider a month ago. And she said, but when you brought it, you told me it wasn't alcoholic.

Oh, it wasn't then, dear, but it's been sitting there for a month. Now what had happened is it fermented, and now it was having an influence on her. Now listen, if any of you saw your parents drink a glass of apple cider, you wouldn't think, oh my word, my dad's drunk.

But you know, after it sat around for a while, different story. When Jesus turned water into wine, Jesus was not hosting a beer bash in Cana of Galilee. That was the fruit of vines.

This is the fruit of grapes. But you know something? These people, the Babylonians, would deliberately get drunk. Now you think about that.

There are people in our day that say, oh, come on. We know the Bible says be not drunk with wine, but you know, come on, you know, I mean, if you just drink socially, if you can control it, go to Proverbs 23 for a minute. Daniel would have been familiar with this book.

Proverbs was written in Solomon's day, so Daniel knew of it. Proverbs 23. I want you to see, first of all, the first part of the chapter talks about food.

Proverbs 23, verse one. When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before thee, and put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties, for they are deceitful meat.

Dainties is sweet things, things that are appealing to the taste. You know, you can't just eat to your heart's content. Man, it tastes so good.

You gotta think before you eat. You easily gain weight off of sweets. Now, I like sweets, and I'm sure sweets like you.

And you know, they're appealing. Boy, it tastes good. I mean, my kids are always like, can we have another cookie? You have to eat your food.

You can't just live on cookies. Maybe your parents and you had that conversation when you were a kid. Put a knife to your throat.

Be not desirous of his dainties. Just because it tastes good doesn't mean it's good or good for you. Go on down to verse 29.

Who hath woe, who hath sorrow, who hath contentions, who hath babbling, who hath wounds without cause, who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his color in the cup, when it moveth itself aright, at last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. What's he saying there? When the wine is red, now, normally grape juice is what color? Purple.

When it's red, when it's changed its color, when it leaves its color in the cup, you ever dump out old grape juice and it leaves the dregs in the bottom? When it moves itself aright, that reminds me of champagne, the bubbles going up. It's now fermented. God says, don't even look at it.

Now, tell me something. If God says, don't look at it, how can we justify, well, it's okay to drink in moderation? And you see, in our day, we have this dumbing down in our churches. Well, you know, it's not that bad or really we don't wanna be extreme or we don't wanna be a legalist or whatever it is.

Listen, folks. There are some things that you just have to say no to. And obviously, you ought to learn at your early age to say no to alcohol.

You know, we have a big campaign in this country, don't drink and drive. The period is put two words too late. The period ought to be after don't drink.

Don't drink, period. Now, you've gotta learn to take a stand. One of the reasons I'm preaching this message, go to verses eight and nine.

I wanna give you Daniel's purpose and I'll tie this in. They changed his diet, they changed his drink, they changed his name too. I don't have to get time to go into it in detail.

Daniel means God is my judge. Anybody here named Daniel? Okay, your name means God is my judge. Any Daniels here? Daniel, that's the feminine.

God is my judge. They changed his name to Belteshazzar. Belteshazzar means Bell, protect the king.

B-E-L, Bell, protect the king. You read about Bell in Isaiah 46.1. He was a false pagan god. So they changed his name from honoring the God of heaven to honoring the king's false god.

They changed his name, they changed his diet, they changed his culture, but they could not touch his character. Notice verses eight and nine, Daniel chapter one. But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself for the portion of the king's meat nor the wine which he drank.

Therefore he requested the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs. I was in seventh or eighth grade, I can't remember which, still in a public school.

I got saved when I was 10 years old, but we didn't go to a Bible preaching church. I had no idea how to live a Christian life. Every Sunday we went to a United Methodist church, but ours was a liberal church that didn't believe the Bible, didn't preach the Bible, didn't believe that Jesus was God or that he was coming again.

So I knew nothing about how to live a Christian life. I was in public school with all my friends. I got a steady dose of rock music by choice.

I was listening to heavy metal constantly. And so I had no idea how to stand up for what's right. My friends were sledding one day when we got a good snowstorm there in Jersey.

We went over to Daredevil Hill, one of our favorite sledding spots. We'd walk to the top of the hill, put our sleds down, and they'd build a fire at the top. I thought, man, this is great.

