



Courage to Stand

Profiles of
Enduring Faith

JOHN STAMPER

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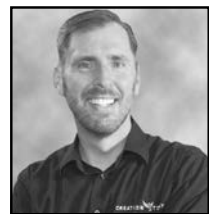
I always say, “Speak truth, and speak it boldly,” because that is part of the Great Commission. John Stammer’s *Courage to Stand* is a reminder that Christianity requires action, and action often requires courage. It’s high time for Christians to act boldly, take uncompromising stands on God’s Word, and conquer the fears of the world.



— Sam Sorbo
author, filmmaker, education freedom fighter

Have you ever wondered where real courage comes from, the kind of courage that stands in the face of absolute, don’t-stand-a-chance adversity? Well, you are about to find out! *Courage to Stand* is packed with powerful stories that reveal the character of people, from ancient times to today, who stood firm on God’s Word despite incredible challenges. This book isn’t just inspiring—it’s a guide to help you find that same courage in your own life. With practical application sections throughout every story, you’ll gain powerful insights on how to apply these lessons to your own journey. You’ll see how trusting God can give you the strength to face any conflict with confidence. If you’re looking to deepen your faith and live boldly for Christ, *Courage to Stand* delivers exactly what you need.

I have no doubt you will enjoy this book; my prayer is that you apply these principles so that you too can experience the *Courage to Stand!*



— Eric Hovind
president of Creation Today Ministries

Courage to Stand is a vital call for conviction and boldness in an age that demands everyone to bend the knee to the idols of political correctness. Drawing from Scripture and history, John Stamper has given us excellent examples of those who have stood for truth and righteousness in the past. These heroes provide a template for us to follow. I was stirred and challenged by this vital and timely book.



— Israel Wayne

author and conference speaker, founder of Family Renewal, LLC

Courage to Stand by John Stamper is a desperately needed work in this age of cowardice. It is masterfully written and should be considered essential reading. There are powerful lessons and examples going back to ancient biblical history all the way up to the modern era that will inspire and encourage all who read it. I can't recommend this book highly enough.



— Alex Newman

*Award-winning international journalist,
educator, author, and speaker*

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my son Teddy who, by God's grace, will be strengthened daily with stories of God's goodness, wonder, and might. Also, to my nieces and nephews who will certainly face Nebuchadnezzars and fiery furnaces in their lives. May you always be willing and obedient to stand courageously on God's Word, knowing that He is with you in the fire. And finally, to Christians of all ages, both at present and those who will accept Christ in the future, who will positively need encouragement at times to live for God in our present Babylon. I hope these stories inspire you to be courageous for God.

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Introduction

The major theme of this book is having *courage to stand on God's Word in the face of spiritual conflict*. As Christians, we all go through spiritual conflict and trials, but hopefully, after reading the true stories in this book, you'll be inspired to live out your faith which, at times, requires great courage.

Why are stories of courage so gripping and inspiring? Perhaps, it's because courage is so rare that we are captivated whenever we see it. And when we hear such captivating stories of boldness and godly courage, we're compelled to evaluate our own spiritual condition and ask ourselves: Would I be able to take such a courageous stand? Have I been obedient to God's Word? Am I willing to forsake all else, to take up my cross, and follow Jesus? How do I bridge the gap from fear and unbelief to obedience and faith?

Every Christian holds biblical convictions, but sometimes we fail to act on them. Every true Christian wants to obey God, but sometimes we don't know what that looks like; we just aren't sure which way to go. Why is that? Why do some Christians know exactly what God wants them to do while others don't have a clue? Why do some have the courage to stand on God's Word while others crumble under the pressure? How is it that one minute we can be courageous, and the next minute we're cowardly? Maybe it's because we compromise, we get scared, or we feel insignificant.

Maybe sometimes we're flat out selfish and follow our own will instead of God's will; after all, we are still living in this sinful flesh.

The idea of "having courage to stand" isn't meant to imply that we have some sort of hidden strength inside of us, or that it's up to us to tap into it. Truth is, it's not even about us. The idea of "having courage to stand" is meant to remind us just how good, powerful, loving, and faithful God is — it's all about Him. And when we know who God is, we can act courageously despite our fears; we can have complete confidence in His Word, and trust that whatever He calls us to do, He will be with us.

Where Does Courage Come From?

When David faced Goliath, David was just a young shepherd and Goliath was a giant, a battle-tested warrior, and a champion. All the men of Israel, including David's brothers and even King Saul, were terrified of Goliath and his threats; but David's stunning response to Goliath was, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?!" David's immediate, gut-reaction was to fight the giant, but Saul refused to allow it; after all, who would've believed that David could defeat Goliath? If King Saul sent the young shepherd David out to fight the brutal warrior Goliath, and David was massacred, it would've brought shame on all of Israel. David could've walked away from the conflict and saved himself the hassle, but to David the thought of walking away was inconceivable. And when Goliath stood to fight David, the Bible says David got up and ran straight toward Goliath, flung his rock, and killed the giant!

