

INTRODUCTION

Today we're going to start the series through the book of Daniel "How to Turn Chaos Into Character."

The book of Daniel is a prophetic book. The first six chapters have to do with Daniel's life, and some of the events are practical events to us. But chapters 6-12 are Bible prophecy. The book of Daniel is much like the book of Revelation. In fact, you must understand the book of Daniel before you can understand the book of Revelation, and the book of Revelation sheds a lot of light on the book of Daniel. Today, I'm going to preach a message entitled "The Daniel Diet."

If you know anything about Daniel, you probably know the story of Daniel in the lion's den. There never would have been a Daniel in the lion's den when he was much older, had there not been the story of Daniel in the dining room when he was a teenager.

Daniel 1:1-12. "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah, into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his God in Babylon and put in the treasure house of his God. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—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 was to teach them the language and the 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 he gave him the name Belteshazzar. To Hananiah, he gave the name Shadrach; to Mishael the name Meshach; and to Azariah the name Abednego. 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. Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel. But the official told Daniel, 'I'm afraid of my Lord the king who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.' Daniel said to the guard, whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, 'Please test your servants for ten days. You give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink.'"

Now, if you've got a King James Bible it says "pulse." What in the world is that? The word actually in Hebrew is *zeroim*, which means food that comes from seeds. That would mean fruit, vegetables and grain. That's what the word *zeroim* means.

Daniel 1:13-17, 21. "Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see. So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took

away their choice food and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them fruit, vegetables and grain instead. To these four young men, teenagers, God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning and Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds...And Daniel remained there [in the palace] until the first year of King Cyrus." [70 years and four kings later]

I want to talk about the Daniel diet, because all of us in our church needs what these teenagers can give us—the zeal and excitement that comes from a young faith in Christ. It's no mistake that today we're talking about a teenager who was sold out to his God, because today we *need* teenagers who are sold out to God.

You know what's been in the news this week. I don't have to remind you. You may be wondering if I prepared this message today from the book of Daniel because of the teenagers who have been killed this week in alcohol-related deaths. Not at all. You know I prepare my messages months in advance. It just so happens I think God has got the attention of every young person and every parent in East Texas. This message today is specifically addressing this issue. When I was 15, my best friend was killed in a drunk driving accident when he was 16. He was in the car alone that night. And just by some quirky twist of fate, had I not been visiting my grandmother that Friday night, I would have no doubt been in the passenger seat of that car and perhaps in the grave today, dead, not ever having pastored, not ever having married, not ever having had children. Because you see, the choices you make as a teenager have tremendous impact upon the rest of your life. And today we're going to look at the life of a teenager and see the choices he made.

I. GREATEST TRIAL: TO TRUST GOD WHEN YOUR WORLD FALLS APART

There are three things I want to talk to you about, because these are three things everybody in this room is going to face. Number one, I think the greatest trial you ever face is to trust God when your world falls apart.

Here was Daniel. He grew up a good Jewish boy in Israel, in Jerusalem, had the word of God, had the temple and prayed to the God of Israel. Suddenly, a foreign enemy conquered his nation. He was plucked up as a teenager, put in a totally different culture, a totally different environment, different language, different people, different food and they said, "You've got to become a new person." It's tough when you move to a new school or new community. Can you imagine a totally different culture? The only way I know to compare it would be if, God forbid, the communist Chinese took over America and bombed and destroyed Washington, D.C., and they exported some of the finest teenagers in Tyler to Beijing, China. Suddenly you could no longer listen to the music you listen to, you couldn't wear the clothes you wear, couldn't eat the food you eat, couldn't pray to the God you pray to. Suddenly you're made to eat Chinese food, pray to the Chinese god, wear Chinese clothes and try to change you to be a Chinese. That's what happened to these 12- and 13-year-olds. It was tough. His world fell apart.

