

**Good Morning...**

**Intro**

I have a pretty simple assignment this morning...I am supposed to make you want to sign up for a Life Group—Let's just get that out of the way right up front. (Life Groups are starting back up on the second Sunday of August and I think that everyone should be a part of a Life Group! So sign up for a Life Group!)

More than that, I am supposed to help you understand why living with a deep and robust connection to Christian community is important...Why "Life Together" matters.

This should be easy for me...This is like the top line of my job description...and I have all kinds of scriptures and stories and models that explain and describe the importance of Community...But, this one wasn't easy...

Now, I don't know if you have ever written a sermon...or wondered what it is like to write a sermon, but for me—sometimes it is almost like it is a direct download from the Holy Spirit—It just comes to me and all I have to do is capture it...and sometimes it is very different—this was one of those "Different" ones.

I felt like the Holy Spirit kind of nudged me towards a particular story...(and that is a good sign) so I read that story and thought ...“What are you talking about God...that's not what I am supposed to talk about!” Then God said, “Read it again.” So I read it again...and I thought...“What is wrong with God?!”

Well, by now the clock was ticking and I was getting worried...so I started to help out a bit...I looked at some other Bible stories...started reading through some old sermons and I thought

“Maybe I could talk about that...Maybe that bit over there...Maybe I could use this part...” but it still wasn’t right...and then God said “Read it again...”

And so I read it again...and this time it was like there was a bit that I hadn’t seen the first few times...and there was a part that I understood a little differently...and there was a particular detail that fit into the story in a different way than I had seen before...

So, this morning I want to invite you to take a journey with me through the first 3 chapters of the book of Daniel as we consider **Why We Need to Do Life Together**

## **Part 1**

- The book of Daniel opens with the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians sometime in the 6th century before Christ.
- At that time, King Nebuchadnezzar ordered that some of the best and brightest of the Israelites be taken back to Babylon to be trained as leaders.
  - This seems to be a common practice for conquering armies because it both incorporated the best and brightest of a captured people, and it also took away the most likely leaders for a future revolt.
  - Our heroes for this morning were some of these guys who were carted off to Babylon.

### **(Daniel 1:3-7)**

<sup>3</sup> Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah’s royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. <sup>4</sup> “Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men,” he said. “Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good judgment, and

are suited to serve in the royal palace. Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon.”<sup>5</sup> The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for three years, and then they would enter the royal service.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. <sup>7</sup> The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names:

Daniel was called Belteshazzar.

Hananiah was called Shadrach.

Mishael was called Meshach.

Azariah was called Abednego.

### -Daniel 1:3-7

- Now, these stories have all the things that make them fit nicely in a Kid’s Bible...they are pretty short, they have some good action elements, and they all wrap up with a pretty happy ending...so we tend to clean them up quite a lot and make kid’s stories out of them.
  - But make no mistake, this was a nasty process!
  - These young men were captives. Their nation had been conquered, their homes destroyed, they were almost certainly orphans because their families were killed, they were carted off to a foreign land and this reprogramming was not optional...
  - The dehumanizing nature of it all is hinted at by the renaming...
    - **Daniel**—“God is my Judge” → **Belteshazzar**—Bel’s Prince
    - **Hananiah**— “God has been gracious” → **Shadrach**—“Inspired or illumined by *Rak* the Babylonian Sun-god”.
    - **Mishael**— “who is what God is?” → **Meshach**—“Who is like the Babylonian goddess *Shak*?”

- **Azariah**— “The one God helps” → **Abed-nego**—“Servant of the shining fire.”
  - The purpose of this process was to completely wipe out all history and identity from before...it didn’t matter who they were or where they had come from...these young men were to be completely indoctrinated in their new home.
- What I want you to see is that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah needed each other because **they needed someone who knew their real names!**
    - They needed to be around people who knew who they were...who knew where they had come from and who remembered their God.

## I. We need to do Life Together because You need someone who knows your real name!

- A. I don’t want to pretend that the pressure or opposition that we face today is anything like the pressure that these young men faced in Babylon...but have you noticed that the way of Jesus is totally upside down when compared to the kingdom of this world?
  1. Loving your enemy doesn’t make any sense without Jesus!
  2. Forgiveness looks a lot like weakness to many in the world.
  3. Grace, mercy, humility, gentleness, honesty...these feel like liabilities rather than strengths in the world we live in.
- B. Living like Jesus in a world that is so unlike Him can be disorienting, and we need people in our lives that can remind us of our real names...
  1. We need to be around people who understand what it means to be committed to following the way of Jesus ...

