

## MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ refuse to conform to the crowd.

## SCRIPTURE

DANIEL 1

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The prophet Jeremiah warned of great destruction that awaited God's people if they didn't repent from turning away from the Lord. Because they refused to listen, God turned them over to their wicked ways, and they were overtaken by King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army around 605 B.C.<sup>1</sup> During this first raid, Nebuchadnezzar decided to take captive some of Jerusalem's finest and teach them how to be Babylonians (Dan. 1:4). Daniel and his friends were among the captives.

Check out the *Teacher Prep Video* for this lesson: <https://vimeo.com/933473208>



## OPENING

### WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

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#### MEDIA AS STUDENTS ARRIVE

1. Play background music (optional)
2. Display **SERIES TITLE Slide** and announcement slides in a loop or customize the provided **PowerPoint**.
3. Play a 5-minute Countdown Timer 5:00 minutes before you start.

### GAME or ICE BREAKER

Based on your group's size, choose a **Game** from **Deep Discipleship Games** OR use the **Ice Breaker** prompt.

- **Game**—We recommend **Was it Spiced?** or choose another screen game from **Deep Discipleship Games**
- **Ice Breaker**— Would you rather be right but have nobody agree with you, or be wrong and have everyone think like you do? Why?

#### DEEP DISCIPLESHIP GAMES

Find free games in **Deep Discipleship Games**. It's already included with your Deep Discipleship subscription. View the game in advance in case you need supplies or slides.

### WORSHIP

Craft a time of worship with a live band or sing along to a playlist.

- Check out our curated Spotify list. We understand that every church has a different theological view of worship. These songs are suggestions, please pick what works best for your church.
- <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2xmeIKGUjkEE7bJYSCbRwe?si=d254ec715a4749e5>

#### SLIDES (optional)

Use **SERIES Background & Blank Slides** or **PowerPoint** to create lyric slides.

## TRANSITION TO MESSAGE

Include a brief element that transitions students from worship to teaching time, like a prayer or video. This will keep students focused and prepared for the message while the band leaves the stage.

### VIDEO (optional)

Show **SERIES Promo Video** or **LESSON Intro Video** after the last worship song.

## MESSAGE

*Use the following teaching points and suggested illustrations as a starting point to build your message.*

### POINT 1: Choosing to not conform

Read or have someone in your group read Daniel 1:1–8

When faced with pressure to conform to the ways of the world, disciples of Christ stand firm in their faith. In Daniel 1, we see how Daniel and his friends faced a similar challenge when they were placed in a foreign culture. They were in a place where no one worshiped God or followed his laws. Because of their faith, they made very different choices than those around them. This story encourages us to consider if our own choices and convictions align with God's Word.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Imagine you're in a new school where everyone does something you're uncomfortable with. How do you decide whether to follow along or stand up for what you believe in?

Whether people recognize it or not, God's ways are true and right. Following them over the crowd will always be the right choice.

### SLIDES (optional)

Use the **SERIES PowerPoint OR the Background & Blank Slides** to create these slides to support your message:

- Daniel 1:1–8
- Point 1

### POINT 2: Staying true to God's standards

Read or have someone in your group read Daniel 1:8

Daniel and his friends understood that following God's standards was more important than conforming to societal norms. Their decision not to eat the king's food wasn't just about diet, it was about their commitment to God's commandments. It's tough not to do something everyone around you is doing, especially if that thing seems to be the key to getting ahead! For Daniel and his friends, choosing to eat different foods than everyone else put them at risk for persecution or punishment! This challenges us to think about how we prioritize what God says over what the world says.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Share a personal story of a time you had to choose between getting ahead and obeying God's principles. How did you make that decision?

Part of being a Christ-follower is trusting he knows better than we do about what is right.