Got a campfire. We're here with our friends. I played football with all these guys.

Got our sleds. And then the next thing, as I walked around the campfire to get warm, I noticed one of the kids had brought a six-pack. It was a six-pack of cream ale, which is basically the same as beer.

Ale. We're 7th and 8th grade. First of all, we got issues here because this is illegal.

Secondly, we got issues because this is immoral. So I knew the pressure was gonna come, but I'd not been in the circumstance. Again, I'm in 7th and 8th grade.

My friends smoked pot, a lot of them. My friends messed around with girls. My friends were into all kinds of stuff.

I knew it wasn't right, but I'd never been personally confronted with it until I guess I was probably most likely in 7th grade at this point. So they said, okay, everybody have one before we take our next run. I said,

no, I don't want any.

They said, come on, Tozer, don't be left out. Everybody's in on this. Hey, we bought it.

Come on, drink it. I said, no, I don't want it. They said, why don't you want it? Have you ever been pressured? I said, because I don't like it.

They said, have you ever tried it? No. Well, then how do you know you don't like it? I said, because it smells like rotten barley, which is what it is. It's rotten barley.

And they said, come on, sissy, drink it. Man, the pressure was on. Well, I knew in my heart I can't drink.

My parents didn't want me to drink. I didn't have any desire to drink, but I'm also under the pressure of the moment. And I remember taking that lid off and I thought, well, I'll just appease them.

I'll taste it and say I don't like it and that'll be it. So I put it to my lips and I kind of plugged my tongue, make sure none went down my throat. I didn't know how much it took to get drunk.

So I didn't even want to swallow one mouthful. So I put it up there and I tasted it. I said, oh, man, it's terrible, yuck.

No, I don't want that. And by the way, that was true. It was terrible.

I didn't like it. It's the only time in my life I ever tasted alcohol, but the Holy Spirit began to convict my heart. That wasn't why you didn't drink it.

Yeah, it may be nasty and horrible, but the reason you didn't drink it is because of Christ. And you didn't identify with me. Now, again, I wasn't in a place that was teaching me how to take a stand, but you know the Lord says, in all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths.

I didn't acknowledge him in that. And I began to get convicted so much so as the day wound down and we're going across the creek, I'm carrying my sled with me. I remember later on saying, hey, guys, you know, up there on the hill, I told you I didn't drink that stuff because I don't like it.

Well, that's the first time I ever tasted it. It's true, I don't like it, but that's not the real reason I didn't drink it. Look, I just want to tell you guys, I'm a Christian.

I got born again when I was 10 years old and I will never drink because I don't believe it's right. On principle, I'll never drink. And I just want you to know, I didn't tell you the truth up there and I'm sorry I didn't, but I just want you to know the real reason.

My friends looked at me and said, that's cool, Tozer. You should have just said so. I mean, nobody's going to make you do it.

I thought, man, I could have saved myself all that. And you know what? I didn't have to fight them over it. Now, sometimes you may say, well, my friends, man, if I didn't do it, they'd beat me to a crisp.

They did that to Jesus, didn't they? And he never did anything wrong. Listen, Daniel purposed in his heart that he wouldn't defile himself. The second thing here is Daniel's purpose.

We looked at Daniel's portrait. We're looking now at his purpose. The word purpose means to nail down.

It means to settle, to fix, to resolve. It means to have some backbone. It means to settle some convictions.

Young people, you need to settle convictions in your life. Now, all of you have some convictions. You all do.

I don't care what level of spirituality you're at. You all have some convictions. I hope that every one of you, for instance, has a conviction that you'll never murder somebody.

I'm sure you've been tempted. I asked how many of you have brothers or sisters. Most of you have multiple brothers and sisters.

I know you've been tempted. I mean, you've thought, just kill that kid. You may not say it because you know better, but you've thought it, haven't you? What kept you from doing it? Fear of my mom and dad.

Boy, they'd kill me. They wouldn't kill you for the same reason you wouldn't kill your sibling, but you're thinking, oh, they'd kill me. You have a conviction against murder.