The question is: Can you trust God when your world falls apart? I don't know of anybody here who has been transported to a different culture lately. But some of you may feel like your world is falling apart, because maybe somebody you know and love has been killed, or maybe

somebody you know and love just died of cancer, or maybe you just got the report you've got cancer, or maybe you have some kind of financial problem or family problem or you have a tremendous decision and you don't know the right decision to make, and it seems right now your world is crumbling. The biggest trial you'll ever face is can you trust God when your world falls apart?

Theme of Daniel: There IS a God in Heaven and He IS in control!

The theme of the book of Daniel throughout all twelve chapters is this simple: There is a God in heaven, and He is in control. Even though Daniel was in a totally different culture, a different land, God was behind the scenes orchestrating all of this.

It's easy to trust God when things are going great, when all your bills are being paid, when your health is great, when everybody loves you and you love those around you, it's easy to trust God then. But you let the bottom fall out, and that's when the trial comes. Will you still trust God then? Well Daniel did. And you can, too.

II. GREATEST TEMPTATION: TO COMPROMISE YOUR BELIEFS TO BE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE (CULTURAL BRAINWASHING)

Number two, the greatest temptation you'll ever face is to compromise your beliefs, to compromise your convictions, to be like everyone else. In other words, to do things because everybody else is just doing it, even though it's not in your belief. I call this cultural brainwashing.

What happened to Daniel 2,600 years ago as a teenager is happening today to every child, every teenager, every college student, and every adult. We have a godless culture around us, a secular culture around us, and you see it everywhere. It's in the music you listen to, it's in the television programs and the movies, and it is in the magazines that you read. A lot of times it is in secular education. It's everywhere all around you. This culture is trying to immerse you and brainwash you and make you just like everybody else in the culture.

Nebuchadnezzar was pretty shrewd. He knew if he could change the minds and hearts of teenagers, he would have them for the rest of their lives, because the values and the decisions you make as a teen are going to determine the rest of your life. It's kind of scary, isn't it, with all these hormones and everything going on and everything else? You mean the decisions I make now is going to determine the rest of my life? That's right. The bad ones you make are going to haunt you the rest of your life. The good decisions you make are going to bless you the rest of your life.

I believe there's a battle going on for the minds and the hearts of the children and teenagers, and the devil and the world is trying to capture you and brainwash you to be like everybody else. The choice is yours. Listen to what the Bible says in 1 John 2:15-17 as relates to the world. "Don't love the world's way, because love of the world squeezes out love for the father. Practically everything that goes on in the world, wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself,

wanting to appear important, has nothing to do with the father. The world with all of its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out, but whoever does what God wants is set for eternity."

Daniel and these three Hebrew boys weren't persecuted. They weren't tortured. They were fed extravagant food. They were seduced, enticed, and overindulged. That's what the world tries to do to you: It doesn't try to make you be real bad. It tries to entice you and overindulge you to the point that you don't have time for God anymore. The world wants to make you so busy doing all the things that the world has to do that you don't have time to get on your knees and pray. The world wants to keep you so busy that you have other things to do other than come to Sunday School and church. The world wants to keep you so busy you don't have enough time to get into the word of God. That's what the world does. It doesn't persecute you. It seduces you. It entices you. "Man, this good food and the wine the king drinks? Hey, man, let's do it!" Daniel had to make a choice. Am I going to compromise my Jewish beliefs just to be like everybody else in this culture or am I going to take a stand? Of course, Daniel decided to take a stand.

1. Authority crisis—What is truth?

Everyone in this room is going to come to some crisis in your life, especially teens. Three points of crisis Daniel faced are the same ones you will. Number one; there was an authority crisis. You've all got to answer the question: What is truth? What is truth? Good question, philosophers have struggled with it for centuries. Teenagers and children, for most of your life you grow up in a family where your mom and dad will tell you, "This is right. This is wrong. This is truth. This is error." And usually when you go to Sunday School and church, you're taught some of the same stuff: "This is right. This is wrong. This is truth. This is error." When your pastor stands in the pulpit, he says, "This is right. This is wrong. This is truth. This is error." But you and I know when you get out there at school and you get among some of your friends and you watch some television and some movies and listen to some music, you have a totally different set of values. There are forces out there telling you, "Hey, that's not necessarily true. Why do you accept it just because your parents told you? Why do you accept it just because your Sunday School teacher told you? Why do you accept it because your preacher told you? Come on, is it really truth?"

