

Goals

After conversion a long and rugged journey lies in front of us before we reach our final destination, the heavenly kingdom. This journey involves making endless choices. Some choices are harder to make when under conflict, pressures and temptations in life. But each choice will determine the outcome of our faith. In this unit our students will study characters such as Daniel and his three friends and Isaac, who all faced many choices in life yet remained uncompromising in their faith. In every aspect of their lives, God was their first priority. Lot too faced many choices. But his decisions were based on his heart's desires rather than on God and as a result he strayed further and further away. Our students will realize that we should not sell our soul for a moment of pleasure but to be like Simeon and Anna who were content to lead reverent and hope-filled lives, with faith that stood the test of time.

unit
2**Teacher Devotional**

We may never experience what Stephen, Paul, Peter, John or any of the other disciples did when they laid down their lives for Christ. But that doesn't mean that God requires any less of us. To walk in purity, to obey, to be sincere, to make godly choices in an ungodly world, to love our enemies are some of the ways in which God wants us to lay down our lives. But to do all these takes faith. Faith enables us to move from the things that are important to us to the things that are important to God. It enables us to look beyond the values of the world to the values of God. With every act of obedience and through every trial and temptation, our faith grows little by little, until ultimately we too can overcome the world.

Faith is the Victory

*"For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith."
(1 Jn 5:4)*

Lesson 5

Daniel and His
Three Friends***Listed Scriptures***

Dan 1-6; Heb 11:29-34

Lesson Aim

- 1) Imitate the faith, love, conduct and wisdom of Daniel and his three friends
- 2) Strive to speak and live the truth in a godless world

Memory Verse

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom 12:2)

Bible Reading For This Week (for students and teachers)

Isaiah 21-25

B I B L E B A C K G R O U N D

**Babylon**

One of the ancient world's greatest empires, the Babylonian empire extended from the east to India, west to Asia Minor and southeastern Europe, south to Egypt and North Africa, Syria, Edom, Judah and Persia. The great city of Babylon, which lies some 50 miles south of modern Baghdad is situated on the east bank of the River Euphrates. The city walls measured 96 km in perimeter. The height of the wall measured 100 meters, and its thickness measured 27 meters. There were 100 city gates with 250 watch towers built atop the city walls. Canals that drew water from the River Euphrates surrounded the city. The canals also acted as a deterrent to any enemy approaching the city wall. The streets were wide, the palace was magnificent and resplendent with many gardens. The hanging garden was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It was built of gold, silver, and all sorts of jewels.

Nebuchadnezzar was the son of the founder of the neo-Babylonian empire. The empire of Babylon was established in 625 B.C. and destroyed in 536 B.C. He personally led the armies of Babylon in a series of wars against Egypt that crushed that ancient power and established Babylonian mastery of the Middle East. Because the Israelites committed idolatry, violated the Sabbath and despised the prophet's warnings, God handed the country into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed the city of Jerusalem and Solomon's magnificent temple. His established policy was to resettle people, and so Nebuchadnezzar ordered the exile of the people of Judah. During the first year of his reign in 606 B.C., the third year of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar took the first captives back to Babylon, among whom were Daniel and his three friends (Dan 1:1-2; 2 Kgs 24:1-7). In the 8th year of his reign in 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar took the second group of captives, among whom was Ezekiel the prophet. The third group of captives was taken in the 17th year of his reign in 589 B.C., among whom was Jeremiah the prophet.

The Book of Daniel

The Book of Daniel is one of the four major books of prophecies in the Old Testament. It is also called the Revelation of the Old Testament.

Author:

The question of whether Daniel is the author of the Book of Daniel is controversial. According to records in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus believes that it is the work of Daniel (Mt 24:15; Dan 11:31; 8:11). Daniel wrote this book in the first person (Dan 7:2, 4, 6, 28; 8:1, 15; 9:2; 12:5-8). Facts and events of Daniel mentioned in Hebrews 11:33-34 are also quoted in Daniel chapters 3 and 6.

About the book:

The Book of Daniel contains the personal history and visions of the future of Daniel, a Jew who was deported to Babylon as a teenager in the year 606 B.C. Daniel was trained with young people from other conquered nations, to become administrators in the empire of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was still in Babylon in the third year of Cyrus the Persian king in 534 B.C. He was in Babylon for a total of 73 years. The book is divided into two natural parts. The first section, from chapter 1 through 6 speaks of Daniel's life and works. The second section from chapter 7 to 12 contains the prophetic visions of Daniel during the reigns of Belshazzar, Darius of the Medes and Cyrus king of Persia. These dreams dramatically outline God's future plans, beginning with Babylon and continuing to the end of the age. They demonstrate God's sovereignty and control of history and the destinies of men.



