

Stand Strong - Live with Conviction, Devotion, and Courage

As reported this week, nearly two-thirds of employed adults in the United States believe that respectfully explaining their political or religious beliefs at work can result in negative repercussions.¹

2 out of 3 employed adults fear that if they share what they believe or who they voted for they will pay a price personally and/or professionally. 2 out of 3 live with a fear of being canceled if people actually knew who they are and what they are devoted to.

Today, we will see how Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego dealt with their own pressure to fit in our call to stand up and stand out.

DANIEL 3:8-12 **8** At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. **9** They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! **10** Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, **11** and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. **12** But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."

Cancel culture is nothing new. Those who opposed the people of God put them in the crosshairs because of their devotion to God. The trap was set for God's people so that their influence would be minimized.

Trap set: Deny your convictions (Ten Commandments #1 - No Other Gods Before Me, Don't Worship False Idols or Face the Consequences. Either way, they lose.

As exiles in a land where Christianity is no longer commonly held:

- My devotion will lead to accusations.
- My devotion may have unintended consequences.
- My devotion will be seen by some as an attack or as a statement of judgment against them.

Big Idea #1: My devotion isn't determined by their response.

King Nebby was about to put the exiles into a seemingly no-win situation.

DANIEL 3:13-15 **13** Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, **14** and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? **15** Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

Nebuchadnezzar demanded that they worship at the sound of the horns and the sight of the golden image. Won't do it, you are heading to the fiery furnace - a tool of industry turned into a tool of execution.

DANIEL 3:16 **16** Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.

¹ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/3-in-5-workers-fear-sharing-religious-views-in-workplace-survey.html>

As courageous Christians, we only bend our knee to God on His throne. That means we will stand up and stand out when others bow to the authorities or ideologies of our day. How do you do that and be both COURAGEOUS and CHRISTIAN? Look at how the three friends did it:

- No disrespect. (If we say we respect the office, but we disrespect the one sitting in it, we aren't showing proper respect for God, who sits on the throne granting authority on earth - ROMANS 13)
- No defensiveness.
- No revisiting beliefs. (RECOMMEND SERIES RESOURCES The Scripture informed their beliefs no matter the situation.)

When asked to do something that goes against your beliefs, stand strong with respect, stand strong with confidence, and stand strong with clear conviction.

- If you are asked to teach something you don't agree with, what do respect, confidence, and conviction look like?
- If you are asked to do something unethical or illegal at work, what do respect, confidence, and conviction look like?
- If you are expected to compromise who you are to be promoted, what do respect, confidence, and conviction look like?
- If you are silenced in social circles, what do respect, confidence, and conviction look like?

BIG IDEA #2: Persecution may come with my devotion so I will prepare for it.

DANIEL 3:17-18 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. **18 But even if he does not,** we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

OBEYING GOD WAS MORE IMPORTANT THAN LIFE TO THESE THREE.

One of the most courageous statements in all of Scripture: **EVEN IF HE DOES NOT.**

Courageous Christians KNOW: Christianity is not relegated to be practiced at home and a Sunday morning church service. It's a part of our everyday life, every day. We live our faith and share our faith in everything that we do.

- We speak up and stand out for the voiceless.
- We speak up and stand out for the unborn.
- We speak up and stand out for the oppressed and broken.
- We speak up and stand out for truth and justice.

The church should always be on the side of **GRACE & TRUTH**. When we are on the side of **GRACE & TRUTH**, we truly are Jesus' side of the issue.

Our world needs Christians that are so committed to **GRACE & TRUTH** that they will be accused of being way too conservative with truth and way too liberal with love **AT THE EXACT SAME TIME**.

When others picked up stones to judge, Jesus gave **GRACE and TRUTH**. "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." If we are always throwing stones or if we are always adapting truth, we are not on TEAM JESUS. Not saying you aren't a believer, but saying you aren't living like ONE!

- When everyone else picks up a rock, Jesus offers grace.

- When everyone else condones your actions, Jesus offers truth.

If you are here today and you have never believed in Jesus and received His life-changing grace, I invite you to believe today. You don't have to live stuck in your sin, powerless to change.

Jesus gives us **GRACE & TRUTH** so we **CONDEMN** no one and we don't **CONDONE** sinful behaviors.

What will history say about us, as the church today? Will we be known for CONDEMNING, CONDONING, or SEEING THE GRACE & TRUTH of God unleashed? How do we act with the courage of our convictions and the love of our Savior? How do we show our devotion to the Lord through the way we serve, the way we vote, and engage culture?

- Even if God doesn't protect me from getting fired, I will live my devotion.
- Even if I get called names and lose friends, I will live my devotion.
- Even if I have to rethink my politics, I will live my devotion.
- Even if they seek to hurt and harm me because of my faith, I will live my devotion.

Where does this type of courage come from?

DANIEL 3:19-21 **19** Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual **20** and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. **21** So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.

But something happened when they were in the fire. The men who were once bound were now freed and walking in the fire. And they weren't alone. There was a 4th man in the fire with them. One who looked like the sons of the Gods. We know Him as Jesus.

Jesus was with the faithful, devoted men in the fire. They were not alone in their trial. They were not alone in their persecution. They were never, ever alone. God was with them - IN THE FIRE.

DANIEL 3:26-27 **26** Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, **27** and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. **(When I fear God, I have nothing to fear!)**

DANIEL 3:28 **28** Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

BIG IDEA #3: My devotion will grow because I know that Jesus is with me, protecting me, and getting glory through my life.

TOC: Pray that you will live your love for Jesus - not just on Sundays, but every day of your life. Live your affection for Him so that others see your devotion. Pray that you won't let the pressures of the day minimize your love for and devotion to Jesus.