



DANIEL: UNSHAKABLE FAITH – LESSON 1

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DANIEL: UNSHAKABLE FAITH

Lesson 1: Choose To Follow God

Bible: Daniel 1:4-5, 8, 12-20

Bottom Line: You can choose to follow God even when it's not the popular thing to do.

SUPPLIES

Opening Game:

- “Attribute” and “describing word” cards sheet (cut out each card)
- Whiteboard
- Dry erase marker
- Masking tape

NOTES

All Scripture references are taken from the NLT unless otherwise indicated.

INTRODUCTION

SAY: Welcome to our new series!

We're going to be learning about Daniel.

ASK: Who here thinks they already know who Daniel is from the Bible? Raise your hands.

Allow preteens to raise their hands.

ASK: Who can tell me a famous thing that Daniel did?

Take responses from preteens. Answers will vary, but some potential answers might be: being thrown into the lions' den, disobeying a king, not eating the king's food, interpreting dreams, etc.

SAY: Those are all great answers! And we're going to be learning about some of those over the next few weeks.

To kick off our new series today, I am going to ask you some questions.

I want you to think about your answers, but don't answer out loud.

Here's the first question:

- How do you become the kind of person who obeys God even if it will make other people mad?

Again, don't answer out loud ... these are just for you to think about.

Allow preteens around 30 seconds to think about their answer.

Here's the second question:

- How do you become the kind of person who is willing to risk being eaten by a lion rather than not praying to God?

Allow preteens around 30 seconds to think about their answer.

SAY: Here's the third question:

- How do you become the kind of person who chooses to follow God even if it could mean being killed?

Allow preteens around 30 seconds to think about their answer.

SAY: These are all questions we're going to talk about over the next few weeks.

Daniel had what I call "unshakable faith" ... and I want us to learn from his story how we can also have that kind of faith!

But before we learn what faith really looks like from the example of Daniel, let's play a game.

OPENING GAME: Unshakable Attributes

Game Prep:

Print out the Unshakable Attributes Printables on cardstock – cut these out into cards. You need only one set of the attribute cards (those with only one word on them), but you need as many sets of the possible definitions as there will be teams of students.

Print the Unshakable Attributes - Leader Guide.

Separate the attribute cards from the possible definitions.

Tape the attribute cards to a wall or whiteboard. (Or you can just write each attribute in list form on the whiteboard.) Leave space for students to tape up the definitions they match to the words.

How to Play the Game:

SAY: The object of the game is to choose and define attributes that describe someone who does the right thing no matter what others do.

We are going to go some characteristics that are common, and you are going to vote whether you think each one describes someone who is unshakable or someone who is easily shaken.

If you think what I read out describes someone who is easily shaken, I want you to shake your whole body (or at least your hand) like an earthquake.

If you think the card describes someone who is unshakable, I want you to hold out your fists in front of you like two unshakable boulders.

Everyone stand up and get ready to vote!

Use the first section of the leader guide to read out the definitions, and let preteens vote whether they feel that definition describes someone with unshakable faith or someone who is easily shaken.

On the leader guide, the answers are in bold, right after each definition is listed.

Interact with preteens about their answers. When this portion of the game is over, refer to the list of attributes on your board or wall.

SAY: All the unshakable definitions I read match up with one of these words.

We're going to match up the definitions with the words, but this time it's a race!

Divide the preteens into teams.

SAY: Each team should quickly choose one fast runner.

When we're ready to start, I'll give you a stack of definition cards.

I'll read out the word I want you to find the definition for, and as a time you'll pick your answer.

When your team decides on the correct match, that runner will grab the card and race up to the board to tape it next to the describing word.

The team whose runner makes it up here first and tapes their definition up correctly gets a point.

Before we start, make sure your team has pre-torn tape strips ready to go.

Read each character attribute from the board in order, and let students guess which definition matches each character attribute. Answers are found in the second half of your leader guide.