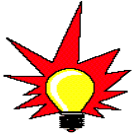
The Emperor's Seed

Once there was an emperor in the Far East who was growing old and knew the time was coming to choose his successor. Instead of choosing one of his assistants or one of his own children, he decided to do something different. He called all the young people in the kingdom together one day. He said, "It has come time for me to step down and to choose the next emperor. I have decided to choose one of you." The kids were shocked! But the emperor continued. "I am going to give each one of you a seed today. One seed. It is a very special seed. I want you to go home, plant the seed, water it, and come back here one year from today with what you have grown from this one seed. I will then judge the plants that you bring to me, and the one I choose will be the next emperor of the kingdom!"

There was one boy named Ling who was there that day and he, like the others, received a seed. He went home and excitedly told his mother the whole story. She helped him get a pot and some planting soil, and he planted the seed and watered it carefully. Every day he would water it and watch to see if it had grown.

After about three weeks, some of the other youths began to talk about their seeds and the plants that were beginning to grow. Ling kept going home and checking his seed, but nothing ever grew. Three weeks, four weeks, five weeks went by. Still nothing. By now others were talking about their plants but Ling didn't have a plant and he felt like a failure. Six months went by, still nothing in Ling's pot. He just knew he had killed his seed. Everyone else had trees and small plants, but he had nothing. Ling didn't say anything to his friends, however. He just kept waiting for his seed to grow.

A year finally went by and all the youths of the kingdom brought their plants to the emperor for inspection. Ling told his mother that he wasn't going to take an empty pot. But she encouraged him to go, and to take his pot, and to be honest about what happened. Ling felt sick to his stomach, but he knew his mother was right. He took his empty pot to the palace. When Ling arrived, he was amazed at the variety of plants grown by all the other youths. They were beautiful, in all



shapes and sizes. Ling put his empty pot on the floor and many of the kids laughed at him. A few felt sorry for him and just said, "Hey, nice try."

When the emperor arrived, he surveyed the room and greeted the young people. Ling just tried to hide in the back. "My, what great plants, trees and flowers you have grown," said the emperor. "Today, one of you will be appointed the next emperor!"

All of a sudden, the emperor spotted Ling at the back of the room with his empty pot. He ordered his guards to bring him to the front. Ling was terrified. "The emperor knows I'm a failure! Maybe he will have me killed!"

When Ling got to the front, the emperor asked his name. "My name is Ling," he replied. All the kids were laughing and making fun of him. The emperor asked everyone to quiet down.

He looked at Ling, and then announced to the crowd, "Behold your new emperor! His name is Ling!" Ling couldn't believe it. Ling couldn't even grow his seed. How could he be the new emperor? Then the emperor said, "One year ago today, I gave everyone here a seed. I told you to take the seed, plant it, water it, and bring it back to me today. But I gave you all boiled seeds which would not grow. All of you, except Ling, have brought me trees and plants and flowers. When you found that the seed would not grow, you substituted another seed for the one I gave you. Ling was the only one with the courage and honesty to bring me a pot with my seed in it. Therefore, he is the one who will be the new emperor!"

Discussion:

What did you learn from this story?

What kind of person was Ling?

What kind of people were his peers?

How would you have responded if you were Ling?

Today, we will look at Daniel and his three friends who did just what Ling did—stand up for their principles against all odds.



Daniel and His Friends

In the third year of King Jehoiachin's reign, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem (c. 606 B.C.). Jerusalem was taken captive and the vessels of the temple, along with nobility and youths were taken to Babylon. Amongst those was Daniel, an Israelite of noble descent. Nothing is known of the ancestry and early life of Daniel. He was not a priest like Jeremiah or Ezekiel, but like Isaiah he was from the line of Judah and of noble descent (Dan 1:3-6).

Daniel's name means "God is my judge." He was also known as Belteshazzar, meaning, "his life is protected" (Dan 4:8). Daniel was about 16 years old when he was taken captive. He was in Babylon for about 73 years and he lived to about 90 years as an exile in Babylon. During this period from 606 B.C. to about 536 B.C., Daniel served three empires: Babylon (under Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar his son), Medes (under Darius) and Persia (under Cyrus). This coincided with the reigns of kings Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah of Judah.