David's courage was undeniable and unmatched. But why didn't David back down when everyone else around him was backing down? How was it that David, a young shepherd boy, had the courage to stand up to an intimidating enemy like Goliath? Where did David's courage come from? And what inspired Saul to change his mind and send David to face Goliath? To answer those questions, let's look at God's Word and retrace David's steps.

1 Samuel 17:32–37

When David first approached Saul and sought permission to fight Goliath, Saul couldn't even take David seriously. Saul basically said to David, "Are you crazy? You're just a kid. Goliath has been a trained and feared warrior since before you were born!" And to be fair, Saul wasn't wrong. After all, David was just a shepherd and, as far as anybody knew, he was completely unequipped and incapable of being a warrior. But then David shared a story with Saul of how one day, out in the field, as he was tending his sheep, he killed a lion and a bear with his own two hands. Because of that miraculous experience, David was convinced he could also defeat Goliath. David's boldness must've inspired Saul to change his mind, because as soon as David left the conversation, he suited David up for battle. But let's not gloss over the fact that David killed two ferocious beasts with his bare hands. How could anyone do that? It seems impossible. To answer that question, let's go back another chapter and retrace David's steps.

1 Samuel 16:13

Before he defeated the lion, the bear, and the giant, David was anointed by Samuel. The Bible says when David was anointed, "*The Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward*" (1 Samuel 16:13). So, before David ran out to meet Goliath, before he approached Saul, before he approached his brothers, before he killed the lion and the bear, before David did *anything*, the Spirit of the Lord was upon him. *This is the critical point!* "Where did David's courage come from?" To put it plainly — David's courage came from the Lord.

Inspirational Profiles

This is a book of profiles containing inspirational stories of biblical figures, historical figures, and contemporaries who stood on God's Word in the face of intense spiritual conflict; some stories may be

familiar to you, and some may be new. Each chapter features a different story told through the lens of the three Hebrew children (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego). I chose this approach because, despite being over 2,500 years old, their story still resonates with Christians everywhere today. We all live in a fallen world (Babylon), we all have spiritual conflicts (Nebuchadnezzar), we will all face consequences and persecution for our faith (fiery furnace), and despite all that, God is still with us (the fourth man in the fire). The three Hebrew children share one story and are always mentioned together in the Bible, never separately; they will be the focus of the first chapter. My hope is that this inspiring story will set the tone for the rest of the book and encourage you to find the courage to stand against whatever spiritual conflicts you face in your life and in your world. The rest of the chapters will follow suit, discussing what each person's Babylon looked like, what their Nebuchadnezzar demanded, what their fiery furnace was, and how God was with them through all of it.

As a former teacher, I began writing this book specifically for Christians in the public school system, hoping to encourage them as they navigate their public school "Babylon." But I soon realized these stories apply to Christians of all ages, and all backgrounds — not just those in public schools. So, whether you're an adult who loves the Bible and loves history, or you're a teenager who's never heard of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Corrie ten Boom, William Tyndale, or anyone in between — this book has a message for everyone.

The spiritual conflicts discussed in this book — both past and present — parallel the spiritual conflicts we experience today, even though separated by hundreds, or even thousands, of years. I want you to see yourself in each chapter and profile and connect these stories with your life. Most of all, I want you to see how God was present in each story and in each fiery furnace, because when we see how God brought other people through the conflicts they faced, we can be encouraged that God will bring us through the conflicts we face. This is a powerful message worth pondering and

sharing. It's reassuring to see how God has moved repeatedly and consistently, over long periods of time, through His children and on behalf of His children — and that's a very important concept to get a hold of. And since God is no respecter of persons, that means what He's already done for others, He will do for you as you strive to act in willingness and obedience to His Word.

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”
(Psalm 119:105).

God gave us His Word as a roadmap for our lives, knowing it would be just as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago. We're all unique and our lives are nuanced; the same is true for the people and stories in this book. But even though our stories are different, we can appreciate the fact that God can use our little nuances, even things that look like flaws and imperfections, to do something that matters for His kingdom. So yes, we're all different, but we also have things in common — even with people who lived thousands of years ago. God's Word is the standard and the common thread that ties us together.

A Message of Encouragement

My hope is this book will be an encouragement and a blessing to you, in a way that is scripturally sound and biblically accurate. I'm writing about courage, not because I am the model of it, but because real courage is quite rare, and I want to be encouraged. The people in this book have demonstrated great courage, and their stories inspire me. I hope they inspire you as well. In all honesty, this book is for me just as much as it is for you.