I hope you have a conviction against stealing. I hope you have a conviction against pornography. I hope you have a conviction that you're not gonna go and do drugs.

All of us have convictions, but you know something? So often, we don't take the convictions far enough. You see, I had a conviction that I wasn't gonna drink. I had a conviction that I wasn't gonna do drugs, but I didn't have any kind of conviction against rock music.

And the music I was listening to at that stage in my life was feeding me the philosophy of immorality, rebellion, drugs, that was the whole mindset of the music I was being fed. My convictions needed to be more stringent than they were. And God would teach me that later that year, later the next year.

Now, God is gonna work in your heart during these next couple of days. You're either gonna say yes to God or you're gonna say no to God. I like the way one of our friends says it.

He's a preacher. He says, just two choices on the shelf, pleasing God or pleasing self. Just two choices on the shelf, pleasing God or pleasing self.

That is really true. Daniel said, all right, I'm gonna purpose not to defy myself. But notice, when Daniel purposed this, the Bible says he requested of the prince of the eunuchs.

He didn't go into the office of Ashpenaz and say, Ashpenaz, where are you? Hey, get over here, you stinking slime bag. Let me tell you something. I am not gonna eat that food and I ain't drinking that wine.

You understand me? He could have said, I'm a child of God. I'm not doing that. Bless God.

Now, wait a minute. Daniel was a teenager. Ashpenaz was an adult.

He said, yeah, but those stinking heathen, they drug him out of his homeland. I mean, they treat a child of God like that? Who do they think they are? Wait a minute, who do you think you are? Yeah, but he's a slave. I mean, he's forced into it against his will.

The Bible describes Daniel again and again as a man of an excellent spirit. What is an excellent spirit? Among everything else, an excellent spirit is a person who knows his place, knows how to function under authority. You may say, but these authorities were illegitimate.

God had allowed this because of the judgment on Daniel's nation. You say, yeah, but Daniel, you know, he wasn't a rebel against God, obviously. God was using this to give Daniel an opportunity to prove his testimony.

And Daniel functioned under authority. He requested of the prince of the eunuchs. You know, I had to learn early on, when I was in that Christian school that year and I was trying to find the good godly kids, the Holy Spirit began to connect my heart.

You know, Rich, the problem here is everybody in this school is doing what you're doing. Everybody's looking around for somebody else to be a spiritual leader and they're figuring, if I could just find somebody that really would help me stand for right, then I could do this. You know, maybe I could stand up for right.

If everybody's doing what you're doing, nobody's taking the initiative to be a leader. You need to stand up for right no matter what everybody else does. And God really worked on my heart that year and I said, Lord, I will do anything you want with my life.

You choose any career you want for me to go. You choose any principle you want to lay on me. I really do want to make a wholesale surrender to you.

And that changed my life. That's what happened with Daniel right here. A lot of my other friends didn't make choices like that.

We had one guy, his name was Dan, not the same Dan I told you about, two Dannys in our class. This other guy was in our school against his will. He said, my parents make me go to this institution.

He said, I want to tell you something. I'm not saved, I don't care to be saved. I know I'm going to hell, I don't want to hear about it.

Shut up and don't talk to me. And he ended up being a drug addict and a drunk when he got out of school. Not real surprising.

There was one other guy in my class. He made a deliberate decision to serve God. His name's Joe Zierfuss.

And Joe and I both got called to preach. Joe now pastors Christ Community Baptist Tabernacle in Elmer, New Jersey, the church his dad used to pastor. And I went into full-time evangelism.

There were 10 in our class who I would describe as neutral. They weren't rebels against God, but they weren't sold out to God. And I'm going to show you at the end of my message that what happened to them is pretty similar to what happened to the rebel.

Because you can't be neutral. You cannot be neutral. Interesting that Daniel purposed in his heart.

You know, we know him as Daniel, yet we know Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego by those names. If I had said, now today I'm going to talk to you about Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, how many of you would have had a clue who I was talking about? A few of you. If I said Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, would you have known then? Yeah.

Why do we know them by their Babylonian names, but we know Daniel by his Hebrew name? Well, notice Daniel purposed in his heart. Daniel initially stood alone for Christ. He initially stood up alone for Jehovah

God.

