



Daniel: Pursuing Integrity
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Spiritual Resiliency

DANIEL I

There's a whole field in the social sciences that studies people who have experienced suffering or major crises, in an attempt to identify the consequences of such trauma on the human mind and spirit. Researchers have studied, among others, POWs from the Korean War and the Vietnam War as well as fifty-two hostages who were held fourteen months in Iran.

As you might expect, these studies showed that a lot of people became defeated by such difficult ordeals. Their spirit withered and they simply gave up. But the studies also made a surprising finding: many people don't just survive traumatic times; they actually seem to thrive and grow through them. For these people, trauma, loss, and pain actually enlarge their capacity to handle problems—they become stronger as a result. Researchers have come to call these folks “resilient” and the capacity to thrive in challenging and difficult situations “resiliency.”

When we look at the life of Daniel, we see one of the most spiritually resilient persons in human history. Daniel lost virtually everything. But, through it all, he exuded a sense of strength, confidence, and hope in God. Such resiliency can be a model for each of us as we face the tough times of life.

Making the Connection

1. Tell about a person you know who has faced deep pain and loss in life but has displayed a resilient spirit.

Share a time you faced a difficult situation but felt the presence of God sustain you and grant resiliency as you walked through that season of your life.

Knowing and Being Known

Read Daniel 1:1 – 21

2. What were some of the losses, changes, and traumas that Daniel and his friends faced, and how could these experiences have deflated and discouraged them?
3. In the midst of this tragic time in Israel's history, how do you see God still present and at work among his people?

Spiritually Resilient People Resolve

Spiritually resilient people have a profound level of personal resolve to honor their deepest values. They refuse to live as passive victims of circumstances. They are determined that they will not get tangled up in things that might cause them to betray their deepest commitments. Ultimately, their resolve is to honor God no matter the price.

Daniel modeled this kind of resolve. If you read Daniel 1:1–7 it appears that the Babylonians are in the driver’s seat. Nebuchadnezzar determines to conquer Israel. He decides to cart off its most sacred objects and take the most gifted young people as prisoners of war. He enrolls these young POWs in his leadership academy and decides on the entrance criteria and subject matter. The dean of the school determines their names, their new identities, their menu. Daniel and his friends have no say, input, or influence on any of this.

The easiest thing in the world would have been for Daniel to feel like he was just a passive victim of forces way too big for him. But one characteristic of a spiritually resilient person is resolve, and Daniel was about to express this—even if it cost him big time! Verse 8 says, “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.” In the midst of all the determining and demanding of King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel made a decision ... he resolved in his heart.

Read Daniel 1:1 – 10

4. Have you ever done something that was difficult, unpopular, or went against the grain of a cultural norm? Describe what happened.

How did your resolve impact you and the people around you?

5. Describe a situation in which you resolved to do something God-honoring, but discovered it was (or is) hard to live out the commitment.

How can your group members pray for you and encourage you to stand strong in this specific area of your life?

Spiritually Resilient People Respond

Daniel's resolve was solid in his heart. But resolve alone was not enough. He also had to respond ... he had to do something! So he went to the dean of the school to discuss the meal plan. Daniel was willing to accept the name change and the new clothes, and he was ready to learn a new language, but he resolved not to become "defiled" by eating the king's rich food.

We don't know exactly why Daniel refused to eat the food. It could have been related to the Jewish ceremonial laws about diet. Maybe the king's food had been offered to idols ... this was not uncommon in ancient times. Whatever the reason, Daniel knew he needed to draw a line, to take a stand. So he responded by presenting a specific course of action to those who oversaw his training, education, and diet. He showed great wisdom as he laid out a plan that would allow him and his friends to eat different food; he even gave a proposed timeline to confirm that the results would be agreeable to all the parties concerned. What an amazing example of an effective response that grew out of a firm resolve!

Read Daniel 1:11 – 17

- 6. Write down an area of your life in which you resolve to do something you truly believe will honor God:

Area of resolve: _____

Next, write down two responses (actions) that will be required if you are going to live out this resolve:

Response: _____

Response: _____

- 7. Describe your area of resolve and your responses to others in the group.

What are some things that could get in the way of you living out this resolve, and how might you prepare for these roadblocks?

Spiritually Resilient People Relate

Spiritually resilient people are committed to living in community. They recognize that having others around them for support, encouragement, and accountability can mean the difference between life and death. For Daniel, he found this network in a small group he formed with three friends: Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. In a strange land, they had a safe haven in each other.

Julius Segal, a gifted researcher in the area of resiliency, tells a story about a man who experienced this need for community at a staggering level. Vice Admiral James Stockdale served 2,714 days as a POW in Vietnam. Through these years he experienced isolation, pain, and torment like most of us can't begin to imagine. On one occasion his captors shackled him in glaring sunshine for three blistering days while guards beat him to keep him from sleeping. After being beaten, Stockdale heard a towel snapping out a secret message in a code the POWs had devised. Four simple but unforgettable letters ... G.B.U.S. Jim's fellow POWs were saying to him: "God bless you, Stockdale." Julius Segal explains that for these men, the briefest experiences of community, of being connected, offered lifesaving hope.

8. What is one relational network you have built and nurtured that helps you remain healthy and resilient in the journey of life?

9. How might group members offer a growing level of support to each other?

Spiritually Resilient People Remember

Spiritually resilient people are careful to remember that their life, and even their suffering, has meaning and purpose in the eyes of God. Researchers say that one of the factors which causes people to give up is believing their suffering has no meaning or purpose. Many times it is not the intensity of the suffering that crushes the spirit; it's the meaninglessness of it.

For Daniel and his friends, the key was to remember that God was still on the throne working through all of the circumstances, even when things looked hopeless. They needed to remember that God had a plan for them and their nation. As they remembered these truths, they could endure the painful loss and challenges of being strangers in a strange land.

10. Tell about a time when God's grace and presence helped you through a difficult situation or life experience.

How does remembering God's help in the past strengthen you for the future?

11. The Bible consistently calls us to pass on stories of God's faithfulness to the next generations—our children and grandchildren. If you grew up with an older person in your life who told you stories of faith (from the Bible and their

own life experiences), how did this person help shape your understanding of God's presence and power?

Name a younger person God has placed in your life and describe how you can be more intentional about sharing stories of faith with this person.

Celebrating and Being Celebrated

Read the following Bible passage and then lift up prayers of thanks and celebration for those who have passed on the faith to you: parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, pastors, Sunday school teachers, or anyone who shared stories of faith and inspired you to walk with Jesus.

What we have heard and known,
what our fathers have told us.
We will not hide them from their children;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
He decreed statutes for Jacob
and established the law in Israel,
which he commanded our forefathers
to teach their children,
so the next generation would know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn would tell their children.

Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds
but would keep his commands. (Psalm 78:3–7)

Loving and Being Loved

Your small group serves as a place where you can relate and connect with other followers of Jesus. By gathering together to study the Bible, pray, and learn we create space for friendship to be forged and love to grow. In addition to your formal group sessions, consider scheduling a time to go out to dinner, see a play, spend an afternoon at a park, or engage in some other group activity. Let this informal time become yet another opportunity to grow deeper friendships with other group members.

Serving and Being Served

The story of Vice Admiral James Stockdale is a vivid example of how community, even the encouragement of a message sent with snapping towels, can offer hope in a dark moment. As a group, identify a person in your church or community who is facing a time of ongoing struggle and pain. Then decide on a practical, tangible way your group can “snap out” a message of love and blessing to this person.