In my first book, *Conflicted: Pulling Back the Curtain on Public Education*, I discussed many of the conflicts that Christians are facing in the public schools. And whenever we face a spiritual conflict — whether as a teacher, a student, a doctor, or a plumber — it's important for each of us to seek God's guidance and hear from Him for ourselves.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened” (Matthew 7:7–8).

Courage to Stand tells inspiring stories of courageous and obedient Christians who stood on God’s Word and faced their conflicts despite their fears. By sharing these stories, I want to encourage you to keep going, don’t quit, hold tight to the Lord, and stand courageously in the face of the conflict in front of you.

What Does the Bible Say?

Standing firm in your convictions and acting courageously, like David did, is not an easy thing to do — that’s why so few people do it. The Bible teaches many lessons on courage and strength, but I want to focus on three specific lessons.

“Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God” (1 Samuel 30:6).

First, the Bible says that even King David, the same David who slayed Goliath, felt weak and scared at times. We too will face challenging circumstances in life, but it’s in those most difficult moments that we must strengthen ourselves in the Lord our God, like David did — the point is to find strength in God! Courage is not the absence of fear, but it’s the resolve to act, despite your fear. It’s in the middle of overwhelming opposition that we must turn our eyes away from the problems and onto our Heavenly Father — ***“our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).*** The words “refuge” and “strength” can mean the same thing, but a refuge is something we run to for protection; it’s outside of ourselves. The type of strength David had, which is the type of strength I’m encouraging in this book, didn’t come from within himself — it came from God.

“Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Second — after strengthening ourselves in the Lord — the Bible tells us that we should encourage, or strengthen, one another. The word *edify* means “to build up,” so God’s Word instructs us to build up each other in our labor for the Lord. As I’ve already mentioned, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were never written about separately; they were always together in Scripture — this has great significance and should be very encouraging for all of us as we walk through whatever God commissions us to do. These three men most definitely encouraged one another and built each other up throughout their entire ordeal. In the same way, we also need to be encouraged as we aim to encourage others. It’s imperative that we surround ourselves with other like-minded believers who can speak into our lives and implore us to follow God, no matter the cost. The importance of having people in our lives who share our values and speak God’s truth cannot be overstated — this is the sacred duty of parents.

“We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done ... which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments”
(Psalm 78:4–7).

Third, God’s Word instructs us to remember the wonderful works of God and to share them with the next generation. This is both a parental duty and a blessing to a child. The Bible says we should strengthen ourselves in the Lord, comfort one another, and tell the next generation about God’s wonderful works. This book aims to accomplish all of that through the telling of nine true and inspiring stories.

Telling stories and knowing history, especially biblical history, are acts of preparation and defense. Dr. Marlene McMillan talks about the importance of storytelling in her book, *Mountains of Deceit*.

“History is really a story and whomever tells the story in the most believable way will rule the future.... History helps make sense of the future. Someone who is ignorant of the past is prey to anyone who claims to understand. What you don’t know about history will hurt you.”¹

So, yes, remembering the former works of God should encourage us, and we should tell those stories to encourage others. But, knowing history, especially biblical history, is also a way to defend from falsehoods, error, and twisting of Scripture.

It’s imperative to understand that while you and I will be the beneficiaries of this book, this book is not about us; it’s not even about the people featured in this book. This book is all about lifting up the name of Jesus and prioritizing the Word of God. The only reason I’m pointing to the people in this book is because they first pointed to Jesus (John 12:32).

Defining Terms

The terms *courage*, *faith*, *strength*, and *conviction* are closely related and are sometimes incorrectly used in place of one another. This often results in a slight disagreement between the intended meaning and the actual meaning of a phrase or thought. While courage is the focus of this book, the other terms are important and necessary as well. So, to make my delivery as clear as possible, I’ll provide definitions of these key terms. And, for the sake of consistency and accuracy, Noah Webster’s *1828 American Dictionary of the English Language* will be used to define each term. Definitions are not exhaustive.

1. McMillan, Marlene. *Mountains of Deceit*. (Forth Worth: Liberty View Media, 2011), 13.

- ◆ **FAITH:** belief; the assent of the mind or understanding to the truth of what God has revealed; the assent of the mind to the truth of divine revelation on the authority of God's testimony, accompanied with the cordial assent of the will or approbation of the heart; a system of revealed truths received by Christians.
- ◆ **CONVICTION:** the state of being convinced or convicted by conscience.
- ◆ **COURAGE:** bravery; that quality of mind which enables men to encounter danger and difficulties with firmness, or without fear or depression of spirits; valor; boldness; resolution.
- ◆ **STRENGTH:** firmness; solidity or toughness; power or vigor of any kind; support; power of mind; the quality of binding, uniting, or securing; confidence; soundness; vehemence; degree of brightness or vividness; fortification; maintenance of power.

