

Daniel: Stand Strong  
Part 3: Holy Confidence  
June 22, 2014

**Welcome:** The book of Daniel is one of the most practical books in all of Scripture in that it shows us how to live as followers of Jesus in a world and culture that does not align with the values and priorities of God or His Kingdom!

It answers questions such as... *"How does being a Christian shape the way we go about work, business, and family? And how does our faith in Christ lead us to engage our communities and world in relevant and redemptive ways?"*

And today...we see how belonging to Jesus will shape the way we face the fires of suffering in our lives!

**Culture:** We live in a culture in which many people look at the presence of evil and suffering in the world and determine that there is either no God...or if there is a God, He is not good!

**Mother:** Not too long ago, I was speaking to a mother whose son was going through a very difficult time and his primary question to her was, *"Why is God doing this to me?"* Implying... *"If God is allowing me to suffer like this, He must not be good?"*

**Tsunami:** Following the massive tsunami in 2004 that struck and killed over 250,000 people around the rim of the Indian Ocean, an article came out in the *New York Observer* entitled ***"Disaster Ignites Debate: Was God in the Tsunami?"*** The reporter wrote...

*"If God is God, he's not good. If God is good, he's not God. You can't have it both ways, especially after the Indian Ocean catastrophe."*

A few of us might say, *"Well, that's just a philosophical debate that's not important or relevant to my life."*

But for the majority of us who have experienced any kind of suffering this hits very close to home, doesn't it? If you've experienced the loss of a loved one, the loss of a relationship or physical illness...If you've faced criticism, rejection or betrayal...this is a deeply personal and relevant issue.

We must have a resource that enables us to stand strong in the face of the fires that come our way, lest we be ruined. But we also need a resource that enables us to love and care for our friends and neighbors who walk through the fire as well, some of whom might be questioning the very goodness of God!

So...let's go to Daniel, chapter 3, starting in verse 1. I want to look at the narrative quickly...and then work back through the text to see how it applies to our lives.

*“King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue ninety feet tall and nine feet wide and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Then he sent messages to the high officers, officials, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the provincial officials to come to the dedication of the statue he had set up. So all these officials came and stood before the statue King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.” Daniel 3:1-3*

If you were with us last week, you'll remember that Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, had a dream, which revealed to him that his empire was going to fall. By the end of chapter two, Nebuchadnezzar is on his knees worshiping God. He then promoted Daniel to be his chief of staff and Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be his governors.

Nebuchadnezzar obviously had short-term memory issues, because one chapter later, he has completely forgotten about Daniel's God, and has ordered that a 90 foot-tall statue be built. Then, Nebuchadnezzar threw a party for all of Babylon's officials where he unveiled and dedicated this image of gold!

*“Then a herald shouted, ‘People of all races and nations and languages, listen to the king’s command! When you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and other musical instruments, bow to the ground to worship King Nebuchadnezzar’s gold statue. Anyone who refuses to obey will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.’” Daniel 3:4-6*

**Nebuchadnezzar has anger issues...let's get that out of the way!** The idea of building a ninety foot-tall statue and demanding that people worship it seems very odd to us. But in the ancient world, it was believed by most that religion was the cement that bound a society together. Though we don't have time to look into this, in short, Nebuchadnezzar was attempting to create a common religion that would unite his empire and establish peace. It was a religion built around polytheism. As a result, anyone who believes in and worships One God (Israel) and not multiple gods is going to face intense opposition.

*“So at the sound of the musical instruments, all the people, whatever their race or nation or language, bowed to the ground and worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. **But** some of the astrologers went to the king and informed on the Jews...(Look at verse 12) there are some Jews – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – whom you have put in charge of the province of Babylon. They pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They refuse to serve your gods and do not worship the gold statue you have set up.” Daniel 3:7-8, 12*

At this, the text says that Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage, called for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and ordered that they bow and worship the golden statue. Look at verse 15.

*"I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?" Daniel 3:15*

Now...listen to their response!

*"Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, 'O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.'" Daniel 3:16-18*

At this, the text says that Nebuchadnezzar became so furious with the men that he commanded the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual. He ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be bound and thrown into the furnace...

***"So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames." Daniel 3:23***

**Did you catch that?** They fell into the roaring flames.

**Suffering:** I've talked with many people who have personally suffered or watched a loved one suffer, and some will say to me, *"I don't understand why God is allowing me or this person I love to go through this kind of pain? They're such a good person.* And underneath their question is an assumption that is built on a very common idea today that says... *"If I try to live a very good life by taking care of my family, being kind to my neighbor, working hard, paying my taxes, attending church somewhat regularly, praying, and giving some of my money away to the poor...then God won't allow me to suffer."*

**This idea, that God doesn't allow good people to suffer, was common in Jesus' day as well...**

**In John chapter 9,** Jesus encountered a man who had been blind from birth. His disciple's asked Jesus why this was. And here was their question... *"Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?"*

They assumed that someone's sin was the cause of the man's blindness! The reverse side of that assumption is that if this man (or his parents) hadn't sinned, he wouldn't have been born blind!