You say, you know, I'd stand up for right if I had some friends to stand with me. Daniel had no promise that anybody would stand with him. Daniel stood alone.

Proverbs 1, verse 10 says, my son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say to thee, come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us work privily for the innocent without cause. We shall find all precious substance.

We shall fill our houses with spoil. Cast in thy lot among us. Let us all have one person.

My son, walk not now in the way with them. Refrain thy foot from their path. That's Proverbs 1, 10 through 15.

God says, don't go that way. Choose to stand alone. I remember when I was reading, I've always loved reading Christian biography, reading the biography of Billy Sunday, the famous baseball player turned preacher.

Billy Sunday used to say this about sin. I'm against sin. I'll take it as long as I got a foot.

I'll fight it as long as I got a fist. I'll bite it as long as I got a head. I'll bite it as long as I got a tooth.

And then when I'm old and fistless and footless and toothless, I'll gum it till it goes home to perdition and I go home to glory. Well, amen. You didn't have to wonder where Billy Sunday stood on sin.

You knew. Do your peers know where you stand on sin or do they have to guess? I think he'd do it. I think if you push him enough, she'd go along.

Yeah, I think they're in. We used to have this preacher come to college when I was in Christian college and he'd say, young people, listen to me! And all the sleepers would wake up in chapel and he'd say, you've got to take your foot and stand against the devil! Woo! Well, you may not have been following the message to that point, but you woke up. Listen, you can't just be the kind of man that Pam would say, I don't think my mom would want me to do that.

I don't think my dad, I think my dad might take the keys away from the car if I did that. Man, you gotta have some backbone! Problem is, we have so many young people. Oh, they have an iron will when it comes to doing their own thing, but they got a spine of spaghetti when it comes to standing up for right.

You need to have a spine that says, I will not defile myself! And yet Daniel took the stand with the right spirit. I made up my mind to stand for right, but I remember our 15th class reunion. I went back to the Christian school and I preached.

And I said, now I want to ask your forgiveness. My classmates looked. I was a spiritual leader of the class and most likely to succeed and all that kind of razzmatazz.

Class of 13, not hard to be that, you know? And so I said, listen, I gotta ask you to forgive me. I said, I have always desired to stand for right. And I love the Lord today more than I ever have.

But what I have to ask you to forgive me for is because I often did it with a holier-than-thou attitude and with a condescending spirit. And with tears coming down my face, I said, would you forgive me for the

attitude with which I took a stand often? And they nodded their heads and many of them came to me after that meeting and said, you know what? I always respected the stand you took, but I really do appreciate you saying that. There were times I thought you were just looking down your nose at us and Daniel requested that he might not defile himself.

There's a right stand and there's a right spirit in which to take a stand. I want you to see in verses 10 through 15, what I call Daniel's proving. He went through proving.

I'm gonna tell you this. If you stand for the Lord, you will be tested. Verse 16.

No, I'm sorry, verse 10. And the prince of the eunuchs said to Daniel, I fear my Lord the King with the point of your meat and your drink for why should he see your face as worse liking than the children which are of your sort? Then shall you make me endanger my head to the king? In other words, Daniel, if I let you guys off of the king's diet, I mean, they were eating like kings every day. You know, roast a pig with a big apple in its mouth and who knows what else that was delectable to the taste, but Daniel said, it's defiling of my diet.

I can't do it. He says, if I don't make you guys eat this, you're gonna get sickly and what are you gonna eat? Then verse 11, then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, prove thy servants I beseech thee. Now, he invites the test.

He says, prove thy servants I beseech thee and let them give us pulse to eat and water to drink. Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee. So our faces, our appearance and the countenance of the children that eat the portion of the king's meat.

And as thou seest, deal with thy servants. So he consented to them in this matter and proved them 10 days. And at the end of 10 days, their countenances appear fairer and fatter in flesh.

Then all the children that ate the portion of the king's meat thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat and the wine that they should drink and gave them pulse. Anybody know what pulse is? Yeah, veggies, it's seed bearing things, fruits, vegetables, those kinds of things that bear seeds. So stuff you can get out of the garden, it will not defile the diet, it will benefit the body and it's not gonna cost you a lot.