I'll explain my view of how these terms are related, and as I use them in this book:

- ◆ **FAITH** comes first, everything else follows — like dominoes. You must believe in something, or someone (Christ and Him crucified), before you can have a moral or spiritual conflict; if you are not rooted in your faith, then you will go wherever the wind blows.
- ◆ **CONVICTION** follows faith; it's the state of being convinced of what, or in whom, you believe. You have a belief and are convinced of that belief.
- ◆ **COURAGE** is the next domino to fall; it's the action that follows faith and conviction. Conviction begs for an action, and courage is the action part of faith and conviction.
- ◆ **STRENGTH**, finally, is the level of firmness, the quality, or the measure of your conviction and/or courage. Some have a weak conviction; others have a strong conviction.

You may have a different perspective, and I realize that my understanding might not be perfect. However, to convey my point clearly, this is the way I structured the book.



chapter one

The Three Hebrew Children

When Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem, he took control of everyone and everything in that city — including the vessels in the Temple as well as God’s people. Nebuchadnezzar sent officers to search through the captives and identify those who could be useful servants in Babylon. He specifically wanted to identify those who were *“of the king’s seed, and of the prince’s children in whom was no blemish, but well favored, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans”* (Daniel 1:3-4 KJV). Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego, and the prophet Daniel were among this group.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted the best of the best, the cream of the crop. He wanted to take the children of the most high God and use their God-given abilities for his own gain and glory. In his arrogance and pride, it seems that Nebuchadnezzar esteemed himself higher than God’s children; either that or he simply wanted to corrupt God’s children — maybe both. Nebuchadnezzar would force the king’s children to leave their ways and to learn of his ways, to live in his palace, to practice his religion, and to worship his idol. To accomplish this goal, he would train, groom, and re-educate God’s children. The Bible says that Nebuchadnezzar *“appointed them a daily provision of the king’s meat, and of the wine which he drank: so,*

nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king” (Daniel 1:5 KJV). During this sort of re-education process, the king’s officer even changed the names, or identities, of God’s children. Daniel was given the name Belteshazzar; the captives Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were given the names Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (Daniel 1:7). Once the Children of Israel learned the tongue of the Chaldeans and had been given new names, only then would Nebuchadnezzar find them to be acceptable, according to his standards.

Application -----

We’ve all been given directives or instructions that are contrary to what the Bible says. Whether on the job or in the culture surrounding us, there is a push for us to accept an alternate reality that contrasts with God’s Word.

Take the transgender issue for example. Many schools today are training teachers and students to “affirm” someone’s chosen gender identity by using their preferred pronouns. Some schools have even gone so far as to give students new names behind their parents’ back, further brainwashing an entire generation of children into thinking they were born in the wrong body. One biblical response to this attack on God’s design comes from Isaiah 45:9, “Woe to him who strives with his Maker.... Shall the clay say to him who forms it, ‘What are you making?’”

Many businesses and organizations have also implemented policies based on “Intersecting Identities” and **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)**, both of which I wrote about in my first book and experienced first-hand in my teacher trainings with Chicago Public Schools. The doctrine of Intersecting Identities claims that we’re either privileged or marginalized based on our immutable characteristics. For example, white, Christian men are labelled as threatening, intimidating, and abusive simply because they’re white, Christian men. DEI policies pick winners and losers based

on skin color, sexual orientation, or income level, but the Bible has this to say on the issues of race, class, and gender: *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27-28)*. The only label God recognizes is whether we’re baptized into Christ.

In the same way the three Hebrew children were taught a new language and forced to receive the king’s provisions, the culture surrounding us seeks to invade our lives on every level and pressure us into using a new language that’s contrary to God’s Word and is meant to change our biblical worldview into a secular one.



The Old Testament Book of Daniel is the only place in the Bible where we are told the story of the three Hebrew children and how they became captives of Nebuchadnezzar, were taken out of their holy city, and were brought into Babylon — a city full of idolatry. We first learn of Babylon in the Book of Genesis, which tells how the people of that city wanted to make a name for themselves by building a tower that reached heaven. Building this tower was about taking authority, seeking autonomy, and gaining independence from God; to be the ultimate authority over themselves. Babylon became such a powerful city that it was known for conquering other powerful cities. Babylonians were also known for idolatry and sacrificing children on a fiery altar to satisfy their false god, Molech. Even though it was such a wicked city, God used Babylon to carry out judgement on other nations, knowing that Babylon would one day be judged as well.

Application

Throughout this book, Babylon represents a place or a system that has rejected God and morality; it represents man’s pride and fall. For the three Hebrew children, Babylon was a literal city, but

for Christians today, Babylon could be work, school, extended family, or our nation.

