

Outline

Purity vs. Peer Pressure – Daniel 3

Let me take you back to middle school for just a second. Do you remember how tough a world that was to live in? I do because I had to live it twice, once as a tortured pre-adolescent going through the pimply, gangly, pre-pubescent and awkward stage of discovering that the “Invasion of the Body Snatchers” might be more than just a movie and that my body had truly been snatched and was being invaded by some foreign substance that was making it feel icky both physically and emotionally. Then I got the great privilege of experiencing middle school a second time as an educator helping those going through that tough time as smoothly as one can possibly help one go through it.

Now that I have sufficiently brought back some very intense memories that you would have preferred to remain buried, let me dig in a little deeper. **Do you remember the toughest part of middle school, and even high school for that matter? – [The Peer Pressure!](#)** It was tough. There was the pressure to look as cool as everyone else, the pressure to experience life like everyone else, the pressure to act like everyone else, the pressure to think like everyone else. It was tough. **Peer Pressure is simply the pressure to fit into a mold of “Nice.”** Someone – we are not quite sure who – got to determine how everyone else was supposed to think, and everyone, if they wanted to be accepted and “loved” had to fit into the mold. But do you remember “Stephanie?” Stephanie was the kid that just did not care what everyone else thought. She was going to live life on her own terms and she got picked on and opposed for it. She got into verbal and even physical scuffles because she just refused to conform to everyone else’s idea of a “nice person.” Oh the pressure that was put on her and everyone else to fit in. That pressure ranged from making fun of clothing to pressuring others to cheat or be allowed to cheat, to giving in to the “spin the bottle” game or trying that first smoke or beer or even toke on a joint.

And what was the result of that pressure – massively produced, ‘faky’, “niceness.” Think back to the experiences that you had growing up. What did you wear that was ugly as sin, but you wanted badly enough to fit in – parachute pants, leisure suits, big hair – even the so called nonconformists bent to the pressure of the same old piercings, tattoos, and colored hair? What did you end up doing that you had no desire to do, but you felt the immense pressure from others to do? Try out for the football team, smoke, give someone the answer to question #3 on the test, make fun of the geeky Stephanie? That peer pressure really almost always demanded that we do something or accept something that was not true to who we really were. More often than not, it caused us to do something that we did not want to do or that we knew was wrong. But we did it. Because we felt the pressure to fit in.

Funny thing, I am not sure that pressure lets up much as an adult. We are still pressured by our peers into poor choices and we give in because we want to be “nice” and accepted. We do not want to offend. We do not want to appear different. We want to fit in – look the same, sound the same, like the same things, dislike the same things, think the same way. We are vocal on issues that are popular whether we actually believe in them or not. **We create a lifestyle and belief system based upon the influence of peers rather than purity.** We end marriages when our friends encourage us to throw the bum out. We get wasted at the parties we go to, because everyone else is. We gossip because our friends accept us when we dish the dirt. Many of our choices in life are the result of impressing our friends or keeping up with our friends. We are huge into image management because of the pressure of our peers.

In the present situation that we find ourselves in as a nation financially, it is because we have seen what our friends own and feel that we should either keep up with them or that we should be able to be just like them. And so many of us are in deep debt because we made poor choices about second mortgages or risky “Interest Only” loans and placed way too many things into those mortgages because our peers told us they did it and it was going fine – they could afford things they never could get before! So we bowed to the peer pressure and instead of allowing the fleeting voice of God and our conscience of purity guide us, we made poor unethical decisions that have now allowed us as individuals and as a nation to be in unmanageable debt.

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But it does not stop here. I wonder if we question our morality based upon the good of godly principles or if we allow peer pressure to “prude” us out of true morality. I wonder if we give in to negativity and gossip because to take a stand against it would get our friends mad at us. I wonder if we struggle with building a good foundation of moral uprightness because of the pressure of our peers. What is the result? It can be some very nasty consequences like the present financial clime or many of our stands morally that we know down deep are wrong, but allow peer pressure to gloss it over. It may even go so far as this famous quote from the Holocaust in Germany:

Pastor Martin Niemoller

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out -- because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me -- and there was no one left to speak for me.

