

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.¹ 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>

FACILITATOR NOTE: We're giving you a lot of teaching material. Don't feel like you should cover everything here. You know your group better than anyone. Choose the material that will best fit your students and skip over the rest.



OPENING

PRAYER

1–2 minutes

Start your small group by asking the Lord to bless your discussion and time together.

OPTIONAL: Give students an opportunity to lead the prayer.

OPENING QUESTIONS

3–5 minutes

- How was the week? What's the best thing that's happened? Anything major going on?
- Think of a time when you had to stand up for something you believed in, even if it meant going against the crowd. Share your experience with the group.



EXPLORE

EXPLORE GOD'S WORD

3–5 minutes

Today we are in the first lesson in the *Different* series. We will study how disciples of Christ—both in history and today—refuse to conform to the crowd when it goes against God's Word. In today's passage, we'll explore how Daniel and his friends refused to conform to the culture around them. Even though they were far from their homes and the lives they knew, they didn't blindly follow what everyone else was doing. They chose to follow God's ways even when it meant taking a stand and standing out. In fact, they chose to stand out in a wise and discerning way instead of being confrontational and argumentative. This choice became a defining mark of their discipleship.

Read Daniel 1:1–7 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- 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.



ASK INTENTIONAL
QUESTIONS

Say something like: Daniel and his friends found themselves in a situation they didn't choose, but rather one they were forced into, like you getting put in second-period math class or on a team with a bully. They were surrounded by people who thought, acted, and believed differently than they did. This happens to us today. How we respond in those times shapes us and our faith.

Read Daniel 1:8–16 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- How did Daniel propose an alternative to the king's food?

Respectfully and with a well-thought-out plan. He didn't make a big show. He requested not to defile himself with the king's food and drink. He even suggested a set time to try out his plan.

- What do we learn about Daniel from his approach to standing up for his beliefs?

He was wise, just like we were told he was (v. 4). He stood his ground for his faith and still worked within a culture different from his.

- What can we learn from Daniel's wisdom in this situation? How can we apply this wisdom to our own lives?

We can live the lives God calls us to and be at peace with those around us. We don't have to be argumentative to make a big difference!



ASK INTENTIONAL
QUESTIONS

Say something like: It's tough to live differently when the world around us lives in opposition to God. We could fight and be mean about it, or we could be humble and wise like Daniel. It is possible to do things God's way in a humble and wise way!

FACILITATOR NOTE: If you have extra time, go through the next set of questions. If not, skip to the **Connection** section.

Read Daniel 1:17–21 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- What were the results of Daniel and his friends' decision not to eat the king's food? How did God honor their faithfulness?

Not only were they allowed to abstain from food God's law prohibited, but when it came time to serve the king, the original four who led the charge were found to be smarter and wiser than any of the advisors the king already had! God blessed their decision.

- 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!



ASK INTENTIONAL
QUESTIONS

Say something like: God blessed the efforts of Daniel and his friends. He promoted them and made them important in the kingdom. We may not be promoted to high levels of government, but we may find ourselves in higher respect with our friends or teachers if we live in the ways God wants us to. Who knows what kind of impact we can have?



CONNECT & APPLY

CONNECTION

5-7 minutes

Show your students how Scripture connects to their lives: Use the example below OR share a personal story of a time you were in a situation where your faith led you to take a stand.



SHARE PERSONAL
STORIES

Example: Imagine being in a new school where everyone picks on one student who is different than everyone else. Maybe it's the color of their skin or the clothes they wear or how they act. But you decide to befriend them and show them love because that student is made in the image of God. This might mean you become less popular at your new school or stand out from the rest of the crowd. This may cause the crowd to turn on you and start picking on you. While following God strengthens our relationship with him, it may cause friction between us and those who don't know him. But as Christ-followers, our desire should be to please God more than we please people (Gal. 1:10).

- 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.

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

2-3 minutes

Disciples of Christ refuse to conform to the crowd.

Use the Mark of a Disciple to reinforce the lesson and challenge students to apply it to their lives.

APPLY IT

5-10 minutes

Consider one area of your life where you feel pressured to conform to the world's standards. How can you intentionally choose to follow God's ways in this area?



MAKE LIFE
APPLICATION

Be specific:

- What are you going to do?
- When are you going to do it?
- Is there someone who can keep you accountable?



HOLD STUDENTS
ACCOUNTABLE

FACILITATOR NOTE: Allow students who are comfortable to share their plans for application. This may encourage or spark ideas for other students, plus add a level of accountability.



CLOSING

PRAYER

2–3 minutes

As we close, let's pray for strength and courage to be disciples who refuse to conform to the crowd, following God's ways even when it's difficult.

Write down any prayer requests mentioned and ask your students about them at your next meeting.

MEMORY VERSE

Send the memory verse graphic included in your download to your students later this week to keep the conversation going.

"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

NOTES

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¹ 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.