The story of Daniel is about a godly teenager who was taken from his country as a captive to a world where beliefs and the way of life were very foreign to him. To be a godly teenager in a pagan world is a tough assignment. But Daniel was able to rise to a position of high honor without compromising the truth, which makes it that much harder. Let's look further at Daniel's example of standing against the tide.



A Daniel Separated Himself

Read Daniel 1:1-16. This passage records how the captured youths were treated extremely well. They were taught the letters and language of the Chaldeans, employed in the king's palace and ate and drank of the king's food and wine. Not only this, but the king gave Daniel and his three friends Babylonian names. Daniel, which means "God is the Judge" in Hebrew was changed to Belteshazzar, which means "the protector of life." Bel was the name of a Babylonian god. Hananiah, which in Hebrew means "God is the giver of grace," was changed to Shadrach, which means "the servant of Aku," the moon god worshiped by the Babylonians. Mishaël, which means "he who is comparable to God" was changed to Meshach,

meaning “he who is comparable to Merdoch,” a Babylonian god. And Azariah, which means “help from the Lord” in Hebrew, was changed to Abed-Nego, which means “the servant of Nego,” a Babylonian god.

Why was Nebuchadnezzar being so nice? The youths were, after all, slaves from enemy territory. Superficially, Nebuchadnezzar’s deeds can be seen as acts of kindness and compassion. On a spiritual level however, his kindness was a way to assimilate the youths of Judah into a pagan culture. All this good treatment was in actuality a threat to their faith. By giving them different names, the king was making the youths forsake their former identity, their God and their nation. Fortunately, Daniel and his three friends saw through the king’s schemes and resisted assimilation. What steps did Daniel and his three friends take to retain their faith and identity?

1. They remained watchful

Although Daniel and his three friends were well treated, they remained alert. They recognized that Babylon was a gentile land with practices that were in violation of their faith. The food and wine would have been offered to the Babylonian gods and idols; the food would not have been in accordance with Jewish dietary laws (Cf. Lev 11); and Jewish custom prevented them from eating with gentiles. The youths knew clearly who they were, where they came from and why they were there. Besides knowing themselves, they were aware of their environment and of the things that could jeopardize their faith. May the Lord grant us the faith to know ourselves and to see the world for what it truly is.

2. They made strong resolutions

Daniel and his three friends understood that their purpose in Babylon was not to strive for a good future, enjoy themselves or learn about a new culture. Their purpose was to live a godly life and bring glory to God. To do this, they had to resolve in advance to refrain from the king’s rich food and wine. Because of their strong resolutions and commitment to God, they were greatly blessed. Today, temptations dance into our lives constantly. To overcome them, we need to have decided in advance what our direction and purpose in life are. Many people succumb to sin and evil, not because they do not know that it is wrong, but because they never made strong resolutions beforehand. It is at those very times when we are undecided that we can be easily pressured into doing something that we may live to regret.

3. They were ready to sacrifice themselves

Daniel and his three friends were able to overcome their environment because they were willing to deny themselves of the things of the world for the sake of obeying God. If we are not willing to give up what is important to us, or have the courage to be different from everyone else then it is very difficult to overcome the temptations of the world. But if we keep God’s commands, He will not cause us to lose out.

Reflection:

1. What are the foods that we must abstain from taking today, both materially and spiritually?
2. How do you decline someone’s offer to do something that is in fact sin, when the offer is made out of goodwill?
3. What resolutions have you made to preserve your spiritual identity?
4. What often keeps you from taking a stand for God?



In the Babylonian kingdom, youths without blemish, handsome and skillful in all wisdom were chosen to serve the king. Out of all the youths Daniel and his three friends were better in appearance (Dan 1:15) and possessed wisdom and understanding found to be ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters (Dan 1:20). Furthermore, God bestowed upon Daniel a special gift of interpreting visions and dreams (Dan 1:17). Despite all these outstanding qualities, Daniel remained a very humble person. From what aspects can this be seen?

1. Daniel gave glory to God

Daniel 1-6 records three incidences involving revelations from God (Dan 2, 4, 5). In all of these events, no one but Daniel could interpret the dreams. Despite this, Daniel attributed all wisdom, power, and glory to God (Ps 115:1; Is 48:11). He realized that he was a mere instrument of God to enable the king and his people to know about the God of Israel. 1 Corinthians 2:11 says: “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.”

