

INTEGRITY: STANDING FIRM IN TOUGH TIMES

Week 3: Integrity Can Lead to Blessing

This includes:

1. Leader Preparation
2. Lesson Guide

1. LEADER PREPARATION

LESSON OVERVIEW

This is the final lesson in our series looking at personal integrity in the life of Daniel. This lesson will help your teenagers discover some benefits of trusting God and maintaining integrity when things get tough. Daniel looked death right in the face because of his faith—and God carried him through this challenging time.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. **WHAT:** We can experience blessings in our lives as we faithfully follow and honor God.
2. **WHY:** In the middle of tough experiences, we may lose sight of God's work and God's ability to help us through—but God doesn't abandon us during these difficult times.
3. **HOW:** Students will be encouraged to stand firm in their faith in God, even during the most difficult moments in life.

PRIMARY SCRIPTURE

Daniel 6:18-28

SECONDARY SCRIPTURE

2 Thessalonians 3:3

TEACHING PREP

The short overview below is designed to help you prepare for your lesson. While you may not want to convey this information word-for-word with your teenagers, you'll definitely want to refer to it as you lead your small group lesson.

Daniel chose to honor God first in his life. He placed his personal relationship with God above everything else. Because of his desire to live out his faith, he made choices and took actions that were influenced by God, not by his culture's standards. Although he faithfully served the king, Daniel cared more about God's opinion than anyone else's view.

Read Daniel 6:18-28.

Notice the influence that Daniel's life had on a king who did not follow God. We see that King Darius remained up all night troubled by the punishment against Daniel. Because of the way Daniel chose to live, God was able to use him to affect the most powerful person in the entire kingdom.

Daniel had no idea what was going to happen as he was being thrown into that pit, but it didn't matter. He was only concerned about honoring God. Once Daniel was in the pit, God sent angels to shut the lions' mouths and keep them from even touching him. Daniel's faithfulness to God resulted in King Darius sending out a decree to everyone in his kingdom

to tremble and stand in fear before God. This is significant because the kingdom was full of all types of pagan gods, and this set Daniel's God, the true and living God, above all others.

THE BEFORE & AFTER [optional]

Text Message Questions

We've provided a couple of different text message questions to send out to your students prior to your meeting. Feel free to use one or both of the questions below. As with the rest of the curriculum, edit these questions to fit the needs of your ministry.

- Why stand strong during tough times? Let's talk about it tonight at small group.
- Could you survive a night in a den of lions? Don't miss small group tonight. And don't worry; I'm not bringing any lions.

Parent Email

We've provided you with an email below that you can send to your parents following the lesson. Our hope is to encourage parents to continue the conversation at home. Feel free to edit and customize the email to fit your ministry needs.

Dear parents,

This week we concluded our small group study on personal integrity, using the life of Daniel as our model. God loves us and wants us to have the kind of integrity that Daniel did. We can remain faithful and trust God, even when times are tough.

Students discovered that their personal integrity can lead to prosperity, and that prosperity means much more than just financial blessing. We spent time looking at the account of Daniel in the lions' den. We encouraged our teenagers to understand that we may face difficult situations because of our faith, but God doesn't abandon us.

During your conversations this week, talk with your teenager about the idea of following God through tough times. If you're looking for some questions to start your conversation, here are some possibilities:

- You'll probably never be thrown into a pit full of lions because of praying to God, but what situations have you experienced when it felt as if you were all alone because you followed God?
- Your small group talked about Daniel for three weeks. How has your faith been strengthened by his story? What are some specific moments or miracles that encourage you spiritually?

Take time to pray that your teenager will remain faithful to God even when it may mean standing alone or going against the crowd. I'm praying that God will continue to bless you and your family!

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GETTING THINGS STARTED [optional]

If you have Internet access at your group location, go to www.youtube.com before your small group meets and find video clips of lion attacks. Pre-selection IS important, to avoid some of the more brutal clips out there.

As you begin your small group, welcome your students and invite them into your meeting area. Open in prayer, and then SAY SOMETHING LIKE:

Many of you may be familiar with the story of Daniel in the lions' den. What I want you to do right now is imagine that you've gone to the zoo and you're looking at the lions. Imagine what it would be like if you fell over the railing. You get just a taste of the feelings going through Daniel's mind as he was being tossed into the pit in this biblical story. But to help you get an even better understanding, check out these video clips of lions attacking.

After watching the video clip, **ASK:**

- *Now that you've seen what can happen when lions attack, what emotions do you think Daniel might have experienced before getting put in with the lions?*
- *Daniel knew this would be his punishment for praying—why didn't he simply continue to pray in private, instead of making a public statement about it?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Fortunately, this story has a happy ending. Daniel's life was spared, and King Darius publicly acknowledged God's power. God hasn't changed. God loves us and wants us to look at Daniel's life and see that we can do the same thing: We can remain faithful and trust God, even when times are tough. We can discover true blessing by depending on God.*

If you came up with an opening activity, movie clip, or game that worked well with your group, and you'd like to share it with other youth workers, please email us at ideas@simplyyouthministry.com.

TEACHING POINTS

The goal of the Teaching Points is to help students capture the essence of each lesson with more discussion and less lecture-style teaching. The main points we have chosen here are (1) Blessed by friendship, (2) Blessed by protection, and (3) Blessed by prosperity.

Remember: All throughout these lessons, it's up to you to choose (1) how many questions you use, and (2) the wording of the main points—keep ours, or change the wording to make it clearer for your audience.

Read Daniel 6:18-28 together as a group. Consider allowing one or more of the teenagers to read the text.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Let's take a look at some rewards that may come as a result of living with integrity. Blessed is a loaded word in our world, but it simply means a FULL and EFFECTIVE life. God doesn't want our lives to be empty or worthless. God will meet all of our deepest needs, and when we have integrity we find ourselves blessed in all the important things!*

1. Blessed by friendship

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *When we choose to live with integrity, people around us will notice. Your life can become a testimony that will help friends understand who God is. It is amazing that when we make our choices based on honoring God, many people will be drawn to us—and then drawn to God through us. Those who are close to us will notice that we are different, and even if they are non-Christians, they will want to be around us because they know we are trustworthy and respectable.*

ASK:

- *Daniel had a strong friendship with the king. What are the benefits and what are the risks of Christians striving to become friends with people that our culture says are "important" or "influential"?*
- *In the last month, how has a friend blessed you and how have you blessed a friend? Give specific examples.*
- *What are some specific ways you can display integrity in your friendships?*

2. Blessed by protection

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *When we are willing to step out in faith, God shows up in incredible ways to protect us. God may not send angels to close the mouths of lions, like Daniel needed, but God has promised to watch over and protect us (2 Thessalonians 3:3). It's worth noting that King Darius was hoping God had done something incredible. Most people would automatically assume that if you'd been thrown into a pit full of lions, you would be killed, right? Not King Darius. He went to the pit first thing in the morning and called out to Daniel hoping to hear his voice—and he did.*

ASK:

- *What do you think went through Daniel's mind while he was in the pit?*
- *You'll probably never be thrown into a pit full of lions because of your faith, but what situations have you experienced when it felt as if you were all alone because you followed God?*
- *What are some moments in your life when you've needed God's protection? Now, in retrospect, how do you see God's intervention in those moments?*

3. Blessed by prosperity

ASK:

- *What does the word "prosperity" mean to you?*
- *Daniel experienced blessings because of his faithfulness. What are some ways that you've experienced blessing or prosperity from God?*
- *How have those experiences shaped your trust in God?*

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: *Most Christians believe God wants to bless and take care of us. In our society, we often associate blessing with monetary gain; however, God does not always choose to bless us with money. Webster's Dictionary defines "prosper" as flourishing or succeeding. Sure, God can bless us monetarily, but there are many other ways we can experience prosperity and blessing. God can bring good health, new friendships, a summer job, or opportunities to serve others—just to name a few examples.*

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION [optional]

ASK:

- *What can we learn about Daniel's character by the way King Darius reacted to having to put him in the lions' den?*
- *Daniel answered the king by recognizing his position and also giving account of what God had done. How do you notice God's influence and work in your life—what sets apart God's "hand" in your life from happenstance?*
- *God moved through King Darius to impact a kingdom with a proclamation about the true and living God. How has God moved through others to help you come to know him? How is God moving through you to help others come to know him?*
- *Read 2 Thessalonians 3:3. How can this verse encourage you to live boldly for God like Daniel did?*

APPLICATION

ASK:

- *We've spent three weeks looking at Daniel's faith and his integrity. How has your faith been strengthened by Daniel's story?*

Pair up with another person in the group for these questions.

ASK:

- *Daniel found favor with several kings because of his personal integrity, resulting in his influencing countless people for God. Discuss some of the ways you are influencing these people in your lives:*
 - *Your parents?*
 - *Other family members?*
 - *Fellow students?*
 - *People in the youth group?*
 - *Co-workers?*
- *What are three things you could change in your life right now to become a person of greater integrity? What would it require for you to make these changes?*

SUMMARY

End your small group lesson here. Provide your teenagers with a quick summary or take-home challenge based on (1) the content of this lesson, (2) the dialogue that took place during the lesson, (3) your understanding of the issues and struggles your teenagers are facing, and (4) the big picture of your youth ministry and what your leadership team wants accomplished with the teaching and discussion time.

FOR KEEPS [MEMORY VERSE]

Encourage and/or challenge your teenagers to memorize the verse below.

Not a scratch was found on him, for he had trusted in his God (Daniel 6:23).