We are living in a spiritual Babylon today. It's important to see the similarities between the world we're living in today and the world of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, because just as God was with them then, He will be with us now if we are willing to stand with Him in the face of an entire world that's committed to rejecting Him. Very similar to how God's children were faced with idolatry in Babylon, Christians today are tempted to worship a multitude of idols such as work, money, friends, possessions, celebrities, or our own image; even our own comforts and luxuries can be idols. Anything and anyone in our life that we put before God can be an idol (Exodus 20:3-4).

Thankfully, God provides for His children, even when He allows them to experience great hardships. That was true in the Bible and it's true in our lives as well. We should ask ourselves when we are faced with a spiritual conflict, "Will I have the courage to stand against it?" As we continue through this chapter, we'll see how the three Hebrew children stood courageously against the wickedness they faced.



Nebuchadnezzar was the powerful and wicked king of Babylon who worshiped golden idols. As a true idolator, Nebuchadnezzar believed that whenever something bad happened, or he had an unpleasant dream, it was because his god was angry. So, to appease his god, Molech,

Nebuchadnezzar resorted to child sacrifice — offering children on an altar of fire. Thinking that these child sacrifices brought him back under Molech's good graces, Nebuchadnezzar would then summon his wise men and expect to hear their pleasant interpretations of his dreams. But, one day, when these so-called wise men could not interpret one of his dreams, Nebuchadnezzar became so angry that he demanded all the

wise men in Babylon be killed; the prophet Daniel was part of this group of wise men. When Daniel learned that he was sentenced to be killed along with the other wise men, he asked for an opportunity to interpret the king's dream. If successful, Daniel could potentially save his life as well as the lives of others; no doubt, Daniel was led by the Lord in doing this.

The Bible says that immediately after Daniel offered to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream, Daniel held a prayer meeting with his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. They didn't hash out a plan of escape. They didn't plan an uprising to overthrow Nebuchadnezzar. They didn't fall down in fear and trembling at the thought of losing their lives. They went to God in prayer. After all, this was a serious situation — their lives were on the line and Daniel had to be certain that his interpretation was correct. Daniel 2:18 says these four men joined together, ***“that they might seek mercies from the God of heaven concerning this secret, so that Daniel and his companions might not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”*** Right after this prayer meeting, God gave Daniel the meaning and interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Not only did God hear their prayer, but He answered it! God gave Daniel the revelation he needed exactly when he needed it, and the Bible says Daniel began to praise and thank God. We might stop there and think the story is over, that Daniel got the interpretation he needed and now he and the wise men would not be killed. But this was just the beginning of God's divine orchestration. God would use Daniel to prepare Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego for their own crisis of faith.

Soon after the prayer meeting, Daniel was granted a meeting with Nebuchadnezzar to interpret his dream. Many lives hung in the balance and Daniel was the last hope. Even if Nebuchadnezzar was pleased with Daniel's interpretation, there still was no guarantee that he would change his mind and spare the wise men. The only thing that Daniel knew for sure was the message God gave him. So, Daniel's big moment had arrived, and he was brought in to

stand before the wicked king, who had the power (and the desire) to kill him. Nebuchadnezzar asked Daniel if he would be able to interpret the dream, and Daniel responded that nobody was able to do such a thing — not the wise men, not the astrologers, not even the magicians or soothsayers. Given that Daniel had initiated this meeting, Nebuchadnezzar probably expected to hear good news, but instead he was given a message he did not want to hear. I could imagine that Nebuchadnezzar was angry, even shocked, to be told “no.” Perhaps he thought, “If you can’t help me, then why are you here? You’re wasting my time!”

But Daniel wasn’t done; he established a hard truth and followed with another truth. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, “*But there is a God in Heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head upon your bed*” (Daniel 2:28). Daniel didn’t sugarcoat his message; he didn’t change what God told him; he didn’t beg the king to spare his life. Daniel told the king that the only one who could interpret his dream was God in heaven. He was showing Nebuchadnezzar that the God of heaven is above all things — above the wise men, above the idols, and above his false gods — and instead of taking the credit for himself, he gave credit to God where it belonged.

Daniel then explained the meaning of the king’s dream: even though Babylon had become the most powerful kingdom, it would eventually be conquered by a more powerful kingdom which would stand forever; Daniel was ultimately referring to the Kingdom of Heaven. Daniel’s message was so powerful that Nebuchadnezzar promoted Daniel to rule over Babylon, over the governors, and over the wise men. As soon as Daniel was given this title and position of power, he promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to oversee certain affairs of Babylon. What a turn of events! One moment Daniel and the three Hebrew Children were on the chopping block, sentenced to be killed, and the next moment they were ruling over the city. “*And we know that all things*

work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

Application -----

When Daniel and the three Hebrew children were confronted with death, the first thing they did was go straight to God in prayer. That’s the example we should follow: when we face a conflict, the first thing we should do is go to God in prayer. Then, once we hear from God, we must have the courage to follow through with his direction — come what may. While you may not be facing death like Daniel was, the stakes could feel very high for you as well. Every conflict we face presents at least two opportunities: one for us to be obedient, and one for God to move.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego

We can see how God orchestrated events between Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel, but why was it important for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to be given higher offices? We will see that it was more than just Daniel taking care of his buddies. God placed these men in higher office at a specific time and for a specific purpose.