Peer Pressure guides a lot of bad decisions in the spirit of being “Nice.” That is the key issue in the situation where we find ourselves in the middle of Daniel 3. We have been looking at the battle between being Good and being Nice over the last three weeks and how it played out in the life of a guy named Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they have been pressured to drop their worldview and live a lifestyle against what they believe to be good – and all of this is found in the book named after Daniel in the Old Testament – Daniel. Daniel had three friends who stood with him in Chapters 1 and 2 and in Chapter 3 their “belief system” is tested once again in the most serious way – by persecution and threat of death. They find themselves standing alone against a maddening crowd, being pressured to participate in an activity that raged against what they believed. They are being sorely tested in their standing for what is right and good. Look how this third installment of the battle between “Nice” and “Good” begins:

King Nebuchadnezzar built a gold statue, ninety feet high and nine feet thick. He set it up on the Dura plain in the province of Babylon. He then ordered all the important leaders in the province, everybody who was anybody, to the dedication ceremony of the statue. They all came for the dedication, all the important people, and took their places before the statue that Nebuchadnezzar had erected. Daniel 3:1-3 TM

Not so bad a start. The King is dedicating some cool and gigantic art and all the cool people have been invited. And look we are in the cool crowd, the “it” generation, the Big Daddy’s ‘faves’! Not a bad place to be...

A herald then proclaimed in a loud voice: "Attention, everyone! Every race, color, and creed, listen! When you hear the band strike up fall to your knees and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Anyone who does not kneel and worship shall be thrown immediately into a roaring furnace." Daniel 3:4-6 TM

Decision time. A great opportunity has arisen. It is time to decide based upon the nice thing and the good thing. And look who finds themselves right in the middle of the decision of their lives in the midst of immense peer pressure – Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - Look what happens:

The band started to play, and everyone fell to their knees and worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Daniel 3:7 TM

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Cool... Everybody is playing nice. Everybody is doing what is expected. No one is questioning whether or not the big guy is telling them to do something that rages against the good – everyone lives today – no one is ostracized – except:

Just then, some Babylonian fortunetellers stepped up and accused the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Long live the king! You gave strict orders, O king, that when the big band started playing, everyone had to fall to their knees and worship the gold statue, and whoever did not go to their knees and worship it had to be pitched into a roaring furnace. Well, there are some Jews here—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—whom you have placed in high positions in the province of Babylon. These men are ignoring you, O king. They don't respect your gods and they won't worship the gold statue you set up." Daniel 3:8-12 TM

You got the picture? It is pretty dismal. Just in case you don't have a strong visual of the dire consequences that we see here, listen to the B52s sing about it – and believe me, it is no Love Shack. *Insert Meshach drama*

Meshach and his buddies did not hesitate. And contrary to the song – Abednego was right there with them. How could they leave out Abednego? Note that the Peer Pressure to conform is immense and it comes with dire consequences for not conforming – a ruined life and death. But these guys do not hesitate. When the King gets really mad at them and demands that they change and give in to his whims or die, they do not hesitate:

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar, "Your threat means nothing to us. If you throw us in the fire, the God we serve can rescue us from your roaring furnace and anything else you might cook up, O king. But even if he doesn't, it wouldn't make a bit of difference, O king. We still wouldn't serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up." Daniel 3:16-18 TM

They stood the test even to the brink of death. They knew what they believed and they believed what they knew. They could not be persuaded otherwise and their lives illustrated it with conviction. It wasn't popular. It wasn't fashionable. It was not considered nice and neither were they. But they were good. And they knew it – the audacity of them!