### SLIDES (optional)

- Daniel 1:8
- Point 2



## POINT 3: Taking a stand with wisdom

Read or have someone in your group read Daniel 1:8–15

### SLIDES (optional)

- Daniel 1:8–15
- Point 3

While Daniel and his friends chose not to conform, they did so with wisdom and respect. They proposed an alternative plan to their overseer, demonstrating their willingness to cooperate while staying faithful to God. Their disagreement in beliefs didn't lead them to start a fight. They carefully and wisely approached the choice ahead of them. This shows us the importance of standing up for our beliefs with humility and discernment.

*ILLUSTRATION:* Share about a time your faith led you to take a stand. How did you do it? What was your attitude like?

Because God has called us to love other people, even our disagreements should be done with kindness and respect.

## CLOSING

### MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ refuse to conform to the crowd.

### SLIDES (optional)

- Mark of a Disciple

#### FACILITATOR NOTE: DO YOU HAVE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION RIGHT AWAY?

- If YES, then **STOP HERE**, divide into groups, and provide Small Group Leaders with the **Small Group Breakout Questions** on the next page.
- If NO, then end your gathering with the **Reflect & Respond** questions and **Prayer** prompt below.

### REFLECT & RESPOND

Give the students time to silently think through what they have heard and contemplate these questions:

- How can you apply Daniel's example to situations where you feel pressured to conform?
- How can you stand up for what's right while maintaining a respectful attitude?

### SLIDES (optional)

Use the **SERIES PowerPoint** OR the **Background & Blank Slides** to display the **Reflect & Respond** questions.

**FACILITATOR NOTE:** Don't rush this part. Give the students a few minutes to really consider how they can live differently than the world around them and not conform to the crowd.

### PRAYER

Let's take a moment to pray and ask for strength to stand firm in our faith, just as Daniel did when he chose not to conform to the crowd.



## SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT (OPTIONAL)

*Pick a few questions from each section to discuss. Close with prayer.*

### BREAKOUT QUESTIONS

#### Build Meaningful Relationships

- Share a personal experience when you felt like you didn't fit in.  
(Don't force students to answer this one because they may not feel like they fit in the small group.) Fitting in is something we desire because we want community!
- How did that experience shape your perspective?  
Answers will vary. When we don't fit in, it can make us feel like an outsider. That feeling can help us be more sensitive and understanding when other people feel like outsiders.

#### Share Personal Stories & Ask Intentional Questions

- When have you been in a situation where you had to choose to take a stand because of your faith?  
Answers will vary. Living in a fallen world means we will eventually need to take a stand.
- What pressures did Daniel and his friends face?  
In order to be trained to attend the king, they needed to eat foods that the Jewish law didn't allow them to eat. In other words, they were supposed to be like everyone else.
- What modern-day pressures might tempt us to conform to the crowd rather than follow God's ways?  
Answers will vary but may include, the music we listen to, the clothes we wear, the way we treat others around us, what we post on social media, etc.
- How do you think Daniel's willingness to stand out affected his relationship with God?  
In times of hardship, when we rely on God and trust in him, it often deepens our relationship with him!
- In what areas of your life do you find it challenging to resist conforming to societal expectations?  
Answers will vary. Maybe you're okay resisting conforming around strangers, but when it comes to living differently than your friends, you find it to be super tough.

#### Make Life Application & Hold Students Accountable

- When have you experienced God's blessings or guidance as a result of making a difficult choice to follow him rather than conform to something that goes against his Word?  
Whether it was getting something in return for your choice or learning to better rely on God, the rewards for living God's way are great!
- What are some practical ways you can stand up for your faith without isolating yourself from others?  
Answers will vary. If the group listens to music that doesn't honor God, suggest a song that does. When your friends tear down someone with their words, find a way to encourage that person with your words. You can always find a way to turn a situation around.
- How can your small group support each other in making choices that align with God's standards?  
Whether it's praying together or trying to come up with God-honoring solutions in a group text, you can support each other. Reach out and ask for help when you need it!

### PRAYER

Let's pray for one another, asking God for the courage and wisdom to remain faithful to his standards even when faced with pressure to conform.

*Use this space to keep track of any prayer requests.*

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<sup>1</sup> Pentecost, J. D. (1985), Daniel, in J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, (Victor Books), 1326.

