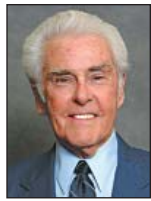


Develop conviction

The Book of Daniel is considered to be the highest example of Old Testament ethics in its discussion of the picture of God's people. It divides



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into two sections — chapters 1-7 and 8:12 with Daniel and the other youth who are central to the story spoken of in the third person while in the remaining chapters Daniel speaks in the first person.

The book is a combination of prophecy, wisdom literature and apocalyptic language styles. For our purpose in the lessons through November 22, we will cover Daniel 1-6.

Facing the challenge of cultural assimilation (1:3-5). King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon besieged Jerusalem and, according to our text, “the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, into his hand, along with some articles from the temple of God.”

Then the stars of our show, four young men from Judah, were brought from Judah to be educated to serve the king after they completed three years of study in “the language and literature of the Babylonians.” These young men were among others who also entered the same type of training.

As one aspect of their training, they were to eat food from the king's table, including his wine. All of these accommodations were designed to have them become more assimilated into the Babylonian culture.

Young people today do not need to have a rich diet to be assimilated into current American culture because they are surrounded by a multitude of influences that challenge the center of their moral and ethical standards. Electronic devices, youth who have other standards, even some school influences can challenge their convictions — if they already have convictions! Part of the shaping of their convictions must come from their Christian faith as well as their

family. Ingrained convictions will strengthen their willingness to refuse cultural assimilation that is contrary to their own convictions.

Drawing the line where you will not compromise your convictions (1:7-13). Daniel and his friends were willing to accept the new names given to them by Ashpenaz, chief of the court officials, because this allowed them to be assimilated into the court culture without compromising their moral and religious convictions. In much of the rest of their story we know them as Belteshazzar, Shadrack, Meshach and Abednego.

But with Daniel's leadership, they resolved not to defile themselves with the royal food and wine. The official was fearful that if these boys ate a different meager diet than the other youth in training, they would lose their health and he would be blamed. So Daniel proposed a test for 10 days with “vegetables to eat and water to drink.” At the end of the 10 days, “they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.” So they were given their own diet by the court official.

Since obesity is becoming a greater threat to good health, both youth and adults need to develop convictions about current obsession with unhealthy foods. The Better Health Channel focuses on things to remember for young people: “A teenager who eats fast food regularly is more likely to put on weight than a teenager who eats fast food only occasionally. A diet consisting of healthy meals and snacks will boost your ingredients such as calcium, which is required for strong bones.” You can adopt Daniel's plan and major on healthy foods as a center of your meals.

As indicated above, the problem of obesity is not limited to youth. A report in the Kansas City Star points to the Midwest as having a higher percentage of obese adults. “The health care costs of preventable chronic disease in the U.S. stemming from obesity are estimated from \$147 billion

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to nearly \$210 billion a year. Related job absenteeism is estimated to cost \$4.3 billion a year, in addition to lower productivity” (Sept. 22, 2015, p. A5).

Become a committed learner for what is best for you in the culture (1:17-19). Because Daniel and his friends were obedient to him, God gave them “knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.” Daniel was also blessed with the ability to interpret visions and dreams of all kinds.

Since the teachings of Jesus encourage Christians to become a witness to our contemporary culture by the quality of our lives, this will make it necessary to become an integrated part of the culture we are to win. But there will come some challenges of the culture that must be resisted because of our Christian faith.

Paul emphasized this challenge for Christians living in the Gentile culture. You “were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its sinful desires, to be made new in the attitude of your mind; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:17-24).

The theme that ties together the various sections of the book of Daniel “is that God expects his followers to maintain fidelity in face of threats, wars, legal pronouncements or changing customs” (Holman Bible Dictionary, p. 336). This is also the purpose of God for believers in our culture; it demands definite commitment to the will of God for his people.

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