2. People who know us and know our stories...people who can speak into our lives and encourage us...
  3. And people who will help us to remember and celebrate the One-True God!
- C. In a world full of people who will be more than happy to give you a new name that suits them or builds up their kingdom...**you need someone who knows your real name!**

## Part 2

- After a bit of a rough start, Daniel and the boys manage to do pretty well...as a matter of fact, the end of chapter 1 tells us: *Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom. (Daniel 1:20)*
- But pretty soon, things took a turn for the worse... King Nebuchadnezzar had some disturbing dreams and he called in his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers, and demanded that they tell him what he had dreamed.
  - They said “Sure, just tell us the dream and we will give you its meaning.”
  - But the King said “I don’t think you understand...YOU tell me both the dream and its meaning...or I will have you all killed!”

<sup>10</sup> *The astrologers replied to the king, “No one on earth can tell the king his dream! And no king, however great and powerful, has ever asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter, or astrologer! <sup>11</sup> The king’s demand is impossible. No one except the gods can tell you your dream, and they do not live here among people.”*

<sup>12</sup> *The king was furious when he heard this, and he ordered that all the wise men of Babylon be executed. <sup>13</sup> And because of the king’s decree, men were sent to find and kill Daniel and his friends.*

<sup>14</sup> When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, came to kill them, Daniel handled the situation with wisdom and discretion. <sup>15</sup> He asked Arioch, "Why has the king issued such a harsh decree?" So Arioch told him all that had happened. <sup>16</sup> Daniel went at once to see the king and requested more time to tell the king what the dream meant.

<sup>17</sup> Then Daniel went home and told his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah what had happened. <sup>18</sup> He urged them to ask the God of heaven to show them his mercy by telling them the secret, so they would not be executed along with the other wise men of Babylon. -Daniel

## **2:10-18**

- Again, we see how difficult the situation was for Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah...The king was perfectly willing to give his advisors an impossible task and then have them all killed when they failed.
  - I see 2 possibilities for what was behind this...
  - It could be that the king was fed up with the manipulations and tricks of the advisors around him...this was his way of cleaning the slate.
  - It could be that the lives of these men meant so little to him that he would have them all killed on a whim...
  - Either way, our 4 friends were about to be killed through no fault of their own...and the only way out was an impossible task.
- Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah needed each other because **they needed someone to pray with in the face of the impossible!**
  - The only way their lives could be spared is for God to do a miracle...so they called on each other to pray!

II. **We need to do Life Together because You need someone who can pray for you, and with you when you face the impossible.**

- A. You probably aren't about to be executed by a mad king, but there is a high probability that you are going to face some difficult circumstances in the days and weeks to come...some of you might be facing something that appears to be all but impossible right now.
1. It could be the result of the foolish and destructive actions of those around you...
  2. It could be the result of your own foolish and destructive choices...
  3. It could be that you are just facing difficulty because the world is broken...
  4. Whatever the reason, if God doesn't intervene in your situation, you are not going to make it...
- B. We need to do what Daniel did...we need to go to our friends and ask them to pray!
1. **You need someone who can pray for you and with you when you face the impossible!**

### Part 3

- God tells Daniel the dream and the interpretation, and the king is so impressed that he made Daniel ruler over the whole province of Babylon, as well as chief over all his wise men. At Daniel's request, the king appointed Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to be in charge of all the affairs of the province of Babylon.
- But once again, things go wrong in our story...
- King Nebuchadnezzar had a giant 90-foot golden statue built and he "invited" all his officials to the dedication ceremony. He issued a decree that when the musical instruments are played, everyone must bow down to worship the image that the king had set-up. (Obviously this will be a problem for Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, because they only worship the One-True God). The decree explained that anyone who did not worship the king's golden statue would be thrown into a blazing furnace.