Pulse to eat, water to drink. So he said, all right, I know you're saying that if you let me out of this diet, heads are gonna roll and it's gonna be yours, but what about this? What if you give us 10 days? Just a week and a half. 10 days, let us try it out and after 10 days, do an inspection.

Call us in and just see, if we look all sick and gaunt and unhealthy, then you can call a timeout on it. But if we look better, then how about it? He said, all right, 10 days, he got 10 days. He made an appeal.

By the way, he went to Melzar, who's his supervisor. They got Ashbenaz, Melzar, Daniel. He went to Melzar and said, hey, can you just check this out? Can we do it for 10 days? So he didn't stand up and say, bless God, I don't care what he says, I'm not gonna do that.

Again, he's tested and he comes up with a creative alternative. There are kind ways to take a righteous stand. And so Daniel did so.

And you know what? After 10 days, they were shocked. These guys appeared healthier than all the rest. Now, can you imagine the kind of ribbing Daniel and his buddies must have gotten during that week and a

half? What's the matter, you little Hebrew boys? Couldn't handle the wine? Hey, don't drink too much water.

You know, you might get soused. You might get drunk over there. Hey, don't choke on your salad.

Might be some big bones in there, guys. Well, teenagers are teenagers. You think there was any ribbing? You think there was any? Have you ever taken a stand and you stand out like a sore thumb? I remember one time I was on our way to a high school basketball game.

I was the center for the team. We were the upperclassmen. Bus was full.

Coach said, hey, you senior high guys, you ride with so-and-so in his car. Follow the bus. So we followed the bus.

As soon as we got in the car, these guys cranked up some rock music. I said, oh boy, I'm thinking to myself, I had just surrendered rock music a year or two before and I didn't want to go back that way and I knew it wasn't right either. I said, hey guys, look, I know I'm the whistleblower here, but I mean, you all know I've given up rock music, but I'm asking you not to play it because we're on school time.

It's a school rule and you guys know that. Oh, come on, Tozer. I said, well, you know, it is against the rules and if you do play it, I got to tell the school authorities and it's not because I'm trying to be a narc, not because I'm trying to blow the whistle on you, but you got to do right so you're putting me in a bad position here.

All right. Time and time again, I found out I had to take a stand and it wasn't always easy. I'm not preaching this message to say, oh, if you stand up for God, everything will be perfect.

You will be proven. You'll be tested. So what? How many of you young men who say, man, I just can't wait to get out from home.

I just can't wait to go out on my own and you want to join the military. You're going to be tested and it may not be on things that matter to you, but what kind of testimony do you have? That matters to God. You will be tested no matter where you go in your life.

But I want you to see the last thing, Daniel's promotion. Because if you do right, notice how God will promote you. Verse 17, as for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom.

And Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. That means he was a prophet. He got revelation from God.

Now, at the end of the days, the king had said he should bring them in. Then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar and the king communed with them all. And among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

Therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding, the king inquired of them. He found them 10 times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.

In other words, all the adults who were supposed to be trained to advise the king, they were nothing compared to the wisdom that Daniel and his buddies had. And verse 21, and Daniel continued even to the

first year of King Cyrus. Now, I told you I'd come back to telling you about my classmates.

One guy in our class was named John. He was a pretty good athlete, played all the sports. But we didn't think John ever noticed girls.

So we got through our senior year and he hadn't even taken any kind of interest at all. And we thought, you know, we wonder if when he goes off to college, he's gonna even take interest in some girl. Well, he ended up taking interest in this one girl.

And they started liking each other. And the next thing you know, they got up in front of their church and they said, we have to ask your forgiveness. She's pregnant, he's the father.

This is John, who, you know, we all thought could have been on the set for Andy Griffith. I mean, this like hometown boy. Never would have thought he'd done that.

This girl in my class, she knew how to blush. I mean, she was funny. Whenever somebody would tell something that was embarrassing, she'd get all embarrassed.

She might the sweetest girl. I'm gonna change the names of the individuals to protect their identities, but I'll call her Bailey. That's not a real name, but Bailey went off to college with the rest of us to a good Christian college.

And then she said, I don't wanna be here. I don't like these rules. I couldn't believe it, not from her.