Overall, the Bible doesn’t tell us much about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. In the first two chapters of Daniel, we learn that these three men were living in Jerusalem when it was captured by Nebuchadnezzar, and we know they were led as captives into Babylon. We know that Daniel trusted them as friends and as men of God because they all prayed together concerning the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. We know they were faithful because even though their home had been destroyed and they had been taken to live in a wicked city under a wicked king, they still believed God was able to deliver. We also know that Daniel promoted them to a high office in Babylon, which means they were knowledgeable, experienced, and wise men. And as previously mentioned, we know that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego are always mentioned

together in the Bible — never separately. So, as far as the Bible is concerned, their lives tell the same story.

Many years after Daniel's interpretation and promotion of the three Hebrew children, Nebuchadnezzar built a large, golden idol in Babylon. Unfortunately, it seems that Daniel's divine interpretation did not have a lasting effect on Nebuchadnezzar, and the king once again followed his own ideals. Nebuchadnezzar made a big show of his golden idol in front of the Babylonians, including a policy that required everyone in Babylon to bow down and worship the golden idol whenever music was played; otherwise they would be thrown into the fiery furnace and burned alive. So, the very first time the music was played in Babylon, everyone obeyed Nebuchadnezzar's policy and bowed down to worship the golden idol — everyone except Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. It's important to remember that these three Hebrew children held positions of power in Babylon, which means they stood out among the people. Because of their position, it was a big deal when they disobeyed Nebuchadnezzar; they weren't just privately defying the king (their boss) — they were publicly defying him. Now, we begin to see why it was important for Daniel to promote these men — because if they had not been promoted, then perhaps nobody would have noticed their stance against Nebuchadnezzar's policy. God wanted these men to be seen standing, not bowing!

Daniel 3:8 says, "***at that time certain Chaldeans came near and accused the Jews.***" Everyone in Babylon saw their act of disobedience, and the three men were immediately reported to Nebuchadnezzar. Upon hearing the news of this rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar was thrown into a fit of rage and demanded that the offenders be brought to him at once. Nebuchadnezzar thought this meeting would allow him to demonstrate his power, to make a show of these three Hebrew children, to save face in front of the people, and to make an example of them for anyone who might consider rebelling in the future.

The three Hebrew children were brought to Nebuchadnezzar who restated his terms: the men must bow the knee to the golden idol, or they would be cast into the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar was not used to anyone standing up to him in his own city; in a way, he positioned himself as a god who must be obeyed. So, with great hubris Nebuchadnezzar scoffed, ***“Who is the god who will deliver you from my hands” (Daniel 3:15)?*** If there was ever a time for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to step down and take the easy way out — this was it! This was the perfect opportunity for them to compromise, to give in, bow down to the idol, and live to fight another day.

But that’s not what they did. They didn’t need to take a few minutes to formulate a convincing argument; they didn’t quiver or give a lukewarm response. They didn’t fight to save their own lives; rather, they fought for their faith.

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king” (Daniel 3:16–17).

This statement went straight to the heart of Nebuchadnezzar’s pride, because these men were not impressed with the king’s power, and they weren’t intimidated by his threats. These men knew from experience that God — the one true God — was able to deliver them. What a powerful and encouraging stance!

Their next statement is as inspiring as it is difficult to grasp. They spoke straight to Nebuchadnezzar and said:

“But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up” (Daniel 3:18).

I wonder, would I be willing to say the same thing? These three men didn’t need time to think about their response; they knew

what their answer was even before being asked. They were willing to accept Nebuchadnezzar's consequence — death — because they had complete trust in God. "But if not ... we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up." These men knew there was the possibility that God would choose to not deliver them from the fiery furnace; they accepted the fact that God might allow them to die in the fire for doing the right thing. This show of faith and resolve is similar to when Job said, "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him*" (*Job 13:15*). These godly men and giants of faith were so persuaded in what they believed, and in the character of God, that they were willing to die for it. Whether God would deliver the three Hebrew children from the fire or whether they would die in the furnace — it wouldn't change the fact that they were still God's children. Fear of consequence had no impact on the stance they took.