Today in America, truth has become relative. That's terrible. Let me tell you what America's attitude toward truth is: Something may be true for you, but not true for me. That's your truth; that's not my truth. They're trying to tell us there's no such thing as absolute truth. That's one of the biggest dangers we face today, because the Bible says there are some things true for everybody, there are some things right for everybody and some things that are wrong for everybody. There is such a thing as absolute truth, even though our culture said there isn't. Did you know what our culture says the biggest sin you can commit is? Our culture says the biggest sin you'll ever commit is the sin of intolerance. Now, get ready to hear more about this.

Intolerance. Did you know because I believe the Bible, and because I'm not ashamed to stand up and say the Bible says homosexual behavior is wrong, I am said to be intolerant? I'm not a good American. Did you know because I am willing to stand up and say without any bother whatsoever that the Bible teaches abortion is murder, the culture would brand me as an intolerant bigot, and I don't fit in the American culture? You know why? I'm intolerant. Because I stand up and say the word of God says there's only one way to heaven, and that is Jesus Christ, not

Muhammad, not Buddha, not anybody else but Jesus Christ, our culture labels me as an intolerant bigot. I don't fit in! You know why? Because I'm intolerant. But you know what, I'm willing to say, I believe with all my heart, there's truth, there's absolute truth, and it's found in the Bible. Now, guys, adults, college students, teenagers, somewhere along the line, you've got to decide, "Am I going to believe the word of God, is it true, or am I going to accept what my culture is feeding me?" The same thing Daniel had to choose about.

2. Identity crisis—Who am I?

The second point of crisis is an identity crisis. You're going to have to answer the question, "Who am I?" Daniel, who are you? Well, did you know Daniel's name means "God is judge?" But he moved to this new culture and they gave him a new name. Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, all of their names had something to do with the living God of Israel. They all gave them pagan names that had to do with pagan Gods. Do you know what Belteshazzar means? It means "servant of Baal." "Daniel, we're not going to call you by your Hebrew name anymore. We're going to give you a new name that represents a pagan god." But if you notice all throughout this book of Daniel, Daniel continued to be called Daniel.

Adults, college students, teenagers, are going to have to decide, "Am I willing to be called a Christian in our culture?" Now I'm not much of a prophet, but I do want to prophesize something that is going to continue to happen in the 21st century. In our American culture, the identification label "born-again Christian" is going to increasingly take on a negative connotation in our culture. If you are willing to stand up in your school and at your job and in your family and unashamedly said, "I'm a born-again Christian. I'm a Bible Christian," you're going to be labeled part of the vast, right wing conspiracy, and you're going to be labeled an intolerant bigot.

By the way, it's okay to be a cultural American Christian, which is a watered-down nothing, but to be a Bible, born-again Christian in America today; you're going to be looked at more and more as a fool. So be ready for that. I want to ask you, are you willing to be identified as a Christian? Have you ever noticed, teens, when you get out among your friends who aren't Christian, you don't want them to really know you're a Christian, you don't want to be identified as a Christian because you're afraid. You've got to decide.

3. Moral crisis—How will I live?

Number three, there is an authority crisis, there is a moral crisis. How will I live? How will I act? How will I behave? What will I do and what will I not do? Here's the deal. King Nebuchadnezzar said, "You guys come here, I'm going to be your new authority. Forget God, forget the Bible." Authority crisis. He said, "I'm going to give you new names. Your name is not Daniel anymore." Identity crisis. Then King Nebuchadnezzar said, "Daniel, you have to eat my food, you have to drink my wine. I'm your boss." How are you going to act? How are you going to behave? Daniel had to decide. "Am I going to act the way the king in Babylon tells me to do or am I going to act the way the King of Kings and Lord of Lords tells me to do?"

