

Bold as Lions: Daniel 1, "The Test", 3/3/19

How many of you have ever gone scuba diving? October while I was in Israel, I had the opportunity to do it for the first time. I got some basic training with hand signs, how to clear out your goggles, all the equipment you need...piece of cake. My Israeli scuba guide takes me in and we are there in the shallow end of the Red Sea, everything is great, I'm taking pictures with beautiful fish...and then he signals (deeper) and I signal back (okay sign). So down we go...And all of a sudden I felt this intense pressure in my ears, my teeth...all of a sudden I forgot how to breath, and I start feeling that panicky feeling, and I forget which hand signal is up so I give him the "I'm freaking out" hand signal. So up we go and I pop my head out and I'm spitting and breathing heavy. It became abundantly clear to me in that moment that humans are land creatures, why am I trying to be a fish? Some fish can go 100s and 1000s of feet... How on earth can it do that? God has designed fish so that the pressure inside, equals the immense pressure from the outside.

The science of deep-ocean fish teaches us something incredibly important about life. The only way we will thrive under the pressures that comes into our lives is if the pressure on the inside is strong enough to face it. I wonder if any of us feel the pressures of life upon us today? Maybe it is the pressure in the form of anxiety or fear of the phone call you are waiting for from a doctor, or you are in between jobs and you feel the pressure to get that next paycheck. Maybe a pressure to perform up to someone's standards at work? Maybe a pressure to conform to certain social or relationship expectations or conform to whatever is on trend. If you are a Christian, there is certainly a pressure to conform to the status quo of the day. To believe whatever the culture tells us to believe about morality, about God, about success. Go with the flow and do what everyone else is doing. Don't be the odd one at school who stands out for his or her faith. Keep your faith to yourself, it's fine to be "spiritual"...just not "too spiritual", don't stand for anything. But you know what the status quo is? Status quo is life without spiritual significance. Life without the Holy Spirit alive and active in our world. There is pressure to conform to the status quo, but I believe the Bible calls us to a holy defiance of the status quo.

No one exemplified holy defiance to the status quo under enormous pressure better than Daniel. Daniel was a Jewish captive in a hostile environment, surrounded by a pagan religious system, his enemies tried to set traps for him to be his undoing, under constant pressure to conform. There is no reason on a human level that Daniel should have survived given the pressures he faced. But Daniel didn't just survive. He thrived. He outlasted all the others, over 70 years, and had a remarkable influence, transforming the culture and people around him. So the question we want to ask in this series, Bold as Lions...are you conforming or transforming? Are you conforming to the status quo, or transforming it? Today in Daniel 1 we are going to see **Three Keys to thriving under pressure.**

Now notice immediately as this book opens the two vantage points from this one historical event that led to Daniel being taken to Babylon.

The **vantage point of secular history.** **Daniel 1:1**

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

Introduced to Nebuchadnezzar, king the Babylonian empire, also known as the Chaldeans (reference to the culture), modern day Iraq. **Show you a map**. In 605 B.C. Neb flexed his military muscle attacks Judah, home of Jewish people. And verse 4 tells us that Daniel as well as some of the other young nobility of Judah are taken into captivity and dragged 800 miles to the Babylon. **(Title Slide)** Now often we think of Daniel with a beard from the flannel graphs and pictures in Sunday School. But he was probably about 15 years old at this time. Pressure sometimes comes unfairly. Life is unfair. Instead of having his whole life ahead of him in as a privileged teenager, probably thinking he would grow up and have a normal Jewish life, instead he is ripped from his family and life as he knew it was over. Have you ever felt like the pressures you are facing don't seem fair? And the temptation is to think we are just victims of the cruelty of life, or other people's mistakes, or a system set up against us. This is the bleak vantage point of secular history.

But there is another **vantage point**, that of **Biblical Theology** that shows up in the very next verse.

Daniel 1:2

And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God.

Same historical event, different vantage point. The Bible wants us to know right up front that while man is active, God is proactive. **KEY #1 Pressure sometimes comes unfairly...but God is always working supernaturally**. God is moving behind the scenes, even in the tragic and in the unfair and in the disaster. You are not left to face the pressures of life alone, God is at work, even when you can't see him at first. Do you trust him in the unexpected, seemingly unfair pressures of life right now? Do you trust that God is at work supernaturally? Let's continue...