Application

In this book, Nebuchadnezzar represents a spiritual conflict that results in a crisis of faith. Nebuchadnezzar's policy required all the people to bow down and worship Baal, even if it meant denying their own God. For Christians today, we might face policies, mandates, or laws that require us to do or say something that violates our biblical convictions. No matter what it is or what that conflict looks like, we are all pressured at times to do or say things that oppose our faith. Even if our jobs — or our lives — aren't hanging in the balance, most of us care about being liked and accepted; it can feel devastating to simply lose the respect and acceptance of our peers. So, whether it's in our church, at work, around our neighborhood, in school, or with family members, it takes courage to stand up against an opposing point of view.

Additionally, many times these crises of faith are accompanied by threats. It's not enough that you're living in wicked Babylon and subjected to wicked rulers, but you may also be confronted

with consequences for your obedience to God. Nebuchadnezzar used the fiery furnace — a horrifying and torturous death — to deter anyone from stepping out of line; this was his scare tactic. Similarly, you might face serious backlash for taking a biblical stand; you might be threatened with embarrassment, humiliation, a suspension, termination, or even a lawsuit. These are real fears and real consequences for many Christians today. And because of that fear, no matter how radical or evil a mandate might be, there will always be people who go along with it — just like the people who reported the three Hebrew children to Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, you might be the only person in your community to take a biblical stand, so don't be surprised if you're pressured and persecuted for it; you should expect it to happen.

In the same way that God placed the three young Hebrew men in a specific position, at a specific time, and for a specific purpose, God has a specific purpose for you. In this age of social media, there's always someone watching, and that can be a good thing if it leads people to God. We may be pressured or intimidated to fall in line with ungodly policies, and we may be given an opportunity to voice our concerns about it. But before giving any response, we must first seek God; we must be rooted and established in our faith and resolved to act in accordance with that faith, no matter the consequences. We should strive for a faith that says, "My God is able to deliver me, but if not, I will not serve your gods." As we learn in the Bible, there is a cost to following Jesus, and holding on to faith isn't easy, especially in the face of intense conflict.

It's important for us to see the similarities between ourselves and the three Hebrew children: we have faith in the same God, and the courage they had to stand up in the face of death is the same courage we must have today. They told Nebuchadnezzar that his golden idol was something "which you have set up." His idol wasn't divine; it had no real power or significance. Similarly, the policies that are set up by men today are powerless against the

Word of God. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego knew who God was and they knew why they trusted in Him (faith); we must know the same. They were convinced of their beliefs (conviction); we should be too. Finally, their resolve led them to act (courage); our faith should also be accompanied with action.



FIERY FURNACE

The story didn't end when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego stood up to Nebuchadnezzar. The king didn't have a change of heart, he didn't show tolerance, and he didn't agree to disagree. The three Hebrew children said what they needed to say, and they did what they needed to do — the rest was in God's hands. After their rebuke, Nebuchadnezzar became so irate that he ordered the fiery furnace to be made seven times hotter, but the three Hebrew children continued to stand their ground. They were bound up, their hands were tied, and they were thrown into the scorching fire. The three men could have cried out as soon as they felt the searing heat and they could have begged for a second chance. If they would've agreed to bow down and worship the golden idol, they probably would have been returned to their esteemed positions.

Not only that, but God could've also intervened at any time. Up to this point, these three Hebrew children had been nothing but faithful. I mean, after all, these three men were carrying a heavy burden, and they were doing their best to help. They prayed, showed obedience, acted courageously, and they were willing to die for their convictions. By all accounts, they did everything right. Couldn't God have just put the fire out somehow? Couldn't He have sent a rainstorm to quench the flames or caused the three men to vanish into thin air, like Enoch and Elijah? Well, yes, God could have done any of those things — but that's not what happened. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were literally thrown into a literal fiery furnace.

“And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace” (Daniel 3:23).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego not only had the courage to stand up to Nebuchadnezzar, but they proved to be faithful to the very end, even to death.

Application -----

There will come a time in our own circumstances — after we’ve said everything we can say, and we’ve done everything we can do — that the only thing left to do is watch God move on our behalf; that’s exactly what happened with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. None of us want to be persecuted for our beliefs; none of us want to be disliked in our community or placed under increasing pressure. But we will not always be free from difficulty, nor are we meant to be. Sometimes the Nebuchadnezzar in our life will land a blow and it will hurt, and sometimes we will go through what seems to be the worst-case scenario. But the one constant throughout the conflict must be our unwavering, unflinching faith in God Almighty, even if it feels like He is letting us experience the pain of the fiery furnace.

In this book, the fiery furnace represents the consequences we could face because of the stand we take on God’s Word. For the Hebrew children, the fiery furnace was real, and it was hot. Your fiery furnace could be anything from the fear of losing your job to the fear of being ostracized from your community — or even worse. No matter what it is or what it looks like, we all experience our own fiery furnace (or, sometimes multiple fiery furnaces). It’s important for us to see the similarities between the biblical fiery furnace and our own crisis because, just as we’re about to see how God protected the three Hebrew children in their fiery furnace, He’s able to bring us through our crisis as well.