**Please hear me. Nowhere in Scripture do we find the idea that good people won't experience suffering! In fact, the Bible and history are full of examples of men and women who loved God very deeply and yet suffered severely.**

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell into the roaring flames even though they loved and trusted God deeply!

**Look at verse 24...**

*"But Suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, 'Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?' 'Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did,' they replied. 'Look!' Nebuchadnezzar shouted. 'I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!'" Daniel 3:24-25*

**The text goes on to say that Nebuchadnezzar called for the men to come out of the furnace, and when they did, everyone noticed that the fire had not burnt their skin, clothing, or hair, and they didn't even smell of smoke!**

### **Application**

Now...with the rest of our time, I want to look at two things this text teaches us about how we can face the flames of suffering, loss, and opposition in our lives without being ruined!

**If you're taking notes...write this statement down!**

**Faith is forged in the fire...but it is fostered in the feast! (Repeat 2x)**

### **#1 – Faith is Fostered in the Feast**

When we were introduced to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in chapter one, we saw that they were quickly promoted to places of honor by Nebuchadnezzar! Even though these were Jewish men living in exile as captives in a foreign nation, they would have enjoyed many of the benefits of being in the king's royal service. It was during this time...that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fostered such a personal and intimate love for God and confidence in Him...that when they faced the threat of death, they didn't flinch. **Before their faith in God was forged in the fire...their love for God was fostered in the feast!**

**Beth:** Beth and I have walked through some very difficult seasons in the fourteen years we've been married! We hadn't been married a year when I realized that my first ministry position was coming to an end. During this time, Beth was a college student and I was working whatever jobs I could to pay the bills, so we were living on Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup and grilled cheese. As we neared our first Christmas together, we came up with the brilliant idea that we could save a few extra bucks a month by forgoing birth control! A month later we discovered that we were going to be parents! For the record, I think that our first co-pay cost us \$30! So we went from planning to wait five years to have children so we could travel the world (on an income that supported canned soup and cheese heated up between wonder bread) to living in the back bedroom of my in-law's house, caring for a newborn while Beth finished school and I looked for work!

**Looking back...no doubt, God has always used those moments in the fire to forge our love for one another.**

But...do you know what has enabled us to stand strong together as the fires have continue to come (intensify)?

We had been married about five years when Beth and I decided that we weren't going to allow the pace of life and raising children to keep us from fostering our love for one another! So we made a commitment to go on a date every week! I wasn't going to assume that because I was married to Beth, I knew and appreciated her fully! Instead, I decided to take the time to get to know her by listening to her and learning to love her in ways that speak to her heart, and as this has happened our trust and respect for one another has grown, and our marriage has deepened!

**Healthy relationships are often fostered in the feast before they're forged in the fire!**

*What does marriage have to do with 90 foot-tall statues and burning furnaces? I'm glad you asked!*

**Let me ask those of you who are in the middle of a feast right now. Your life is good...work is stable...family is healthy, your bills are paid...you've got a Disney trip planned in the next year!**

Are you fostering your love for God in the middle of the feast? Are you deepening your understanding and appreciation of God's character and nature? Are you learning to listen to Him and trust Him? **How?**

**Scriptures:** Are you pressing into the Scriptures regularly? Are you taking the text from our time together, and then going home and applying His Truth and promises

to your life? Are you getting together with friends to read Scripture, encourage one another, celebrate what God is doing, and pray for one another? Are you practicing gratitude and worship? Is there a growing desire in your life to obey God?

Are you creating margin in the middle of the feast to foster your affection for Jesus?

During the time that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were exiled in Babylon, God spoke to the people through his prophets. Now...you have to imagine that these young men listened intently to the words of God as they were spoken. One prophet was named Isaiah. Listen to his words...

*"But now, O Jacob, listen to the Lord who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, 'Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; **the flames will not consume you.**'"* Isaiah 43:1-2

Do you think that message came to mind as those three young men stared into the face of the furnace? They stood strong because they had fostered their faith in God in the feast!

**Faith is fostered in the feast!**

## **#2 – Faith is Forged in the Fire**

It's possible that you've been listening thus far, and you're still saying to yourself, *"I can't believe in God because of suffering."*

That's fine...but please hear me. The furnaces are going to come and when they do, what god will you take into the fire with you? What resource do you have that will protect you in the face of suffering?

