

STANDING TALL

by Laurel Mast and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

I Peter 5:8-9

Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

FAITH STORY:

Daniel 1

FAITH FOCUS:

King Nebuchadnezzar captured Judah and seized young men to prepare them for service in the king's court. They were given new names and were to eat the palace's food and wine, but Daniel did not want to defile himself so he suggested that he and his friends eat only vegetables and water for ten days. If he and his friends looked healthier than the other men after ten days, then they would continue eating only vegetables and water; if not, then they would eat the same as the other men eating the palace's food. God provided for Daniel and his friends, and after the ten days they were healthier than the other men. Daniel and his friends received wisdom, knowledge, and service in the king's court for staying faithful to God.

SESSION GOAL:

Encourage students to stay strong and be faithful to God under pressure.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will have:

- Identified the Israelites' pressure under foreign rule, how they dealt with it, and how God provided and blessed them for their faithfulness
- Been given opportunity to name situations where they have been pressured to do something that they knew was wrong

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1** A bowl and 30 buttons
- 2** Bibles
- 3** Newsprint and markers
- 4** Paper and pens
- 5** Note cards for optional response activity

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–10 minutes)

Welcome students to the class. After they are seated, you need to decide (based on how students are seated) who will be the next-to-last person in the Button Game. Make a mental note of who that person is. Then tell students you need to give each one of them instructions about the Button game. One by one, tell the students that they are to count the buttons when the bowl comes to them and then state how many buttons there are. Tell the second last person to discreetly take one button while counting and hide it, but to still state the total number of buttons. The last person will count the buttons and come up one short. The class should question that person and why they can't seem to count right. Count the buttons yourself—there will be 29. Explain to the class what happened.

Discuss what happened. Ask the last person: *How did you feel? Did you feel pressure to give in and think that maybe you counted wrong, or were you sure about your count and were ready to stick with it?*

CONNECT: (5 minutes)

Ask students to spend a few minutes quietly thinking about pressures they experienced in the last week—times when they felt pressured to do something that they knew they really shouldn't do.

Invite students to share their thoughts but do not pressure anyone into sharing!

Say... *Knowing what's right to do and giving in to what isn't right is a very old problem for people—it goes way back to Adam and Eve, and the Bible is full of stories of people who made different choices when they faced that kind of pressure. Our story today is about some young guys—maybe about your age—who had some big pressures to face.*

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (20 minutes)

Do the skit at the end of this lesson, and look up the rest of the story. Fill in details on the historical/cultural background of the passage as found in the Insights from Scripture.

Discuss: *What pressure did Daniel and his friends face? How did they deal with their pressure? How did God provide and bless them for their decision to stay faithful to God.*

APPLY: (10 minutes)

Divide the class into groups of 3-5 students. Give each group newsprint and markers, and instruct them to make columns across the top of some pressures that kids their age face that get in the way of their relationship with God. The list could include wearing certain trendy expensive clothes, doing drugs, drinking alcohol, smoking, sex, cheating, etc. Then ask students to come up with ideas—including crazy creative thoughts—on how to resist those pressures and to write those in the column below each item. (Examples could include praying, supportive friends, avoiding the situation, planning ahead of time what you will say or do).

Optional: *Each group can think of a situation to act out.*

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Choose one or both of these options, depending on what you feel will work best with your class:

- 1 Hand out paper and pens. Ask students to think about the following question and write a response to it on their paper. Assure them that they will not be sharing their answers. Are you more concerned about pleasing God or pleasing others? What do you think God is saying to you today about giving in to pressures in your life?
- 2 Divide the class into pairs. Ask students to pray with each other, naming specific pressures if they feel comfortable doing so, and promising to keep each other in prayer during the coming week.

Conclude by reading the key verse together. Optional: have students print it on a note card to take home with them.

Teacher Tip: *It should be made clear during the lesson that God still loves us even when we do give in to pressures that separate us from God. Even though we can be unfaithful to God, God is always faithful to us, and will give us the strength and courage to overcome those pressures.*

INSIGHTS FROM THE SCRIPTURE:

In 610 B.C., Judah became a vassal to Egypt at the Battle of Megiddo. Thus the fate of Judah became tied to the future of Egypt. Later in 605 B.C. at the Battle of Carchemish, Egypt and Judah were defeated by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and became a vassal to Babylon. The Israelites were disobeying God, but God had compassion on them and sent prophets to lead the people to repentance. They didn't listen to the prophets and continued to sin. In the third year of Jehoiakim's reign as king of Judah, God allowed Judah to be taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar—he took Jehoiakim and some treasures from the temple and brought them to Babylon. But that wasn't all he took—he began to take people also, young royal men. There were many deportations of people into Babylon, but Daniel and his friends were probably in the first deportation around 604 BC. The exiling of people continued until after the fall of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC, when the temple was destroyed and thousands of men, women, and children were killed.

Once in Babylon, Daniel and other Israelite men were put into training to join the king's staff. In preparation for this duty, their names were changed from Hebrew names, which they received when they were circumcised and were linked to God: Daniel – God is my judge, Hananiah – Yahweh has been gracious, Mishael – Who is what God is?, and Azariah – Yahweh has helped.¹ Their names were then changed to different ones, Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, which were linked to the service of the foreign idols of Babylon.