So you think eating and drinking is an insignificant, minor issue? Daniel's Old Testament, his Bible, told him he was to only eat food that was kosher. He couldn't eat certain meats, such as

pork. He couldn't eat beef that had been offered and sacrificed to idols. Daniel made a decision to stick to his diet. He faced a moral crisis. Here we are two weeks into the year 2000. You ought to get a T-shirt that says, "I survived the '90s," because there were so many dire predictions about all the crashes that were going to happen in America during the 1990s. There was the computer crash that was predicted to happen. It didn't happen. There was the economic crash that everybody was talking about, the coming economic crash in the 1990s. It hasn't happened. Friend, I'm here to tell you, while computers didn't crash and the financial world did not crash, we as Americans are right smack dab in the middle of a moral crash, a moral collapse. We as a culture are in trouble morally. Technologically, financially, prosperous. Morally, spiritually, bankrupt—at bottom. You don't believe it? Open your newspaper any day. And just to prove it, I waited until this morning before I came to church to open my newspaper and on one page there is a headline, '11-year-old boy charged with raping eight-year-old girl.' Headline on the same page, 'Woman accused of giving pot to 2-year-old son.' Any day, any newspaper, any city, open it up. Morally, America is bankrupt. My friend, you have to be under a rock if you disagree with this statement. America is worse off morally today than we were 5 years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago. I mean, it is bad, and it's getting worse.

In the middle of this moral crisis, we're going to have to stand up and say, "This is right and this is wrong," because we've lost our moral absolutes. That's why we're in a moral crisis. A recent CNN poll given to Americans asking their attitude about the Ten Commandments, 64% of Americans said they would steal if they knew they could get away with it without getting caught. When it came to lying, 74% of Americans said they would lie under certain circumstances. How are you going to live? Kids, when you go to school, your not at mama's skirt anymore, you're going to find kids that are different than you and say they don't believe what you believe. You're going to have teachers that say the same thing. What are you going to live? What are you going to believe?

Students, when you go off to college, especially if you go off to some secular college. You grow up believing in the Bible and you go into some sociology class and some Dr. Wigglejaw tells you the Bible is just a bunch of fables and myths, fairy tales. You've got to be ready. Some of you adults may be in a job where you're required to do unethical and dishonest things, you're going to have to make a choice. How am I going to live? According to the culture or according to what's right? See, folks, I want to say it again. Your greatest temptation is not to just fall into terrible sin. Your greatest temptation is to compromise your convictions just so you can become just like everybody else. But I want to tell you, folks, you cannot sin against God with impunity. The Bible says sin will always find you out.

Let me tell you the modern fable of a rat that decided to chew through a steel cable. You know a rat can't chew through steel, but he thought he could. So he began to chew away on this steel cable. Of course, his little mouth hurt to start with, but before long, he couldn't even feel anything. His mouth became deadened. That's the way sin is. But then he chewed and chewed, and before long he saw blood on the steel cable. Thinking in his little rat brain, "I'm hurting this steel cable, it's bleeding." not knowing it was his own blood. In this little modern fable, the rat chewed and chewed away until it chewed itself to death. That is exactly the picture of a person who gets into sin. Oh, it bothers you to start with, but then you get used to it. And then you say, hey, "This is all right." Before you know it, death.

The Bible promises sin always leads to death. The Bible says where lust has conceived, it brings forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. That is the word of God. That's your greatest temptation. I want to move on to number three, to the greatest triumph that you'll ever experience in life. It is this.