Went back home and then she said, I don't like my parents' rules. And she moved out of the house. Next thing I know, I heard she was living with a guy.

She went to a Christian school. She was the innocent girl. Next thing I know, she'd broken that off.

And then I heard she was engaged to a youth pastor. And you might think, well, that's good. Well, not in this case, because this youth pastor was being prosecuted for molesting children in the youth group.

I thought, what happened to these classmates I went to school with? The guy I told you about, Dan the Answer Man, the Bible Answer Man, one day somebody saw him at a church softball game. He was gathering up the bats and he was putting them in the trunk of his car. And when he opened the trunk, it's a case of beer in the trunk.

One classmate after another. I had classmates that got involved in immorality, had other classmates got out. They got hooked on drugs, had another classmate.

They, he and his brother, they were both druggies and they, this is Christian school kids. They started doing drugs. Later on, one of the two brothers got saved.

He'd been all the way through Christian school, but had never gotten saved. Listen, there were heartaches from our school. And this, these were 10 kids who were not defiant of God or disrespectful of God.

Now, some of them are doing okay today. Some of them are going to church and so forth. But there were a whole bunch, man.

They were just, well, they ended up as bad as the kid who was shaking his fist in the face of God and saying, I'm going to hell and don't talk to me about it. You cannot be neutral. You can't be neutral.

Two of us said, we'll do anything God wants. And it wasn't by accident. We ended up in full-time ministry.

I'm not saying that the only way to be a good person is to go into full-time ministry. No, but you let God put you where He wants you. The choice ought to be God's.

Daniel's promotion, it's amazing. He ends up 10 times better than all the magicians and astrologers in all his realm. In fact, let me just read this to close.

Go to the book before Daniel, Ezekiel 14. I want to show you about this. Ezekiel 14.

I wondered why that last verse of the chapter said he continued even into the first year of King Cyrus. See, he was under King Nebuchadnezzar in chapter one. Then in chapter five, it's King Belshazzar after Nebuchadnezzar's dead.

Remember the night the handwriting appeared on the wall and Daniel interpreted it? That king promoted him to be his right-hand man. Then that night, Babylon Falls, King Darius comes in. He's the one that Daniel got thrown in the lions under.

Remember? The den of lions under Daniel chapter six. Then you come to Daniel, end of chapter six, and he got Cyrus on the throne. Daniel was under four different kings, two different kingdoms, and guess what? Under all four kings, at some point, he was promoted to be the right-hand man of the king.

How did he get that kind of prominent place in pagan government? God promoted him. When a man's ways please the Lord, he make it even his enemies to be at peace with him. Proverbs 16, verse seven.

You may be the kind of student who says, why is that teacher always picking on me? Why is the principal on me? It's like he's got my number. I mean, what did I ever do? Listen, God says when a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Your teachers aren't your enemies, but if you've got a reputation, you ought to be thinking about it.

How did I get this reputation? Look at Daniel's reputation. Ezekiel 14, verses 12 through 14. The word of the Lord came again to me saying, son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then I'll stretch out my hand upon it, will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and I will cut off man and beasts from it.

Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord God. Notice who he names, Noah, Daniel, and Job. Who are they? You know about Noah.

He built the ark. Only eight souls saved in the world. He and his family.

You know about Job. Suffering all pain like unbelievable. Lost all his children, all his possessions, but he wouldn't curse God.

Faithful to God. Those men had been dead and gone for centuries, but Daniel was named with them. You know what's ironic about that? Daniel was about 35 years old when that was written.

He and Ezekiel were contemporaries. They lived at the same time. That would be like God saying, if Richmond, Virginia sins against me, I don't care if Noah and Job and Harold Vaughn are in town.

I'm gonna judge Richmond, Virginia. In other words, Sodom and Gomorrah, if they could have found 10 righteous souls, God would have spared the judgment. He said, I don't care of the most godly people you can think of.

Can you imagine if brother Vaughn were mentioned in the same breath with Noah and Job? That's what we're talking about here. Daniel was mentioned as a living legend in his 30s. How are you gonna be remembered in your 30s? If you're walking with God, it won't be on accident.

It'll be on purpose. Let's bow our heads together in prayer.

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