**1. Motivate**

When have you felt you were going against the flow?

* going up the down staircase
* trying to get out of a door most everyone else was trying to get in
* turning the wrong way down a one way street
* when everyone else wants to go to one restaurant and you want a different one
* you liked a particular movie and all your friends hated it
* the only seats available at a big game were right in the middle of the other team’s rooting section
* you like golden oldies music, others around you like only contemporary stuff

**2. Transition**

God calls us to live our lives with uncompromising conviction.

* Daniel and three other young Jewish boys faced a culture that was totally different
* Our convictions, not our circumstances, define who we are.

**3. Bible Study**

A video introduction to the lesson is available. View it at <https://watch.liberty.edu/media/t/1_itv3q5c6> . If you have no wi-fi where you teach, it is best to download it to your computer from <https://tinyurl.com/ysp9y2sr>

3.1 Culture Expects Conformity

Listen for criteria for royal service.

Daniel 1:3-7 (NIV) Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring in some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility-- 4 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 literature of the Babylonians. 5 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. 6 Among these were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

What were the king’s qualifications for choosing young Israelite men?

* from the royal family, from nobility
* young men
* no physical defects
* handsome
* quick learners
* good preliminary education

What was the training plan for the young men chosen?

* learn language and literature of the Babylonians
* same diet as the king had
* three years of training
* begin involvement in the king’s service after the training

What was the goal of that plan?

* enlist well qualified new leadership
* train them to speak, read, think in Babylonian language
* immerse them in Babylonian culture

The training and environment was meant to “lull” the Hebrew captives into blending with his culture. How does our society lull us to blend in with the world’s mindset?

* TV and movie entertainment
* glorification of sports heroes, popular entertainers
* high priority placed on material goods, high paying jobs
* news media portrays its own agenda (right or left, it is still a secular viewpoint)
* dismissal of biblical values by public higher education
* demand for “tolerance” (while being intolerant of Christian values)

How do we counter these cultural influences in a Christian home?

* limit how much and what is viewed on TV
* turn off the TV at meal time and talk together as a family
* read to your children, with your children
* consider the admonition of Deut. 6:6-7 (NIV) *These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. [7] Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*
	+ all the time,
	+ wherever you go,
	+ whatever you are doing
* as your family matures, discuss moral and philosophical implications of cultural influences
* involve family in church activities … ministry, church league sports, youth group

3.2 Draw the Line

Listen for how Danial took a risk.

Daniel 1:8-13 (NIV) 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. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, "I am 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." 11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 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."

What was Daniel’s resolve?

* not to defile himself with royal food and wine
* maintain Jewish dietary restrictions if at all possible
* training in language and customs was one thing, being forced to go against Jehovah’s spiritual commandments was something else

The official over Daniel was reluctant to change their diet. He was responsible for their good health. How did Daniel respond to the officials reservations.

* how about a 10 day experiment
* we’ll go with a simple diet (no wine, no rich meat … just veggies and water)
* after 10 days we’ll compare us to the rest and then see how we compare to the others

Daniel drew the line. In what kinds of situations might you have to draw the line to avoid adopting habits of the prevailing culture …

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| At your work? | In your neighborhood? | In a social organization? |
| * stretching the truth
* covering for someone else’s misdeeds
* repeated extra long lunch or coffee breaks
* gossip
 | * what beverage is chosen at a party
* flirting vs. friendliness
* Sunday activities that conflict with church
* keeping up appearances in spending (cars, boats, etc.)
 | * what kind of entertainment is chosen
* who is accepted or rejected
* temptation to be a social climber
 |

What risks do we run if we “draw the line” over a cultural issue we think is wrong for us to do?

* made fun of
* miss a job promotion
* lose friends
* written off or rejected as a “do-gooder”
* branded as a racist, homophobe, fringe lunatic, rightwing nut-case, etc.

How do you see that Daniel demonstrates both flexibility and strength in this situation?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Flexibility | Strength |
| * asked permission rather than demanding
* offered an alternative
* suggested a trial period
* was willing to give up if the trial proved unsuccessful
 | * took a stand against official policy
* held to what he knew was right
	+ their food may have been linked to idol worship
	+ at very least was not according to Jewish dietary laws
* not willing to back down entirely
* willing to suffer consequences if he was wrong
 |

3.3 Trust the Lord

Listen for the results of Daniel’s experiment.

Daniel 1:17-19 (NIV) 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. 18 At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service.

What skills did God give to the four men?

* knowledge
* understanding
* skill in learning of the Babylonian literature and culture
* Daniel was given skill of understanding visions and dreams

In evaluating the four men at the end of their training, what did Nebuchadnezzar conclude concerning them?

* the king interviewed them
* they were at the top of their class
* they looked good, talked well, displayed all the skills the King desired
* they were qualified to enter the king’s service

⇨ Note that they used their God given skills for the foreign king and in the midst of a pagan culture … without compromising their first allegiance to God.

What are some ways in which God equips *us* (as believers) to make a positive contribution to our culture ?

* do your job faithfully
* do your best as an educator, a caring health care provider, an honest business person,
* keep cars running well, keep buildings clean, provide quality services to the public

In what ways do you think their (and our) battle against culture is never over?

* assume they continued with their spiritual convictions
* they would still end up crosswise with a pagan culture
* we see that with the three who would later not bow down and worship the king’s image
* likewise, Daniel would always pray to Jehovah God … he got thrown into the lions’ den for his faithfulness

How might others benefit when we stand our ground?

* see what the right thing is to do
* we model what is right
* encouraged to make good choices
* know that they are not alone in these kinds of issues

Use the last page as a handout so your learners can take home the application points of this week’s lesson.

Application

Analyze your own life situation.

* Is God working in an unexpected way?
* If so, pray and ask for His wisdom to see the bigger picture of what He is doing in your life.

Think about your own life.

* Is there an area in which you have compromised and adopted the world’s unbiblical values?
* Pray and ask God for strength to know what to do in this situation.

Tell your story.

* Share with your family or friends details of a time God led you into an unexpected or even uncomfortable place, opportunity, or situation.
* And you later saw His hand at work.
* Explain how this experience affected your life and your family.
* Pray with them, thanking God for letting them be part of your faith journey.

Cryptogram Puzzle

This important message was discovered in the trash of our consulate in Deca Fanited. You can see the water damage it has taken. Spiros the Spy has forwarded it to us to decode. His decoding crew is busy with JV Fall Football practice. Use the key below. Note how the code works with the “Hello World” sample on the left. Technical help and other fun Family Activities are available at <https://tinyurl.com/ysp9y2sr> When you complete the decoding process, pass the message to your Discipling Pastor.