III. GREATEST TRIUMPH: TO STAY PURE IN THE MIDST OF MORAL DECAY

The greatest triumph of life is to stay pure in the midst of moral decay. That's what Daniel did. Look at verse 8. To me, verse 8 of Daniel 1 is the greatest verse in the entire book of Daniel. "But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with royal food and wine." Now, listen to me, teenagers, college students, adults, children. I'm going to ask you today to do something highly intelligent. I'm going to ask you to dare to be a Daniel. To dare to stand up in the face of our godless culture and say, "I will not defile myself. I will say no to sin. I won't go along with the crowd. I'm willing to be different." *Dare to be a Daniel*. Now, Daniel had learned all of his life, don't eat pork, don't eat meat sacrificed to idols, so he said, "Okay, I'm not going to defile myself." You need to make that same decision, also.

1. Hard decision

Let me tell you what will happen when you make the decision to be a Daniel. Number one, it will be a hard decision. I promise. It will be hard because of peer pressure. All these other teenagers were eating the king's food, drinking the king's wine, and Daniel was willing to be different. It's tough. Teenagers, here you are out in some pasture, there's a bonfire going on, somebody brings out a keg or brings out a bottle and starts passing around alcohol or a passing around a joint. And there you are standing with your friends, and they each take a swig or they each take a puff, and they hand that bottle to you or they hand that joint to you, and everybody looks at you. What are you going to do? Your choices are simple. You're either going to dare to be a Daniel and say, "No, I'm not going to do that. The Bible says it's wrong, it's illegal, according to the law, and I'm not going to defile myself." Kids, if you do that, let me promise you what's going to happen. Your friends are going to look at you and make fun of you. "Chicken! Come on, don't you have any guts? Come on, everybody's doing it. Come on." Listen to me, teenagers. It takes a thousand times more guts to go against the flow and say no than it does to go along with what everybody else is doing. And you know what? You'll be alive the next day and you'll be able to look at yourself in the eyes for the rest of your life and say, "You know what? I did the right thing. I refused to defile myself, even though everybody else was."

What about the way everybody's talking? You hear the "s word" and "f word" everywhere, don't you? Everybody's talking that way. Your friends are talking that way. But when you decide you're not going to talk that way, you're going to keep your vocabulary clean; you are made fun of. You know what profanity is? Profanity is the attempt of a weak mind to express itself forcefully. Come on, kids, be smarter than that. You don't need profanity, even though everything you listen to on the radio and movies and television is spouting it out. Will you say, "I'll dare to be a Daniel and will not defile my mouth by the language I use?"

Kids, everyone else at school is cheating. They're downloading research papers off the Internet, they're getting tests from people who have already taken them so they can see what's on the test, they're copying everybody else's work, they're taking shortcuts. Everybody else is doing it. Will you dare to be a Daniel? Will you say, "I will not defile myself?" Teenagers, will you say no to premarital sex? Girls, one of the most precious things you can give to your husband is your virginity, your virtue. Will you say, girls and guys, "I will not defile myself, even though everybody else seems to do it?" Folks, it is everywhere else. Will you say, "I will dare to be a Daniel?" I just want to tell you, kids, when you make a decision to do that, you're going to be different. Daniel was different. You're going to be different. But under God, you're going to be right, and they're going to be wrong.

Girls, sometimes these girls that are sort of loose and lose their virginity, they may kind of laugh at you and make fun of you girls that are pure, but in your mind I want you to think this, girls. When you think about that girl, you look at her, you don't have to say it out loud, but this is what I want you to think. I want you to think, "You know, I can become like you at any time I want to, but you never again can become like me." *Dare to be a Daniel*. It's a hard decision.

3. Humble decision

Number two: It will be a humble decision. I want you to see the way Daniel did it. He wasn't obnoxious about it. He wasn't bragging about it. He didn't say, "I'm not eating king's food, I'm not drinking wine." He humbly requested he would not defile himself. He didn't make a big deal about it. He wasn't judgmental. He wasn't critical. He said, "For me, I'm not going to do it." Teens, that's the attitude you need to have. "As for me, I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to defile myself."