2. Daniel remembered his friends

Daniel’s humility shone through when he acknowledged his three friends before the king. When God revealed the interpretation to Daniel, he acknowl-

edged that it was the result of all their prayers. Daniel says, "You have now made known to me what "we" asked of You" (Dan 2:17-24). Later, when Daniel was rewarded, he requested that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be promoted too. Unlike the people of the world Daniel did not hoard all the attention or take all the credit. He did not try to elevate himself while suppressing others. The society that we live in encourages individualism and self-accomplishment. People use different means to get to the top even if it means taking the credit for someone else's work. In God's kingdom, it is different. As members of the body of Christ, we need to work together and use our gifts to bring glory to God.

Reflection:

1. How can we promote team spirit?
2. Are there times when you have taken credit for something instead of giving glory to God?
3. How can we maintain a humble spirit even though we are in fact better at some things than others?



C The Friends Were Faithful Unto Death

Read Daniel 3. One of the greatest trials for Daniel's three friends was when King Nebuchadnezzar built a golden statue to be worshiped by all. The height of the statue was about 2,640 cm tall and 264 cm wide (1 cubit being equivalent to 44 cm). Everyone did obeisance to the statue, except Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, Daniel's three friends. The three men faced this difficult trial with extraordinary faith. In fact they could have come up with these reasons to save their lives:

1. We will bow down but not actually worship the idol.
2. We will ask God for forgiveness after this one time.
3. The king has absolute power and we must obey him, God will understand.
4. This is a foreign land so God will excuse us for following the customs of the land.
5. If we get ourselves killed and some heathens take our high positions, they won't help our people in exile.

Although these excuses sound sensible at first, they are in fact very dangerous. They knew that bowing down to the idol violated God's command recorded in Exodus 20:3,4 which says, "You shall have no other gods before me.... You shall not bow down to them or serve them" and that God's commands cannot be com-

promised under any circumstances. These three men possessed such faith because they understood God. They knew that they worshiped the true and living God and they can entrust their lives to Him (2 Tim 1:12; Eph 1:17). They also understood that the value of their faith surpassed everything, even their own lives (Lk 9:23-25). Lastly, they were determined to maintain a sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Cor 11:3).

Reflection:

1. What are the spiritual teachings with respect to the worship of the golden image (cf. Col 3:5; Mt 6:24)?
2. Have you ever given yourself excuses for not obeying God? Share your experience.
3. Have you faced a situation in life where you were led to the "fiery furnace"? Share your experience.



D Daniel Was A Man of Excellent Spirit

Throughout his life, people could observe that Daniel was different. King Nebuchadnezzar described Daniel as one who had the spirit of the holy gods (Dan 4:8-9). Belshazzar's wife commended Daniel as having an excellent spirit (Dan 5:10-12, 6:3). King Darius wanted to set Daniel over his whole kingdom because he could perceive Daniel's fine spiritual virtues. Even the presidents and satraps who sought to find grounds for complaint found no error or fault in him (Dan 6:1-5). In Ezekiel 14:14, Ezekiel, a contemporary prophet of Daniel, compared him to Noah and Job, two other righteous men. How did Daniel maintain a good spirituality?

1. He feared God

What does fearing God mean? The verb to fear in this context does not refer to terror, but deep respect and reverence of God. In order to respect and be in awe of God, we have to understand who God is and who we are. Deuteronomy 10:17 describes God as "God is the God of gods, and Lord of lords, He is the great, the mighty and the terrible God." He is the Creator of the universe; holy, almighty, righteous, pure, all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present and full of mercy (Josh 2:1; Deut 7:21; Ps 116:5). When we understand who God is, we will develop a fear of Him and will listen attentively to His words and apply them to our daily lives. Our goal is to please Him and we will remain within the boundaries set by God. Daniel understood who God was. In his daily life, he made a conscious effort to observe God's commandments (Dan 6:22).

2. He prayed incessantly

Throughout his life, Daniel prayed earnestly three times a day (Ps 55:17). Even when he was over 80 years old, he continued to fast and pray (Dan 9:1-4; 10:12; Deut 9:18-20; Lk 2:36,37). This daily spiritual cultivation enabled Daniel to be close to God and understand the things of God. Furthermore, Daniel did not allow any obstacle or difficulty to take time away from his daily prayers. Oftentimes we allow daily things to distract us from our time with God. Daniel never gave himself any excuse even though he was the prime minister of Babylon. No matter how busy he was or what trials he encountered, he prayed and gave thanks to God always.

Reflection:

1. What is your understanding of fearing God?
2. How can we improve upon our daily prayers?
3. What are some of the things that distract us from our daily Bible reading and prayers?
4. Why did Daniel risk his life to pray to God as usual?