How do you live? **Do you know what you believe in so securely that you think your own God-directed rather than human-directed thoughts? Is your life strongly anchored to the firm foundation of a belief system or do you more resemble the bouncing of a pinball in a machine, bouncing from one person's opinion to the next?** What if you were sorely tested in what was right and good and you could get away with what you knew was not good? How would you respond? Could you be goaded and pressured into doing something evil or harmful? What do you so firmly believe in that you would not be persuaded to act against it even in the threat of death? You need to know that for that foundation of belief and principle will guide your life to one of principle and fulfillment. You see, by being the "Nice Guy" and giving into everyone else's system of belief, you do not live life, but allow the lives of others to live you – even to the point that you do things that deep inside you know are foundationally wrong or even evil. **Know what you believe and believe what you know and be willing to die for it – or at least stand in the face of peer pressure and personal persecution.** Are you willing to do what is right and lose the guy? The friend? The job? Are you willing to be Good, even if it does not lead to blessing in your life? **Live by Principle not by Peer Pressure!**

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How could these guys not hesitate? How could they be in such a place that they knew what to do on the spur of the moment without wavering? Notice that they believed so strongly in God's provision for them that they actually felt convinced that God would save them from death. But even if He did not save them from death, they knew that God had their best in mind! They were even cocky about it. It's like they were playing pickup basketball and they knew that LeBron James was coming and going to be on their team. They bet the house that they would win because they believed in the goodness of God in their lives. And they were going to live according to the principles of His goodness and **KNOW** that they would be blessed for it – either in life or in death.

How can you live in assurance that you will make the Good decision rather than the peer-pressured Nice decision in the critical moment? How can you know that when you go out with that guy and he invites you into his bed that you will have the fortitude to withstand his charms and his sexual pressures? How can you know that you will make the Good decision rather than the peer-pressured Nice decision when the “great mortgage deal” is thrown in your face? How can you know that you will always make the Good decision to live your life in purity rather than have your life lived for you by the pressure of others? How can you live with the peace and cocky confidence that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego lived? You must live by the purity of principle rather than the cloudiness of peer pressure. They knew what they believed and in whom they believed and they let that guide every – not most – but every decision of their lives. And when the critical choice came – when the moment of decision came – they were ready without hesitation to make the Good Choice over the Nice Choice.

How do you get there? I think you have to practice living Good rather than living Nice and here are a couple of clues how to begin to live that way:

Live Good vs. Being Pressured into Living Nice

1. Know what to Believe.

- Begin to read through the *One Year New Testament* today and live out what you learn. Use the *Day by Day Guide* on the back of the program to help guide your thoughts as you read the Bible.
- Take the *Foundations* Class being offered starting on April 5 from 8:30 to 9:30 on Sunday mornings in the band room.

2. Write down your Beliefs that God reveals to you in our study and your Fleeting Thoughts.

- I believe that God is good and will motivate me to do good at all times.
- I believe that I tend toward the negative and society will always tempt me that way as well, so my thoughts and its thoughts must be questioned.
- I believe that I am to be generous with my life just like God.
- I believe that I am to stand up to injustice as God points it out to me.
- I believe that I am to treat all people (enemies and friends with love and respect)
- I believe that my integrity is the only true value that I own by myself and I must guard it with my life.

3. Practice Obeying every Positive Fleeting Thought that comes into your mind as it relates to your Beliefs revealed to you by God.

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4. Watch your Fleeting Thoughts become a lifestyle of Good.

The result will be the same result that happened with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego – a life lived by Purity of a Good Spirit rather than a sell out to a Peer Pressure. The Good Life is not always the easiest life, but it is the easiest life to live with.

Begin the Song *Stand* with the following passage on the screen for at least the first verse and chorus:

Suddenly King Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in alarm and said, "Didn't we throw three men, bound hand and foot, into the fire?"

"That's right, O king," they said.

"But look!" he said. "I see four men, walking around freely in the fire, completely unharmed! And the fourth man looks like a son of the gods!"

Nebuchadnezzar went to the door of the roaring furnace and called in, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the High God, come out here!"

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego walked out of the fire.

All the important people, the government leaders and king's counselors, gathered around to examine them and discovered that the fire hadn't so much as touched the three men—not a hair singed, not a scorch mark on their clothes, not even the smell of fire on them!

Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel and rescued his servants who trusted in him!

They ignored the king's orders and laid their bodies on the line rather than serve or worship any god but their own. Daniel 3:24-28 TM

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