In verse 15, Nebuchadnezzar threatened these young men by asking them...

*"And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?"*

Daniel 3:15

**But just moments later, after God delivered them from the flames, Nebuchadnezzar said...**

*"There is no other god who can rescue like this."* Daniel 3:29

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No other god...not Babylon's gods...not even a 90 foot-tall golden statue was able to rescue like the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!

**This world** can't offer you a solution to the problem of pain! It teaches us that we're all products of chance...only the strong survive...and one day our world is going to get to close to the sun, and we'll all burn up. **No other world** religion offers an answer to the problem of suffering! At best, they promise a way to escape the pain and suffering in this world; but they offer no solution to it.

**Christianity** – Christianity alone claims that God became uniquely and fully human in Jesus Christ and therefore knows first-hand despair, rejection, loneliness, poverty, bereavement, pain, and imprisonment.

Jesus Christ is the only God who will walk with us into the fire!

**Why did God allow Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to walk into the fire in the first place? Why didn't He rescue them before they fell into the furnace? Why instead, did He send an angel to meet them there?**

Throughout the Scriptures, we see that God does not always deliver his people from the fire, but He **will** always meet us in the flames!

**There is no greater place to see this than the cross!**

**Gospel:** Though we have all walked away from God (we've all bowed to the idol), and therefore we deserve to face the fire of God's eternal wrath and judgment. Jesus, the Eternal Son of God...fully God...fully man...walked into the fire for us.

**On the cross, Jesus took all of the punishment that our selfishness, wickedness, and indifference deserved and He died the death we deserved to die! Jesus Christ is the only God who is willing to go into the furnace for His people; to suffer and die for us to set us free!**

In her book, *Christian letters to a Post-Christian world*, Dorothy Sayers wrote...

*For whatever reason God chose to make people as they are - limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death - he had the honesty and courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from us that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When he was man, he played the man.*

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*He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it all worthwhile.*

Dorothy Sayers

How can there be a God who loves in spite of all the badness in the world? The cross. If you don't believe that God suffered, there is no proof that God is a loving God. And if you don't believe that God is a loving God, you won't have the resource to walk into the fire!

**Only when you see him walking into the furnace for you will you feel him walking into the furnaces with you.**

And when you walk through the flames, your faith in God will be forged...you will be strengthened!

Find someone who has truly suffered...and ask them how their suffering has shaped them. Oftentimes, especially if they have a personal faith in Jesus, they will tell you that their life is deeper, richer, and fuller as a result of the flame.

**Ken:** One of my very best friends and mentors is a man named Ken. He's a retired marine who served in Vietnam and saw all the horrors of war, first hand. On one occasion, the entire platoon under his lead was ambushed and killed and the only reason Ken didn't die with them is that he was kept back at base that day because of a minor injury. During this time, Ken wasn't a follower of Jesus...and the post-traumatic stress sent him into a deep depression. When he came home, he went back to the family ranch where he became a commercial property mogul and earned millions...only to lose it all in the late 80's. His depression deepened. It was during this time that Ken met Jesus for the first time and Jesus literally transformed his life! **I've never met a man who loves people deeply because he understands the frailty and brevity of life.** If you asked him, Ken would tell you that He wouldn't trade his experiences in Vietnam or in bankruptcy for anything because God has used those experiences to shape the man he is today.

**Why does God allow us to go through the furnace of suffering?**

*Why did he allow what happened in your past?*

*Why doesn't he stop your marriage from crumbling?*

*Why are you jobless or penniless?*

*Why do you continue to battle depression?*



*Why are you facing intense opposition in your faith?*

**Please hear me!** I don't know the answer to that...I don't know why you're facing the fires that you are. I do believe the Bible when it says that this is part of living in a world broken by sin...and yet one day, Jesus will return to fully heal and restore our lives and the fractured world we live in...

**For today, before Jesus returns, He has promised us that when we walk through the flames, He walks with us! And He uses those flames to forge our lives...**

*"Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing." James 1:2-4*

**Be assured that through the suffering, God is shaping you. He is doing something in and through your life beyond what you can see or imagine!**

**Worship** – The narrative ends in worship... (Nebuchadnezzar is on his knees again!)

I believe there are few ways to glorify God than by enduring suffering with a deep and abiding peace because we know that God has not forgotten or forsaken us! When your friends and family, your neighbors and colleagues see you stare into the furnace confident in God's goodness. Though the fire hurts (hear me...it hurts), and yet it doesn't ruin you, people will notice and they'll want to know why! And those will become opportunities to tell of his goodness and power to save!

**Pray**