Do Daniel Showed Loyalty to God and Man

1. Daniel was loyal to his king and country

During his life, Daniel not only served under four different monarchies but he held top positions in the various empires. One of the reasons for Daniel's success was that he did not serve for personal or selfish gain. For example, when King Belshazzar promised Daniel gifts, honor and position for interpreting the dream, Daniel replied, "Let your gifts be for yourself and give your rewards to another" (Dan 5:17). Later King Darius made Daniel one of the three presidents because he knew that he could "trust Daniel to ensure that he suffered no loss" (Dan 6:2). As Christians, we must be faithful in our responsibilities. When we work, it is not to fatten our own pockets, or get paid for the least amount of work done. We need to work with the goal of pleasing our employers and with the welfare of the company in mind. Through our diligence and loyalty we can bring glory to God and allow others to know God through us.

2. Daniel was loyal to God

Daniel was a loyal and faithful prophet of God in a gentile country. When King Nebuchadnezzar dreamt of the tree, Daniel was not afraid to reveal the true meaning of the dream even though he had to speak words of doom (Dan 4:27). Also in Daniel 5:17ff, he was not afraid to rebuke King Belshazzar for

his sins. Daniel did not beat around the bush, or try to soften the truth (Dan 5:22-23). He simply spoke whatever the Lord wanted him to convey even if it meant risking his life. In prophet Jeremiah's time there were certain false prophets who preached what the people wanted to hear even though they were untruths (Jer 28). They preached according to their imagination, hoping to gain favor from the people. On the other hand, Jeremiah, (a true prophet of God) spoke the truth even though it was unpopular and he was punished because of it. Sometimes, we are afraid of certain consequences and so we shade the truth or keep quiet. But to be faithful workers of God, we should imitate the courage of Daniel in knowing how to stand up for God and speak the truth directly and tactfully (Dan 4:19).

Reflection:

1. How was Daniel faithful to his king and country?
2. How was Daniel faithful to God?
3. Has there been a time where you had to stand up for your principles? How did you react?

C H E C K F O R U N D E R S T A N D I N G



Due to the nature of this lesson, the Check For Understanding questions can be found after each Bible Study section under the heading "Reflection".

L I F E A P P L I C A T I O N



Dear Solomon

The youth group in your local church publishes a monthly newsletter. One of the features is Dear Solomon, where readers are invited to write in their questions or concerns regarding faith and everyday life. As the editor of this section, read the following letters and write a response to your readers.

Case 1

Dear Solomon,

I have a good friend at school called Pete. He also happens to be a homosexual.

Aside from his sexual orientation, Pete is a warm, sensitive and funny guy. I know from passages in the Bible such as Romans 1:26-27 and Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 that homosexuality is wrong and an abomination in God's sight. Pete has come to church once, but he doesn't like the attitudes that other people in church have when they find out about his sexual orientation. I believe that God is an all-loving God who accepts us just as we are despite our sins and weaknesses. I'm annoyed at the narrow and judgmental attitude that our believers have. The church needs to open up and embrace all peoples and be tolerant of differences.

Signed,
Angry and Hurt

Dear Angry and Hurt,

While it is correct that we should not show partiality and to accept all who wish to come before the Lord, tolerance of sin is wrong. Our society today is increasingly tolerant of sin. Many Christians today compromise their faith with the wider social belief that every way of life is legitimate and acceptable, as long as everyone is happy and that no one should pass judgment on others. They see those upholding the absolute truth and keeping the word of God as being narrow-minded and arrogant. When the word of God has less prominence in our lives, relativism and individualism creeps in. When this occurs, we tend to shift our focus away from God and His church, toward our non-believing friends and their attitudes. It is imperative therefore, to root ourselves in the word of God. Your angry feelings are understandable but friendship and the truth are two separate issues. Homosexuality is not a difference. It is a sin - a violation of God's command. But if Pete has a genuine and sincere heart to repent, turns to God and forsakes his former ways, God will welcome him with open arms.

Case 2

Dear Solomon,

Maybe you can help sort out something my mom and I have been constantly bickering over— what I wear. She's always complaining that my clothes are too short, too tight, too revealing. I tell her that's what's on the racks these days and that it's a matter of individual taste. Besides, what we wear has nothing to do with salvation. God looks the heart and not at our outward appearance. Don't you agree?

Signed,
Fashion Conscious

Dear Fashion Conscious,

Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:23 says, "All things are lawful, but not all things are beneficial." Yes, what we wear does not concern salvation, and we do have

rights to individual tastes. But have you ever questioned why your mother is on your case so often? Then ask yourself, "Why do I dress the way I do? What is controlling my choice of clothes?"