We cannot always trust what we see or how we feel — in most cases it’s wise not to — and that’s why it’s so important to know

the truth of God's Word, to believe it, and to stand on it. God let Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego go into the furnace and it's possible they wondered where God was while they were bound and thrown into the flames. That doesn't mean God won't still come through, but it does mean we don't always see or feel Him, and we need to have faith regardless.



“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you” (Isaiah 43:2).

Nebuchadnezzar was able to save face in front of the people and preserve his reputation by punishing these three Hebrew men. He had built his golden idol, he showed it off in front of the whole city, and he required everyone to bow down and worship it — on command. And the first time anyone disobeyed his orders, he made an example out of them by throwing them into the fire; he did what he said he would do. The consequence was clear and from now on nobody would dare to stand against him again.

Though it's a seemingly tragic ending, everything up to this point is still a great story of courage. These three men did something that was extremely difficult and inspiring. They stood up to the most powerful king of the most powerful nation — not to mention their boss — and they were willing to lay down their lives to put God first. They knew the consequences going into it and if they were to die in the fiery furnace, they would go into Paradise — not because of their works, but because of their faith. Even if God let them die in the furnace, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego still would have trusted Him. If the story ended there, it would still be inspiring. But God prepared a different ending to their story.

The Bible says that after Nebuchadnezzar threw the three men into the fire, he looked into the flames and was astonished, or terrified, at what he saw. He said:

“I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” (Daniel 3:25)

When Nebuchadnezzar looked into the flames, he most likely expected to see the shapes of the three Hebrew men lying dead on the ground. But instead of seeing three dead men, he saw four men walking around in the fire, and the fourth looked like the Son of God! The men were thrown into the flames bound up, tied so tight that they couldn't keep themselves from falling down. But when Nebuchadnezzar saw them, they were not bound at all; they were loose, walking around, and they were not harmed — not a scratch on them. They weren't burned, their hair wasn't singed, they didn't even smell like smoke! There is no natural explanation for what happened — it's not possible in the physical world. This divine protection, from beginning to end, was entirely prepared, designed, orchestrated, and superintended by God.

When Nebuchadnezzar was able to gather his wits, he shouted into the fire:

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here” (Daniel 3:26).

And all the people and officers gathered around to witness this great miracle; it was undeniable — the God of Heaven was greater than the god of the Babylonians. Even Nebuchadnezzar had to admit that the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego — the God they said was able to deliver them — was indeed the Most High God! No golden idol could have performed a miracle like this. This series of events had a profound impact on Nebuchadnezzar as he made a new law, saying that anyone who spoke against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego shall be cut into pieces and have their house destroyed. Again, what a turn of events!

Application

Everything changed the moment God stepped into the situation. The three Hebrews didn't perform any miracles, they didn't elevate themselves to a higher position, and they didn't persuade Nebuchadnezzar to change his policy about worshipping the golden idol — God did all of those things. But because they were faithful, courageous, and obedient, God was able to use the three Hebrew children and move in their lives — and the lives of everyone in Babylon — in a miraculous way. The same is true for us. As much as we might try to speak the truth, get ourselves out of a conflict, or plead our case when we are persecuted — we can't do everything on our own. There are things that only God can do, and we must learn to trust Him and allow His plan to unfold, even when it means going into the fiery furnace.

Had the three men compromised their convictions at any point throughout this story, they could've escaped the heat of the fiery furnace. That sounds pretty good in the natural, but without the fiery furnace these men would have forfeited their great deliverance. They would've failed to see God's power and they would have missed an opportunity to deepen their relationship with Him for the rest of their lives — for any future crisis they may encounter. And what would that have meant for us? We would have missed out on this timeless, inspirational, true story of Godly courage.

If we take the easy way out and avoid every spiritual conflict in life, then we too will forfeit our great deliverance. We will miss out on seeing God's power and having a deeper relationship with Him — which we can build on for the rest of our lives. That's why it's so important for us seek God and allow ourselves to be used by Him — according to His will and His purpose — even when it means going through a fiery furnace. We can gain courage by hearing true stories like this and, in turn, we can encourage others as well.

The fourth man in the fire represents the presence of God in our lives. Actually, the fourth man in the fire really isn't a representation at all — it's quite literal! For the Hebrew children, the fourth man was the literal presence of God. The presence of God can be demonstrated in different ways, such as in the way that God strengthens us, the way God encourages us, and the way God shows up in our situation. It's important to see the similarities in the fiery furnace and our trials today, because just as God brought the three Hebrew men out of that fiery furnace, He can bring us out of ours as well.