- Sure enough, when the musical instruments were played, everyone bowed down and worshiped the image that the king had set up—everyone except Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.
- Well, it didn't take too long for word of their disobedience to reach the king...and this is how he reacted:

*<sup>13</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him. When they were brought in, <sup>14</sup> Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? <sup>15</sup> I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?"*

*<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. <sup>18</sup> But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up." -Daniel 3:13-18*

- This didn't make the king feel any better. He flew into a rage and had the furnace heated 7 times hotter! Then he had Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah tied up and thrown into the fire. (The furnace was so hot that it killed the guards who threw them into the fire!)
- But then...

*<sup>24</sup> But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, "Didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?"*  
*"Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did," they replied.*

<sup>25</sup> “Look!” Nebuchadnezzar shouted. “I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!”

<sup>26</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”

So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire. <sup>27</sup> Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn’t even smell of smoke! **-Daniel 3:24-27**

- Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had a difficult choice to make, and they clearly understood the consequences of their choice. They would either bow to the demand of the king, or they would be cast into the fire.
  - And they understood that God could save them from the fire...but they had no assurance that God would save them from the fire...but they understood that they could never bow to the king’s demands either way.
- Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah needed each other because **they needed someone who could face the fire with them.**
  - They needed someone to walk with them in the fire (that was Jesus’ job...) but before that they needed someone to face the fire with them.
  - They needed someone to say “We will NEVER bow to your statue! (Right guys?)”

### III. **We need to do Life Together because You need someone who can face the fire with you.**

A. Have you ever needed someone to face the fire with you?

1. Have you ever needed someone to say “We will NEVER do that! (Right? We aren’t going to do that right?)”

- B. Have you ever faced a choice where it was clear what the right thing to do was, but it was also clear what it would cost you to do the right thing? Aren't those choices a little easier when you have someone facing that fire with you?
1. Look, God never promised you that everything would be great! God never said that if you served Him and had a lot of faith nothing bad would happen. (As a matter of fact the Bible is full of stories that show us just the opposite is true!)
  2. God did promise that He would never stop loving you and that He would never leave you. He did promise you that when you seek Him you will find Him. He did promise that if you put His Kingdom first He would take care of you. He did promise that if you believed in Him He will give you eternal life. He did promise that if you admitted to your sins He will forgive them and wipe them away, no matter how bad they are. But, He never promised that life would be easy.
- C. Sometimes God asks us to do difficult things. Sometimes obedience is costly. That is why **you need someone who can face the fire with you!**

#### **IV. Shameless plug**

- A. OK, real quick...One of the places where we do life together here at church is Life Groups.
- B. Life Groups are in home small groups that meet on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday nights of the month during the school year.
- C. Next Sunday night we are going to have our Life Group Kick Off picnic starting at 6:00 here at the church...If you aren't part of a Life Group, we want you to come out and sign up for one...If you are part of a Life Group, we want you to come and celebrate with us...
- D. If you are interested in hosting or leading a Life Group, please fill out a card on the information desk so I can be talk with you.

## CONCLUSION (Band)

- Life Groups are great, but let me show you one more thing...
- We said: **You need someone who knows your real name!**
  - Jesus says this in **Revelation 2:17** *Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it.*
  - Jesus knows your real name! Like your “Real name”...The name He has set aside just for you. He knows you and He knows your story and He has a name for you!
  - You need someone who knows your real name and Jesus knows your REAL name!
- We said: **You need someone who can pray for you, and with you when you face the impossible...**
  - **Hebrews 7:25** *Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.*
  - **Romans 8:34** *Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God’s right hand, pleading for us.*
  - Jesus forever intercedes for you with the Father! Jesus is standing at the right hand of God pleading for you!
  - You need someone to pray for you, and Jesus is always praying for you!
- We said: **You need someone who can face the fire with you**

- You might remember when I said “They needed someone to walk with them in the fire...that was Jesus’ job”...
  - There is good reason to believe that the fourth man that King Nebuchadnezzar saw was more than an angel...that it was actually Jesus!
- Listen to what god said in **Isaiah 43:2** *When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.*
- You need someone who can face the fire with you...Jesus will walk with you IN the fire!
- If you are trying to do faith all alone, get in a Life Group and get connected to some people who can help you...
- If you are trying to do Life alone...come surrender your life to Jesus and let Him fill you with everything that you need!

## **PRAY**

**There is nothing you could ever do...**