How we dress conveys a certain message. The fashion of the world is a reflection of the values of the world. What society values are beauty, sexuality, intelligence and money. Fashion is designed with these values in mind. People dress to enhance their beauty and have greater sex appeal. Clothes are tighter, more revealing, and shorter to show off the body. This does not mean that as Christians we have to resort to wearing a burka. But, we do need to take a closer look at ourselves and examine what it is that's really influencing our choices. If we compare the way we dress with our friends or the pop stars in magazines, would we see a resemblance? Sometimes, unknowingly, we have allowed television and our friends to have a subtle but powerful influence over our dress sense, attitudes and morality. Most importantly, pray about this matter. If you are walking with God, the Holy Spirit will let you know if something is good or bad for you.

Case 3

Dear Solomon,

Each Christmas the staff at the place where I work has this tradition where we get a secret Santa. For the entire week we buy small gifts or do a good deed for each other while maintaining our anonymity. At a Christmas luncheon at the end of the week, each person tries to guess who their secret Santa is. Knowing our church stance on Christmas, I did not participate in all of this. I sat there during lunch watching everybody laughing and opening gifts. I prayed I would go unnoticed. Tough luck! Someone noticed that I did not have any gift and asked me why. In front of everyone I had to explain that I did not celebrate Christmas. I returned home that night thinking that next year I'm going to take part in the festivities. Would it be wrong to join in the festivities without believing in it?

Signed,
Embarrassed and Left Out.

Dear Embarrassed and Left Out,

Firstly, give yourself a pat on the back for your courage in standing up to your beliefs. Who said it would be easy?! We may not face persecutions like Daniel. However, professing a belief in Jesus does involve risks. As followers of Christ we are different and we need to be mentally ready to stand alone. God wants us to be set apart from other nations, which means that in our beliefs, our characters, and our lifestyles we need to be different from that of the world. In this way we can shine the light in an unbelieving world.

Case 4

Dear Solomon,

My best friend is Jake who is not yet a Christian. As for me, I was invited to the True Jesus Church by Kyle. Not long after attending services there, I received the Holy Spirit. I later got baptized and changed many of my former bad habits. The problem however is Jake. He's upset that I can't hang out with him on Saturdays like I used to. He's asking me how come I'm all holy now and why we never go to the places we used to, to check out the girls. He wants our friendship to go back to the way it was. Last month, he asked me to go to a dance party at this friend's house. I declined and this infuriated him so much that he didn't talk to me. Eventually, I agreed and have started going back to the places we used to go to. I feel like I've betrayed God by going back to those places and doing the things I used to before I knew Him. At the same time, I feel I can't disappoint Jake because that hurts our friendship. What do you suggest?

Signed,
Pressured

Dear Pressured,

Friendship is one of God's finest gifts. It seems that you and Jake go back a long way and the friendship means a lot to you. But since you found God you must think over your values and priorities. The conflict you are experiencing is because you and Jake now have different outlooks in life. Your values such as how you spend your money and time, and how you treat the opposite sex is different from the past (Phil 3:8). The Bible tells us that when we are baptized we put on Christ and so we need to imitate Him in all that we do. This means that we need to place God above all other things, even relationships that are dear to us (Jas 4:4). Your friend may be important to you, but there are times when you need to say "No" especially when you are asked to overstep the boundaries of the Bible. We need to hold onto our principles. Explain to Jake why things cannot be as they were in the past. If he is indeed a good friend, he will respect you and who knows whether he will come to believe in the Lord. However, if he doesn't listen, we have to be careful that we are not lured back into our past sins. 1 Corinthians 15:33-34 says, "Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits.' Awake to righteousness, and do not sin" May God grant you the discernment to do what is right (Phil 4:9, 10).

Suggested Reading:

"A Day On Campus," *Manna* Issue 34, Jan-Mar 2001
"Keeping Your Identity," *Manna* Issue 37, Oct-Dec 2001

REFLECTION & PRAYER



From the history of the chosen people, it is clear that God desired His people to be a blessed and holy nation. The messages of the prophets, the teachings of our Lord, and the epistles of the disciples all express the same desire of the Lord: Leave! Separate yourselves from them! And yet throughout history, the chosen ones did not separate themselves from the world. When the Israelites asked Samuel for a king, they simply wanted to be like all the nations (1 Sam 8:5). Today God too cries out to us, Come out of her, my people! What will you choose to do?