If a team puts up an incorrect definition, take it down and see if the other teams have the right one ready to go.

Cheer your students on and transition into the teaching time once the game is done.

TEACH

SAY: As we begin, I want you to think about this:

If a classmate were to choose character attributes for you, which of those attributes and describing words would they use to describe you?

We are going to focus our time together this month talking about a man whose faith in God was unshakable.

Each of those unshakable characteristics could be attributed (or said) about him.

Daniel was an awesome man.

He sinned and made mistakes just like all of us do, but he had faith in God, and that's the main thing he is known for.

ASK: The Bible story most people know best about Daniel has to do with him being thrown in a pit with which animals?

Allow preteens to answer.

SAY: Daniel was thrown into a lion's den!

Before we jump to the story of Daniel as an 80-year-old man who was thrown into a lion's den for praying, we need to back up a little and talk about who Daniel was as a young man – not much older than you.

Daniel was part of a group of young men who were of noble birth.

The Bible tells us in **Daniel 1:4-5** that each in this group of young men was “**strong, healthy, and good-looking.**”

They were chosen to go live at the king's palace, eat the king's food, and be educated in language and literature.

When they were ready, those chosen young men would enter the king's service.

It sounds like a charmed and luxurious life, doesn't it?

Oh, I forgot to tell you that this king was from another country that had just destroyed Daniel's country and taken these young men captive.

These young men were taken from their families and forced to live and be trained at the palace of a king who defeated Daniel's people in Judah.

The people of Israel and Judah had continued to reject God and His expectations of a right relationship with Him, so He allowed King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy them and take His people in exile to Babylon.

Daniel was with three of his friends – and you may have heard of them before.

Their names were Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah ... but you might know them by their Babylonian names – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Daniel's Babylonian name was Belteshazzar.

Alright, back to the story.

Daniel had been raised to eat only the foods that God had approved for His people to eat.

The problem was that King Nebuchadnezzar's food wasn't on God's approved foods list.

Daniel 1:8 says:

⁸ But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods.

SAY: So, the chief of staff had a big problem.

ASK: What do you think would have happened to the chief of staff if Daniel and his friends had gotten sick and died from malnutrition?

Allow preteens to answer.

SAY: Daniel 1:10 says that the chief of staff was afraid the king would behead him if the young men appeared even pale and thin!

But Daniel persisted because he wanted to be obedient to God.

Here's what Daniel tells the chief of staff in **Daniel 1:12-14**:

¹² “Please test us for ten days on a diet of vegetables and water,” Daniel said.

¹³ “At the end of the ten days, see how we look compared to the other young men who are eating the king’s food. Then make your decision in light of what you see.”

¹⁴ The attendant agreed to Daniel’s suggestion and tested them for ten days.”

ASK: What do you think happened after the 10-day test?

Allow preteens to answer.

SAY: **Daniel 1:15-20** tells us what happened after 10 days and the days after that:

¹⁵ At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king.

¹⁶ So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others.

¹⁷ God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for understanding every aspect of literature and wisdom. And God gave Daniel the special ability to interpret the meanings of visions and dreams.

¹⁸ When the training period ordered by the king was completed, the chief of staff brought all the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar.

¹⁹ The king talked with them, and no one impressed him as much as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So, they entered the royal service.

²⁰ Whenever the king consulted them in any matter requiring wisdom and balanced judgment, he found them ten times more capable than any of the magicians and enchanters in his entire kingdom.

SAY: God was with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and protected them.

Daniel showed his unshakable faith by asking for vegetables and water instead of accepting the food that God had told His people not to eat.

ASK: What was the result of Daniel's courage and faith?

Allow for answers.

ASK: What kind of an example was set by Daniel to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

Allow for answers.

SAY: It must have been really hard for Daniel to ask for special permission to go against the king's orders.

It must have been really hard for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to go along with Daniel's request when none of the other young men were asking for special treatment.

