

Fire and Faithfulness

Session 1: God’s in Control

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: As believers, we can still live and thrive in a world that hates God by trusting God is in control.

Head Change: To know that God can be trusted in both the good and difficult times.

Heart Change: To feel confident in our obedience to God as we maneuver through an unrighteous culture.

Life Change: To accept and trust that God is in control.

OPEN

What are some common cultural issues that cause division among Christians and the world today? What does it mean for you to be countercultural?

As believers, our loyalty, sacrifice, and obedience to God can be seen as strange because the standards of the world are often different from the standard God has for his people. This tension can leave many people wrestling with pressure to compromise their beliefs to avoid uncomfortable and difficult circumstances.

So how do we stand firm in our faith when pressure from our culture feels too heavy? In this series, we’re going to hear from author and *Duck Dynasty* star Sadie Robertson Huff as she helps us answer the question, “How do we live well in a world that hates God?”

REVIEW

Sadie began the session by asking if it's possible for believers to thrive in our world today, considering how our culture hates God. **How would you answer her question? How has it been easy or difficult for you to live life as a Christian in our culture?**

Daniel found himself adapting to a brand-new culture with rules, leadership, and values that opposed God's ways. **In what ways did the Babylonian culture display hatred for God? How did King Nebuchadnezzar's actions contribute to this hatred?**

King Nebuchadnezzar desired to have young men of good repute serve him among those he captured in the invasion which included Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. **How did Sadie describe Daniel and his friends? What was their new role in the Babylonian kingdom?**

Daniel had plenty of reasons to be afraid. His people were in captivity, his name and identity were changed, and he was chosen to serve a king who did not believe in his God. **In what ways have you had to trust God while living or serving in a non-Christian environment? In what ways was it a comfortable or uncomfortable experience?**

Many times, being faithful to God in a culture like ours is all about our reactions. When stress and difficulty arise, our response can reveal a lot about our faith in God. **What did Daniel's response to the king's rules reveal about him?**

As believers, we're always going to be put in situations where we must choose our faith in God over the pressure to conform to the world's standard. **In what ways did Daniel's choice to faithfully obey God's food laws, instead of the king's, help him in the end?**

Choosing God's way over the world's way can be hard—especially when those in authority expect you to make certain decisions. But Daniel and his friends show us that it's worth it to stand firm in what you believe in. **In what ways have you had to choose God's way over the world's way? What kind of experiences have led you to make countercultural decisions?**

Daniel had reason to compromise his faith, but his reaction was to obey God and risk upsetting the king. When under pressure, our reactions can reveal a lot about where we stand. **How do you typically react to unforeseen circumstances? What's your first instinct?**

Sadie told a story about her grandfather's bout with cancer. As hard as it was to deal with, it helped her to trust the Lord and his Word despite a hard situation. **In what ways is praying through a hard circumstance easy or difficult for you? How do you typically deal with difficult situations?**

As Sadie stated, a diagnosis from the doctor, losing your job, and even a global pandemic are all things within God's knowledge and control. **What difference does it make to know that God is not blind to what's happening around us? In what ways do God's knowledge and sovereignty comfort you in difficult times?**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

We know that God is in control, but our circumstances can often make us feel like God is far away. But Daniel and his friends show us that having faith in God despite our circumstances is worth it.

Read Daniel 1:1–7.

Daniel and his friends were exiled away from their families, under pagan rule, and forced to assimilate into a new culture. They more than likely were dealing with discomfort and lack of clarity for the future. **How have you been able to relate to Daniel’s situation, whether currently or in the past? In what way does his story resonate with you?**

Daniel and his friends were chosen to serve King Nebuchadnezzar, which included learning Babylonian literature, eating the king’s choice foods, and three years of training. They also had their names changed, which stripped them of their Hebrew identity. **In what ways have you felt the culture today try to shape your identity? In what ways, if any, do you struggle to guard your identity in Christ from the world?**

Read Daniel 1:8–21.

Daniel didn’t want to defile his body with the food that was offered to him and asked to be given foods that would allow him to honor God. **What was Daniel’s response to the new food laws? What did he ask of the commander and why?**

Despite the king’s pagan rules and regulations, Daniel remained kind and respectful when asking permission from the commander to not defile himself with the king’s food. **What can we learn from Daniel about speaking up on behalf of our convictions? In what ways does he show us that obedience is better than compromise?**

Daniel and his friends chose to keep the food laws that were part of their faith instead of eating the diet of the king. They were faithful to God and kept their convictions despite being given different rules within the king’s court. **What were some of the key things that changed in Daniel and his friends’ lives due to their decision to stand firm? Why were these changes significant?**

Horizontal lines for writing.

Verse 9 says that Daniel was given favor with his overseer, which helped him in the long run. **How does Daniel's story show God's control during scary or difficult times? In what ways have you seen God's hand in your life through the favor of a boss, coach, or teacher?**

The overseer tested them with the food Daniel requested for ten days and in the end, they were healthier and had a better appearance than the other young men who were on the king's diet. **In what ways does the outcome of Daniel's test display God's control?**

Verse 17 explains that God gave them great understanding and skills, in all of the Babylonian literature and wisdom. Daniel specifically had understanding in all visions and dreams, which made him helpful and valuable to the king. **In what ways has God used your gifts and talents to help others?**

Daniel and his friends became the wisest in the kingdom and were able to use their God-given talents to serve under the Babylonian rule. **What could it look like for you to thank God for the skills and talents he's given you? How can you continue to use your gifts in both Christian and worldly environments?**

The beginning of Daniel and his friends' story reminds us that God is in control. Think about some areas in your life that you tend to try and control. **What could it look like for you to surrender all control to God in those areas this week?**

LAST WORD

God is always in control, even when it doesn't look like it. Like Daniel, we may find ourselves in situations that are out of our control, feeling the pressure to conform to the world's standards. But Daniel and his friends showed us that it is possible to trust that God is still on our side when he seems absent and our circumstances are tiresome.

Trusting God's faithfulness despite our feelings is the first step on the journey to our faithful obedience.

DEEPER WALK

Read: Read Daniel 1 in one sitting. Take note of anything that may seem important as we continue through the upcoming sessions.

Pray: Pray that God would help you release whatever you might be trying to control in your life. Thank him for being in control and ask him to help you surrender.

Memorize: Memorize Sadie's statement: "We can trust everyday wisdom and guidance that we find in the Word of God. This Word is faithful because God is faithful."

Write: On a sheet of paper, write down three ways you could choose God's way over the world's way as you make your decisions this week.