3. Honored decision

Number three: God will always honor that kind of decision. After ten days of eating that kind of food, those guys looked wonderful. They looked handsome, strong and healthy.

By the way, I've just got to put this in as a parenthesis for some of you who may be interested. I never heard this before, but in 1992, I was reading Daniel 1, wanting to lose a little weight. So you know what I did? I went on the Daniel Diet. I've never heard it before or since. I guess I coined that phrase. The Daniel Diet is when for ten days you eat nothing but "zeroin." Fruit, vegetables, grains. It just means you don't eat meat, dairy products or sweets. Drink water. It's amazing what happens after ten days. I've done it many times through the years. In fact, after all that holiday feasting, I'm just now coming out of the Daniel diet. Today is the last day of it. I've lost ten pounds and I feel great. The reason you go on the Daniel diet is not for health reasons. It is a form of a fast, and a fast is always positive, because it puts you in touch with God and always reminds you of why you're eating or not eating a certain way.

By the way I would like for someone in our church who is a physician or somebody in the health care field interested in nutrition, I want you to write a book called *The Daniel Diet*. I'll help you with the Bible chapter on it. You write a book on it. I think it will sell more copies than *Sugar*

Busters and Atkins diet, and we'll take the profit from that book and put it on the new building. It's a good thing to do.

The reason to do it is not because of just health reasons; it was a spiritual commitment for Daniel. God honored Daniel. He became an interpreter of dreams. Later on in his life when he was thrown into the pit of lions, God shut the mouths of the lions. When he was a teenager, if Daniel had not shut his mouth to the food and wine of the king, I believe God would not have shut the mouths of the lions later in his life. In other words, if there wasn't the story of Daniel in the dining room, there wouldn't have been the story of Daniel in the lion's den or it would have been a short story. * Burp! *

The decisions you make about the small matters of your life pay off great dividends in your future. The bad choices you make lead to megamiseries, but the correct and good and right and noble and pure choices you make lead to megablessings.

When you choose to stay pure—then God gives you the power to stay pure

Here's the last thing I want to say. If you make the choice to be pure, God will give you the power to stay pure. But it's your choice.

Have you ever seen any of those beautiful, soaring redwood trees out in the California forest? There was one particular redwood tree this past year that had been standing there they estimate for over 400 years. It had survived storms, lightning, earthquakes, forest fires, but suddenly this great huge redwood tree came crashing to the floor of the forest. They wondered what happened. They cut into that redwood tree and they found it was not the earthquakes or the storms. It was tiny little beetles that had eaten into the heart of that great tree.

Teenagers, in the scope of the whole Christian life, I'll agree that eating and drinking and some of those things, they are relatively insignificant. But if you make the wrong choices about those, those are like beetles that will get into your heart, and you'll experience a spiritual collapse. God says, "You be faithful to me in the little choices of life, and I will honor you and I'll be faithful to you."

OUTLINE

I. GREATEST TRIAL: TO TRUST GOD WHEN YOUR WORLD FALLS APART

Theme of Daniel:

(2:28) There is a God in Heaven

(4:17) and He is in control!

II. GREATEST TEMPTATION: TO COMPROMISE YOUR BELIEFS TO BE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE (CULTURAL BRAINWASHING)

Don't love the world's way. Love of the world squeezes out love for the Father. Practically everything that goes on in the world—wanting your own way, wanting everything for yourself, wanting to appear important—has nothing to do with the Father. The world and all its wanting, wanting, wanting is on the way out. But whoever does what God wants is set for eternity. *1 John 2:15-17 The Message*

1. Authority crisis: What is truth?

2. Identity crisis: Who am I?

3. Moral crisis: How will I live?

III. GREATEST TRIUMPH: TO STAY PURE IN THE MIDST OF MORAL DECAY

1. Hard decision

2. Humble decision

3. Honored decision

When you choose to stay pure—then God gives you the power to stay pure.



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes