

SEPTEMBER 12/13, 2020
LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
DISTANCE LEARNING | RESISTANCE
DANIEL 1:1-21

Just by way of introduction, here are EFCC's new discipleship values. These haven't been formally released yet, so some of the language might change, but I kind of doubt it. Their formal introduction will happen in a teaching series in January 2021. However, as you know, I have been writing the discussion questions and leader's notes to focus our attention on the value that I believe is present in our text of study, so I thought giving you an actual list might help. These values speak to who we want to be and become as individuals and a church.

- PURSUIT (Isaiah 41:10) - "I am with you." We cultivate an awareness of God's pursuing presence and intentionally seek to encounter him.
- OBEDIENCE (Luke 9:23) - "Take up your cross daily." We commit, by his grace, to submitting to the authority of Jesus.
- JOURNEY (Phil 3:12-16) - "Press on." We commit to continual growth through grace-driven effort.
- WHOLENESS (John 10:10) - "Live an abundant life." We commit to abiding in the identity Jesus has given us.
- TOGETHER (John 13:34-35) - "Love one another." We commit to caring for and encouraging each other through authentic relationships.
- MISSIONAL (Matthew 28:19-20) - "Go!" We commit to partnering with Jesus to share his love with our community and the world.

And then we have a model that we are adopting to help us live out and grow up into these values. That model is "Being WITH," "Becoming LIKE," and "Doing AS." With, Like, As. Being WITH is about our vertical relationship with God, so think "upward focus." Becoming LIKE is about what's going on inside of us, so think "inward focus." Doing AS is about following Jesus, so think "outward focus."

Each week, then, as I read Ryan's manuscript, I try to prayerfully discern what I think is not only the value that best captures where Ryan went with the message, but I also try to discern what part of the model is most helpful for us to concentrate on. Then I think about, "What do we need to learn about the value?" and, "What kinds of things can we practice to help us grow in it?" This is what I hope drives my questions and notes.

For this week, I believe the value the text calls us to is *obedience* and I believe the part of the model we should focus on is *as*. We are called this week to be faithful regardless of our circumstances. Jesus was faithful regardless of his circumstances, wasn't he? You bet he was. Like Daniel, we are to follow when it's convenient and follow when it's not. I'm not saying it's easy because it's not always easy for me, and I know it's not always easy for you. But, by his grace, we decide to do our best to remain faithful despite the circumstances that get thrown at us. When we blow it, we confess and get back in the game. When things go well, we remember to point to the One who gave us the grace to be successful in the first place. I Thessalonians 5:24a says, "Faithful is He who calls you." He is faithful. We are called to follow in his footsteps of faithfulness and to live in his way with his heart by virtue of the grace he abundantly supplies. So this is where I hope and pray our groups go this week.

Thanks again for your leadership of, and love for, your group!

Engaging with Each Other

1. Share about a time when you refused to allow your circumstances to determine your faithfulness.

One that comes to mind from the not-so-distant past is that there were some circumstances that came up when Darica and I were dating which could have derailed our relationship if I would have let them. And while this was many years ago, it is among one of the most important times in my life where I needed to decide if I was going to choose to follow the plan of God or yield to pressure and other voices. By God's grace, everything eventually worked out the way I hoped it would.

Another one that comes to mind is Darica's and my decision to never let our income level drive our giving decisions. We have always set aside a percentage of our income that we give to EFCC and some missionaries we support, and we have never wavered in following that percentage (whatever it was at the time), even when our income might have dropped precipitously (which it did a few times over the 27 years we've been married) and it would have been easy to use that money for living expenses. We always felt that faithfulness to God and his church was the way to go. And you know what, he has always taken good care of us. Matt 6:33!

What are some of yours?

Engaging with the Scriptures (Read the passage here)

2. The text presented us with three things we can do as we find ourselves living in two worlds. What are they? Talk a little about how each helps you fight the cultural rip current that threatens to pull you away from faithfulness to God.

So this is about learning how to do AS Jesus did. This is about positioning ourselves to acquire the knowledge we need to be equipped to be faithful despite our circumstances as we live with our feet planted in two very different worlds.

The three things are:

- Remember your true Identity (Daniel 1:7)
- Resist the draw toward conformity
- Recognize obedience precedes blessing.

Let's talk a little about each. I'll draw from Ryan's manuscript for this. If it's from Ryan, I'll put RP in parenthesis after it. Again, keep in mind that this is about you and your group talking about the things we need to know and/or be reminded of so that we can stay faithful to God despite the strong cultural rip currents that surround us.

Remember your true identity. (Daniel 1:7. Refer back to this verse as you talk about this point.)

Why do we need to remember this? Why do we need to know that we are supposed to remember this?

Here are some thoughts to guide you as you lead a brief discussion about "Why" it's important to remember your true identity. You might ask, "Why is it important for us to remember our true identity?" and then use the notes below to help facilitate that conversation.

- Understanding your identity is essential to living effectively (RP).
 - It's why God changes people's names.
- While Daniel doesn't explicitly fight this name change – he knows you have to choose your battles - he does resist it. (RP)
 - Essentially, he says, "you can call me whatever you want, but I will remember who I really am!"

- You and I must do the same.
- Resolve to: Remember your true identity.
- Know that the names you respond to are often the scripts you live by.
- I'm sure there are names people have called you; failure or successful, ugly or beautiful, unlovable or loved – that have shaped your life.
- Which means we have to understand that attacking identity is the enemy's battleground. (RP) (See Matt 4.3)
 - Neil Anderson quote, "No person can consistently behave in a way that is inconsistent with what they believe about themselves. So if I think I am just a loser or I'm lame or I'm trying to live up to someone else's expectations, I never ever really truly get there. No matter how hard you try, someone is always going to come along with hostile rejection and criticism to put you down, and then you're left to pick yourself up by your bootstraps. And it just doesn't really work."
- And we also have to fight back with God's truth (RP)
 - Lauren Daigle's song "You Say."

Now let's talk some about the "What" and the "How." Here is a potential discussion question to help you along - "**What** are some of your favorite 'identity statements' from the Bible and **how** do they help you stay faithful to God in difficult circumstances?"

- Here is a list of 100 Identity Statements. Maybe ask people to think about them ahead of time and come with a few that are meaningful for them, and to talk about why and how they help them maintain fidelity to Christ when the winds of cultural pressure come blowing [100 Identity Truths](#).

Thus we complete the discussion on "Remember your true identity." Now we move on to "Resist the draw toward conformity."

Resist the Draw Toward Conformity (Daniel 1:8-16. Refer back to these verses as you talk about this point)

Here is a discussion question to start it off - "Why do we need to resist the draw toward conformity?"

- Through a series of subtle and small compromises, we can get carried away – eventually we're renamed. (RP)
- The longer we live in a culture obsessed with success and production, the longer we're in a work culture of course joking and filthy talk, the longer we're surrounded by decisions about sexuality that run contrary to the way of God – the easier it is to drift. (RP)
- We've all seen it happen! Someone who was once on fire for God slowly fades. In the midst of an overwhelming cultural current, we must be people who intentionally resist conformity. (RP)
- Dennis used to say, "People don't drift toward God." Likewise, people don't drift toward non-conformity.

Then comes this discussion question, "What can we do to resist the draw toward conformity? And, How will what we do help us resist?"

- I would review Daniel’s strategy and then ask people what they think about it? What about it is helpful for them in their current situations? How might they adopt some of it?
 - Daniel’s resistance strategy (RP) -
 - His resistance is private (1 Thessalonians 4.11-12). Daniel’s journey begins with personal holiness, not public resistance.
 - His resistance is respectful (he asked permission to have a different diet).
 - His resistance was based on real life results. (Check us in ten days and see what we look like then. Daniel 1:14-16)
 - Ryan also gave us “Ryan’s resistance strategy (at least it’s in his notes!) -
 - What could you do to affirm your allegiance to Jesus?
 - Perhaps it’s practicing Sabbath.
 - Maybe some sort of a fast - from food or technology or something else.
 - What could you do to affirm your baptismal identity as a follower of Jesus rather than a pawn in the empire?
 - If you feel yourself drifting, today is the day to dig your heels into the sand and say, “No more!”

Lastly we have, Recognize obedience precedes blessing (Daniel 1:17-20)

Here is a question to start off the discussion - “Why, when it comes to resisting the temptation to jettison faithfulness in unpleasant circumstances, is it important to remember that obedience precedes blessing?” (Deut 28:1-2)

- Daniel doesn’t obey so that he’ll be blessed, he obeys because that’s what’s in his heart. (RP)
- Favor is the outflow of following. (RP)
- If we obey to get blessing, we’ll always be disappointed. (RP)
- Our obedience cannot be motivated by outcomes, it must be motivated by love and conviction. (RP)
- The greatest blessing we can receive is knowing Jesus and experiencing his presence. (RP)

What does one do to recognize this truth? How does one go about practicing it? Is it a daily reminder to yourself? Is it focusing more on your relationship with God and on growing deeper in that? Is it focusing on obedience a little more this week? What would you say?

Engaging the Scriptures with Life

- 3. This week, how will you make a stand for private devotion? What are some small, subtle, private acts of resistance you can practice which will help affirm your true identity as a Christ follower?**
 How will you practice faithfulness to God as you live in a culture in which all of the circumstances of that culture seem to be pulling you away from God, or at least don’t encourage you to pursue him? How can you do AS Jesus did and maintain more faithfulness? How can you practice greater obedience?

I’ll be thinking and praying about this one!