

SESSION 3

STAND COURAGEOUSLY



When have you seen someone be courageous?

QUESTION #1
© 2015 LifeWay

#BSFLgamechanger

Be ready and willing to stand for God.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Strange as it may seem, many people learned their first lessons about courage from the Cowardly Lion.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Cowardly Lion sang “If I Only Had the Nerve”—a song bemoaning his fear of rabbits and the fact that he was more of a “dandy-lion” than the king of the forest. Yet even though he was always afraid for himself, the lion never hesitated to do what was right.

That’s a picture of courage.

Mustering the courage to do the right thing isn’t always easy. After all, if it were easy, it’s wouldn’t take courage! But finding the courage to take a stand is often necessary when we follow Christ.

In the Book of Daniel, we find three men who were even willing to die rather than compromise their faith. Their courage inspires us to stand unwaveringly for God in a world that often pressures us to do just the opposite.

WHAT DOES **THE BIBLE** SAY?

Daniel 3:13-18,26-28 (NIV)

13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, **14** and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? **15** Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. **17** If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. **18** But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

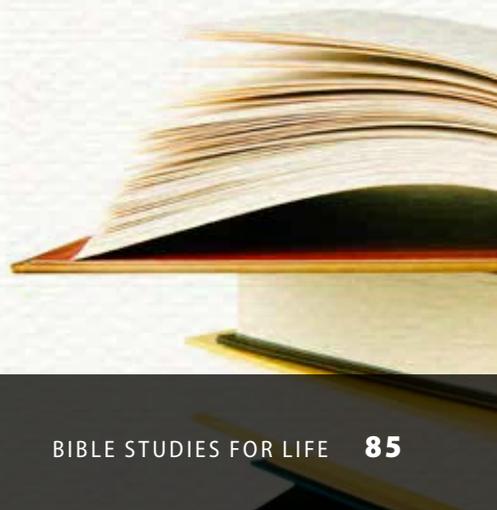
26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, **27** and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.”

Satraps (v. 27)—“Satraps” were the chief representatives of the king. They supervised large divisions of the Babylonian Empire.

Prefects (v. 27)—Political or possibly military officials who reported to the satraps.

Governors (v. 27)—Administrators of smaller regions within the empire.



Daniel 3:13-15

King Nebuchadnezzar wasn't happy. He'd built a large, gold statue in his own honor, "sixty cubits high and six cubits wide" (Dan. 3:1). Building such a statue to honor himself was bad enough, but Nebuchadnezzar ordered everyone else to bow down before it. When the Babylonian orchestra sounded, people were expected to fall down and worship—or face the fiery consequences.

But not everyone obeyed. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—three of the young Jewish men the king had brought into his service—stood their ground. They didn't have to, of course. They could have rationalized their way into several seemingly acceptable reasons for bowing before the statue:

- ▶ "Nebuchadnezzar is the king; we have to do what our boss says."
- ▶ "The statue is only a symbol, and Nebuchadnezzar isn't a real god. The statue means nothing to us."
- ▶ "We can do more good if we're alive than if we're dead."

Yet all three men had strong spiritual convictions. They knew and believed God's Word: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). They would not bow.

That's why Nebuchadnezzar was so upset. In fact, he was "furious with rage" (v. 13). Beside himself with anger, the king taunted his young servants, asking, "what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (v. 15). Nebuchadnezzar was challenging God Himself. He was basically saying, "Your God may have been able to reveal my dream, but He is powerless to protect you from death."

The challenge had been issued. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were in a tight spot with no immediate evidence of rescue. But even then, they were not alone.

What are some pressures followers of Jesus face in today's world?

QUESTION #2

Daniel 3:16-18

You can't miss the conviction and courage of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They had no idea what God was going to do. Yet live or die, they knew He was on their side.

In their response to the king, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego gave an example we can follow. When people challenge our beliefs and convictions, we should:

- 1. Stay calm.** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego neither begged, nor cried, nor shouted for mercy. They remained calm while answering the king.
- 2. Be committed.** The young men said: "But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (v. 18). A true commitment to God must be present before we are challenged. Know what God's Word teaches and decide what you will do before you are put to the test.
- 3. Make an open confession.** Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego unashamedly proclaimed their belief in God. Never miss an opportunity to confess the name of Jesus.
- 4. Be courageous.** Stand firm in your faith. The Lord promised He will never leave you nor forsake you (see Heb. 13:5). Therefore, be strong.
- 5. Stand confident.** All three men expressed their confidence in God "to deliver us" (v. 17). They didn't know what God would do, but they knew He was infinitely more powerful than anything the king could throw at them.

In order to stand for God each day, we must place our faith and confidence in Him—not only in the furnace, but out.

What is the connection between courage and faith?

QUESTION #3

When is it necessary to take a public stand for our convictions?

QUESTION #4

Daniel 3:26-28

The confidence of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did nothing to soften Nebuchadnezzar's rage. He ordered all three men to be tied up and thrown into the furnace. And that's when the miracles started.

I love that God didn't merely protect His servants from the effects of the fire; He was *in the fire* with them. This wasn't lost on Nebuchadnezzar, who exclaimed, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods" (v. 25). Many people believe this person was either an angel sent by God or the pre-incarnate Christ. From a theological perspective, we have no hesitation in affirming that God Himself was in the furnace.

Nebuchadnezzar had earlier asked the question, "what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?" (v. 15). Now he saw the answer firsthand! He was forced to admit the truth, and even offered praise to God (see v. 28). Nebuchadnezzar never gave up his practice of worshiping other gods, but he did acknowledge the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as the only true God. "For no other god can save in this way" (v. 29).

Your faith in Christ will be challenged, yet you have no promise that God will step in and rescue you. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego experienced a divine, miraculous intervention from God—yet untold numbers of others have gone through their own fiery furnaces and died for their faith. Whatever the outcome of your circumstances, if you remain faithful before the fire, as these three men did, you will bear witness to the glory and goodness of God.

How do we help one another be ready and willing to stand for God?

QUESTION #5

TO STAND

What decisions or priorities will help you stand for God? Use the following acrostic to highlight helpful choices in the coming weeks.

What obstacles will you need to overcome in order to follow through with these decisions?

To stand for God, I will...

Speak

Trust

Adopt

Never

Decide

"Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are stiffened."

—BILLY GRAHAM

LIVE IT OUT

Are you ready and willing to stand for God? Consider the following suggestions for taking some practical steps this week:

- ▶ **Pray for others who are taking a stand.** Identify Christians who are currently living under persecution in a specific region or culture. Commit to praying daily for God's presence and provision in their lives.
- ▶ **Be prepared.** Now is the time to consider what you will do when your faith is challenged. Work to determine what resources and support (information, prayer partners, Bible verses, and so forth) will help you stand courageously—then take steps to begin putting those resources into place.
- ▶ **Speak up.** Be on the lookout for opportunities to proclaim the name of Jesus or respond to those who oppose Him. As you do so, remember the five attitudes mentioned on page 87 of this resource.

While the body of Christ is no place for cowards, there is no shame in feeling afraid. We all do at one point or another. Yet, like the Cowardly Lion, true followers of Jesus must never allow that fear to prevent them from doing what's right. We must be ready and willing to stand for God.

