

SMALL GROUP: DANIEL

CATCH UP

This section is designed for each person to share their experiences from last weeks' application. This should be an encouraging time and not a time to shame someone for not doing their assignment - simply let a couple of people share how their project went. Be sure to encourage the group to talk about their struggles and mess-ups as well as their successes.

WARM UP

Have each person share about something they've worked really hard at accomplishing. Maybe it's a school award or a hobby they've created or a collection they've been working on for years. Have each person share the hardest part of the process.

READ UP

- Daniel 1:1-20
- Daniel 2
- Daniel 6:1-23

Daniel was a man who spent most of his life in foreign lands serving foreign kings. His home country of Judah had been taken over by other more powerful nations. So, there were people on both sides of this story who had great expectations for Daniel - both his own countrymen and his captors. He was handpicked by the Babylonian government and placed in their top training program. Later he was picked by the Persian government to be one among many Jewish administrators in the region. His leadership skills and strong personality took him to the heights of earthly authority and rule. It also came with heavy demands on his convictions and beliefs.

You see, before Daniel had been picked by these foreign leaders to serve, he had been handpicked by God to serve a greater Kingdom. God had similarly high expectations for how Daniel would lead his life, and he was about to discover the inner struggle between the two. Daniel would be more of a servant of God than a servant to any earthly king. But, the expectations of these earthly powers were in direct conflict with His Heavenly Father.

Daniel had life-threatening decisions to make - not just in one instance, but in multiple instances throughout his life. In some cases saying yes to his new authority meant saying no to God. Daniel, time and time again, instead chose to say "Yes" to God. When offered a diet of Babylonian food that violated God's covenant with Israel, Daniel chose to stay true to God no matter the cost. When tempted to claim special powers of interpreting dreams in order to get ahead, Daniel chose to give glory to God instead. When everyone around him worshipped the Persian king, Daniel maintained his habit of spending time worshipping, praying, and listening to the One True God—even under threat of death.

While others tried to build a comfortable and safe life through the approval of a foreign government, Daniel applied himself to the everyday practice of following God instead. Through his hard work and God's supernatural blessing, Daniel excelled beyond all his peers and became a key player in the history of foreign governments.

While others excelled at conformity, Daniel excelled at doing the right thing. Daniel trained himself for righteousness, and his training paid off for him and all those who chose to associate with him. Daniel is a man who honored God in all he did.

It's easy for us to call Daniel great because of his godly choices. But, when you look at the consequences of his rebellion toward these super-powers, you see a more complex story. Imagine yourself faced with a pit of starved lions ready to rip apart your body, limb from limb. You don't rebel against your captors and step into a lion's den without having been trained and fully committed to your Heavenly Father's purposes. He stayed true to God's training plan for righteousness, even though his environment didn't even acknowledge the One True God.

TALK UP

1. Daniel was handpicked by God and so were you. How does it feel to have been handpicked by God?
2. Daniel had many challenges in his relationship with God. What are some of your biggest challenges as you try to follow God?
3. What distracts you from following God and staying on His training plan for you?

ACT UP

Identify one area of your spiritual training that tends to be a weak point for you. This could be spending more time praying or reading the Bible. Maybe it's sharing your faith with others. Take some time this week to "work out" this particular area more intensely.

PRAY UP

Ask God to help you take advantage of opportunities to grow in Him more intensely.

GATHER UP

Before everyone leaves, make sure you confirm next weeks' meeting day and time – and confirm those who can make it.