1 Daniel 1:4-7 *Young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He (the chief official) was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.*

The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

Neb was brilliant in his plan to pressure these young captives to conform to Chaldean status quo. In these verses we see a **Four-fold plan of Conformity:**
Isolation- Ripped them out of there context, family, cultural and take them 800 miles away.

Indoctrination- Educated them the Chaldean way...This was designed to brainwash. Forget what you think you know.

Gratification – Best charcuterie and cheese boards. Farm to table steaks...aged wines... we were never given this before in Israel!

Identification- Gave them new names. Most personal thing you have is your name. He changed their names from names for the God of Israel, to names of their pagan gods. Someone changes your name, that person wants to control you. Forget your past, forget what you've been taught, forget your identity. You belong with us now.

The goal was to work from the outside in to conform them to the status quo. Guess what...our secular culture is doing this to us every day, using the very same plan, isolate you from community of faith and family, indoctrinating... What is morally right and wrong, what we should believe about God, clearly through education system. Gratification- showing us the allure of the status quo, the fulfillment we will have if we pursue what we think will make us happy. Identification- Giving us a label to tell us this is who you are, here is where you belong. Parents-if you aren't disciplining your kids, the world is daily fitting us into its mold. The pressure to conform is enormous. Let's see how Daniel responds.

v.8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.

Key #2 Pressure works from the Outside in to Conform, but God works from the Inside Out to Transform.

The word translated Resolve- Placed upon his heart. God placed it on Daniel's heart. Maybe through his conscience, through the Holy Spirit, giving him the courage to stand up against the status quo. God is at work not only in the seemingly bleak circumstances around him but in him.

You say, "What was the big deal about the food and wine?" Daniel knew what God said in his Word. He knew it would be breaking not only the letter of the law to eat this non-kosher food and drink this wine sacrificed to foreign gods, but his conviction was that if I compromise here, I am going to compromise everywhere else. Even though no one was looking...what happens in Babylon stays in Babylon... he knew that fidelity to God means drawing clear lines.

What are things, even little things, that are pressuring you to conform to the world and corrupt you? Maybe it is websites you go to, shows you watch, people you are hanging out with, the allure of things you think you need to be happy.

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. This comes from studying and developing deep convictions about who God is and what he desires in our lives.

Key #3 Pressure tries to Bully...but trust that God is Bigger!

Pressure comes to bully Daniel and his friends, and pressure comes to bully you to conform. Summarize Daniel 1:9-16: God causes David to have favor, he offers a test for 10 days to eat just vegetables and water, goes vegan...lots of kale. And you see God's hand behind it. David and his 3 friends look great!

Daniel 1:17

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

We find out they are 10x better than anyone else. Daniel ends up in a place of influence that outlasts 4 kings, over 70 years. Why? Because of a critical spiritual truth-

2 Chronicles 16:9

For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

God gets behind us when to trust him. He opens doors, after all, is anything impossible with God? It comes down to a matter of faith. Do you believe that God is bigger than the bully of pressure? God is bigger than that boss that is making your life miserable, he is bigger than your financial issue, he is bigger than the pressure to give in to sexual temptation? And a million other pressures to conform to the status quo.

Summary: **Three Keys to Thriving Under Pressure**

#1 Pressure sometimes comes unfairly...but God is always working supernaturally.

#2 Pressure works from the Outside in to Conform...but God works from the Inside Out to Transform.

#3 Pressure tries to Bully...but trust that God is Bigger.

Close with question- Which are you going to be? **Thermometer or Thermostat?** Thermometer goes up or down based on what is around them. Thermostat isn't affected by surrounding temperature, but changes the environment.

You and I are going to fail, sometimes we are going to give into pressure. But there is a greater Daniel who came. Jesus faced the greatest pressure imaginable. Literally the weight of all the sin of mankind that he took and carried to that cross of Calvary. Not only did he never conform or give into the enormous pressure even to death, overcame it and showed he was powerful over it.