The young men were also prepared physically for their service for the king, and that included eating the palace's meat and wine. Daniel and his friends did not want to defile themselves by eating this food because it is very possible that the food was associated in some way to idol worship.² The meat also may not have been prepared in the correct fashion for a Hebrew and could have been from unclean animals. It was considered a sin for a Hebrew to eat of unclean animals—those that did not both chew their cud and have split hooves. Instead of eating the unclean meat, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah ate vegetables and had only water to drink.

By allowing Jerusalem to fall and the people to be deported, God was breaking down two barriers that the people had constructed during the United Monarchy. God was dismissing the barrier that God was a geographical God that could only be worshipped in one place, the temple. God also destroyed the nation-state boundary. When the people came together during the United Monarchy, they built the temple and put the Ark of the Covenant in it, and God then became a god of a certain geographical location and could only be worshipped in one place. However, with the fall of Jerusalem and the exiling of the people, God was saying that he is an omnipresent God, and that he can be worshipped anywhere.

Endnotes:

¹John E. Goldingay, **Word Biblical Commentary: Daniel** (Dallas, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1989) p.17.

² John E. Goldingay, **Word Biblical Commentary: Daniel** (Dallas, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1989) p.17.

STANDING TALL • Worksheet

SKIT OF DANIEL 1

Characters:

King
Daniel
Ashpenaz
Hananiah
Mishael
Azariah
Guard

King is "on stage" alone. Others are "off stage."

King: Ashpenaz! Come here!

Ashpenaz comes running and bows in front of king: Yes, Boss?

King: I've got a job for you. I want you to go out and find some hot young Israelite guys, okay? I mean they need to be good-looking, brilliant, quick-learners, socially well-mannered—you know, all around perfect guys. I want to train them to work here in the palace. Do you think you can do that?

Ashpenaz: No problem, boss. I'll have them here in no time at all.

Ashpenaz runs out and gets the four guys and brings them back to the king.

King: Boy, when you said no time at all, you meant it!

Ashpenaz: I am to please, Boss. What do you think?

King looks at the guys, one by one.

King: I'd say you did very well. Yes, they will serve my purposes well. Take them away and put them into training, beginning with my special diet.

Ashpenaz: Yes sir!

Ashpenaz leave with the guys and take them to another part of the room.

Ashpenaz: Okay guys, first things first. What are your names?

Daniel: My name is Daniel and it means "God is my judge."

Mishael: My name is Mishael and it means "Who is what God is?"

Azariah: My name is Azariah and it means "Yahweh has helped."

Hananiah: My name is Hananiah and it means "Yahweh has been gracious."

TEACHER TIME OUT: Teacher, call for a "time out" and explain that Yahweh is another name for God, and it is pronounced Yah-Way.

Ashpenaz: Very good boys, you even know what your names mean! Well, that's the last time you will hear those names, because my name is Ashpenaz, the king's Chief Official, and that means I get to give you new names that will be appropriate for someone serving the king. So....Dan, you will be Belteshazzar. That's belt-shazzer. Mish-man....you will be Meshach—that's pronounced me-shack. Hanna-whatever...you can rhyme with Meshach—you'll be Shadrach. And finally Azariah, you will be Abednego. That's a-bed-ne-go. Got it?

Guys all look confused but they nod.

Ashpenaz: Now, the king wants you on his special training diet—the best meat and wine from the palace will be yours. You are very lucky young men! This is the original high protein diet, and in no time at all you will be in incredible shape!

Daniel: Um, excuse me, sir.

Ashpenaz: Yes?

Daniel: I'd rather not go on this diet. It goes against my religion.

Ashpenaz: You're kidding.

Daniel: I'm very serious. We don't eat certain meats and we don't eat food that hasn't been prepared for us in the traditional Hebrew way. Please let us off the hook on this diet.

Ashpenaz: It's not me demanding it—it's the king. If I don't make you stick to this diet and you end up looking terrible compared to the other guys in training, it'll be my head. And I mean that literally. The king will lose his temper and I will lose my head.

Daniel: I don't want to be responsible for you getting killed but I can't go on the diet either.

Ashpenaz: I can't watch you 24/7 to make sure you do the diet, but I can get a guard to do that. Guard! Come here!

Guard comes in

Ashpenaz: Watch these guys. They have some sort of religious eating disorder. Make sure they eat the king's food when it comes.

Guard: Will do.

Ashpenaz leaves.

Daniel: I'd like to make a suggestion.

Guard: Yes?

Daniel: We want vegetables. Just vegetables and water for ten days.

Guard: You GUYS want VEGETABLES????

Daniel: Yep. And let's see how we look compared to the guys on the king's diet after ten days.

Guard: Okay, whatever you say. I just don't understand guys who could have meat and wine asking for VEGETABLES instead.

WHAT HAPPENED? READ THE REST OF THE STORY IN DANIEL 1:15-21.