Everyone else who had been chosen was going along with the king's food requirements, even though it was against God's instructions.

There will be times when you are faced with difficult decisions that make you choose between following God and His expectations or following someone else's expectations.

You may have already had to face something like that.

Let's answer those questions I asked at the beginning of our time together.

How do you become the kind of person who obeys God even if it will make other people mad?

How do you become the kind of person who is willing to risk being eaten by a lion rather than not praying to God?

How do you become the kind of person who chooses to follow God even if it could mean being killed?

You start by putting your faith in God at a young age – this age! – and trusting Him to provide ways for you to obey Him no matter what anyone else is doing or expecting.

This is a great time for us to split into our small groups, talk through the things we learned today, and learn how we can have unshakable faith like Daniel.

Close in prayer and dismiss to small groups.

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY: Will You Bend?

SAY: We are going to play a quick game.

The object of the game is for us to realize the importance of standing strong even when we are tempted to bend.

I want everyone to stand up.

Shake your wiggles out from sitting so long, then stand up strong and tall like a soldier.

I am going to read you a list of things many people are tempted with.

If you have ever been tempted with or given in to any of these things, I want you to bend one of your joints (fingers, wrist, elbow, knees, neck, etc.).

- If you have ever been tempted to eat something even when your parent told you not to, bend a joint.
- If you have ever been tempted to steal a piece of candy from a store, bend a joint.
- If you have ever been tempted to say a curse word to look cool or impress your friends, bend a joint.
- If you have ever been tempted to watch something you knew you weren't supposed to watch, bend a joint.
- If you have ever been tempted to say something to one of your parents that was disrespectful or in a disrespectful tone, bend a joint.
- If you have ever been tempted to tell a lie so you wouldn't get in trouble for something you did, bend a joint.

If you are still standing tall, you are superhuman.

If you are honest, most of us had bent at least one joint in that game.

Alright, everyone can sit down again.

Romans 3:23 says this:

²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

SAY: We all are tempted to sin and bend in ways God doesn't want us to.

But we can be like Daniel and his friends and take a stand for God by obeying Him.

We won't be perfect at this – no one is!

But by following Daniel's example and choosing to obey God even when it's hard, our faith becomes unshakable.

Daniel needed help from God to stand firm, and God helped him.

In the same way, we can ask God to help us stand firm, and He will help us.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which word from our game earlier would you like to be said about you? Why?
 - RESILIENT: Doesn't let hard times or sadness stop him or her from following God
 - ENCOURAGING: Takes opportunities to give others hope and encouragement
 - RIGHTEOUS: Does the right thing, even when others don't
 - PREPARED: Has already decided to not be involved in things that don't honor God, before temptations come up
 - PRAYER WARRIOR: Prays even when people make fun of him or her for it
 - HONEST: Says what is true and right, even if it could get him or her in trouble
 - INTEGRITY: Does the right thing, even when no one else is looking
 - SELFLESS: Uses influence to help other people do what is right, even if it makes life harder for him or her
2. Why do you think Daniel cared so much about what he ate?
3. What risks do you think Daniel was taking by asking for different food?
4. What does Daniel's request for different food show us about what was most important to him?
5. If you were in this story, which characters do you think you would be most like?
 - Daniel, who spoke up and asked for the special provisions
 - Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who followed Daniel's lead and obeyed God
 - The other young men, who went along with King Nebuchadnezzar's commands
6. What do you think gave Daniel the courage to speak up instead of staying quiet?
7. What are some common struggles for preteens that present opportunities for standing strong and having unshakable faith?
8. Why is it easier to bend and go along with others who are doing the wrong thing than to stand and do what is right even when others are doing the wrong thing?
9. How would you describe the beliefs, lifestyle, and habits of someone with unshakable faith?

10. What advice would you give a fellow student who was in a situation where God's way was different than what everyone else was doing?