

Life: Develop conviction

October 2, 2015

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Oct. 18 focuses on Daniel 1:3-5, 8-13, 17-19.*

Which side of the cake do you eat first, the cake side or the icing side? It's been said those who eat the cake side first have learned how to delay gratification. Usually, people prefer the icing side of a piece of cake. Delaying gratification means eating the cake-only side first, then the icing side. These individuals discipline their own lives, and they follow their convictions.

Culture expects you to assimilate (Daniel 1:3-5)

Through no fault of his own, Daniel found himself captive in Babylon, a foreign land having a foreign culture and different gods. Religion permeated every area of society. Daniel would have to learn how to live in this land and remain faithful to the God he worshipped.

Daniel was selected to serve in the king's court. He was young, handsome and intelligent, which meant he held high potential for assimilation into the Babylonian cause. Orders were issued to the chief of the court officials to train Daniel and others in the ways of Babylon.

Surely, it would be no stretch of the truth to imagine Daniel as somewhat uncertain about what the future held. Questions certainly would have abounded in a keen mind like his. What was going to happen? What would he be forced to do? What compromises would he be required to make? How would he be mistreated if he failed to live up to his captors' expectations? The answer to these questions lay in God's hands, and Daniel's trust in God was about to be put to the test.

Much of what would be expected of Daniel was innocuous. Taking up the language and literature of the land, Daniel would face no challenges to his principles, and one would think eating the food of a foreign land would have caused no demands on a person's convictions, either. But, for Daniel in Babylon, that would not be the case.

Draw the line where you will not compromise (Daniel 1:8-13)

To strengthen the new recruits to the royal court, the chief in command of the court officials gave his charges the best food Babylon had to offer. Daniel didn't see it that way. What he saw in the food and drink that was wrong never is stated specifically in Scripture. Knowing what was wrong with the food isn't the point anyway. Knowing something was wrong is the point. He would not accept the spiritual junk food of the Babylonians and resisted assimilation into its culture.

Daniel and his friends would not eat and drink what was served. This decision went against the order of the king, and it placed the chief in charge of the court officials in a predicament. If Daniel and his friends refused to eat, then their physical bodies would suffer and their poor health would become apparent to all. The king would know of their condition and blame the chief for failing to follow orders.

Understanding the situation, Daniel suggested a test for 10 days. During that time, Daniel and his friends would eat only vegetables and drink only water. If they looked no worse for their diet, then they would be allowed to continue to eat according to their custom.

In a circumstance where one's convictions are challenged, divine help is needed and required. Daniel needed God to work, and he did. God caused the Babylonian official to show favor and compassion toward Daniel. The test was accepted. For 10 days, they would be allowed to eat vegetables and drink water—nothing else.

Serve and stand for the Lord no matter what the culture does (Daniel 1:17-19)

At the end of the 10-day test period, Daniel and his friends appeared healthy and well-nourished. They even looked better than those who had eaten the royal fare.

No one should be misled. The passage doesn't address nutrition. The message of the passage is God worked to produce the robust health of Daniel and his friends. God showed himself trustworthy. Daniel and his friends trusted their health to God, and God answered in full.

This point must be understood: To stand firm in one's convictions while living in a world that constantly seeks to force its inhabitants to compromise their convictions takes a good deal of wisdom, for it is an incredibly difficult endeavor. In fact, divine resources are needed. God must work or failure will come.

The culture in which Daniel lived changed. He was geographically moved into a different culture. Another way a person can live in a different culture is to experience a cultural transformation. No geographic move is required since it is the culture itself that is changing.

Many see changes in American culture. These changes have brought new challenges for Christians. Certainly, today's culture does not help the church make disciples of Jesus Christ as it once did. The church no longer is a dominant force in America.

Daniel stands as an example of one who held to his convictions in the face of a different culture. First, he understood his convictions and how they related to his everyday life. Second, he did not want his behavior in holding his convictions to harm others, such as the leader of the court officials. Finally, he trusted God to work in his life, and his trust went to the point of expectation. He expected God to work.

Where do you see Christians needing to hold on to their convictions? How are they treating other people as they hold to these convictions? Where do you see God working in these situations?