



LIVING AMONG
LIONS

HOW TO THRIVE LIKE
DANIEL
IN TODAY'S BABYLON

DAVID & JASON
BENHAM

STUDY GUIDE

LIVING AMONG LIONS STUDY GUIDE

Study 1: Conviction — Identity

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This Study is Designed to be Used for:
Small Groups ~ Sunday School ~ One-on-One Discipleship ~ Personal Study

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STUDY GUIDE INTRODUCTION

For the first time in our nation's history, living faithfully for Christ may actually cost something for those who choose to stand against the ever-shifting culture.

But here's the good news. Since the battle cry in our first book, *Whatever the Cost*, we have been traveling the country calling Christians to stand boldly for Christ. And we hear a rumbling, a stirring, among believers who are *not* willing to bow to the changing culture, but who are willing to live faithfully in the midst of it.

These convictional Christians—those who actually live according to the convictions of their faith—have the chance to be God's instruments of light pushing back the darkness in an hour of history that is exclusive to us. This is our time! We were born—and born again—for such a time as this.

The choice for us today is clear: bow before God or bow before men.

In our second book *Living Among Lions* and in this companion study guide, we take a detailed look at the life of Daniel as he transitioned from the light of the Holy Land to the darkness of Babylon. We walk through the three C's of his life—conviction, commitment, and courage—that set him apart in Babylon's culture and must also set us apart in our own today.

This study is structured to inspire in you a spiritual life like Daniel's—a personal culture of transformational living that moves from conviction to commitment and from commitment to courage. Because as the winds of culture continue to shift against our convictions of faith we will need the courage of Daniel to live faithfully in the midst of a darkening land.

STUDY ONE: Conviction — Identity

In this first study, we will focus on how crucial it is to be certain you have a growing and deepening personal relationship with God—the conviction that transforms your inner person. Knowing God, choosing to stand out, knowing your identity and thinking your identity all intertwine to produce strong commitment and courage for the spiritual battles we face in today's Babylon.

Know God

Daniel's conviction that transformed his heart came from his *relationship* with God. But his *surrender* was not an eleventh-hour Hail Mary on the road to Babylon; instead it was an intentional decision to be in an intimate relationship with God—to *know* Him—many years before the captivity and deportation of his country. A relationship this strong is not built overnight in the face of a crisis, but is tested and deepened over time.

Yet the fruit of Daniel's life—even at such a young age—made this one thing abundantly clear: He *knew* God. *His* God! So when the crisis came down, Daniel rose above it. Even amid judgment and captivity, His conviction matched God's call to flourish in Babylon. His faith was his own, not just relegated to Sunday morning church attendance or belonging to the "right" church or denomination. Daniel's faith was deeply personal.

At around sixteen years old, both of us began to dig into our time alone with God and Bible reading, to believe and experience that God knew us and loved us. And we wanted to know Him and love Him in return.

The next few years before we left home for Liberty University proved to be a time of explosive growth in the Lord for us. By the time we were college freshmen, we could say we truly knew the Lord. Like Daniel, our faith was now our own *and* deeply personal.

After four years at Liberty, we entered the world of professional baseball. For the first time in our lives, we were in a totally foreign environment. People in our new world not only lacked interest in the things of God; they often mocked them. The friendly confines of our comfortable Christian environment had been replaced by a strange and unfamiliar land. And our relationship with the Lord was daily put to the test.

We did the only thing we knew to do: be faithful to God by drawing strength from our growing relationship with Him. Because of this, we understood our role in this new environment and were able to remain secure in our walk with Christ. We didn't carry index cards around the clubhouse with how-to lists or reminders to say no to temptation and shine the light of Jesus. Instead, we simply focused on our relationship with Him. So even in a foreign situation, often opposed to our faith, we kept up our pursuit to know God better. And the more we got to know Him, the more of Him we wanted to discover.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: If you own it, you never have to borrow it, and you'll always have it when you need it. You must own your relationship with Jesus.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

How about you? Have you made an intentional decision to be in a personal relationship with God? Is Jesus *yours*? Or is He just your parent's, your friend's, your spouse's, or your pastor's Lord and Savior?

Do you *own* your faith or are you only "borrowing" it from someone else?

If you're confident you know Jesus, are there areas of your life where you have not fully surrendered to Him?

Knowing that you know God is the first step on the journey of faith. This is where the Kingdom of God begins. We want you to know that you know Him before you move forward in this study.

Stand Out

Because of sinful actions as a nation, Israel had been captured by Babylon and many Israelites were exiled there. Uprooted and placed in a strange land, Daniel's life was turned upside down, but God was going to place him right where He wanted him.

"Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, youths in whom was no defect, who were good-looking, showing intelligence in every *branch of wisdom*, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, and who had ability for serving in the king's court; and *he ordered him* to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and *appointed* that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service. Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah." (Daniel 1:3-6 NASB)

It was no accident that Daniel and his friends were placed into the direct service of the King of Babylon. God was at work—even amidst the darkness. He elevated Daniel and his friends to the height of Babylon's culture. And yet, they refused to *become* like the culture. They chose to stand out.

"But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought *permission* from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself." (Daniel 1:8 NASB)

Though Daniel had to live in Babylon, he maintained Heaven's culture inside his own heart. Though he mixed in, he did not blend in.

Daniel and his friends stood out like chocolate chips in the cookie dough of culture! Hang with us on this one while we explain ...

When you make chocolate chip cookie dough, you blend together ingredients like butter, sugar, flour, baking soda, vanilla, and salt into the dough. After mixing it all together, you can no longer recognize what's what. Yet when you mix in the chocolate chips, they keep their distinct form. Though they mix in, they never *blend* in—even when baked in the oven. The chocolate chips remain a distinct part of the batch, but never lose their form.

This is our calling today as Christians in today's Babylon—mix in, but never blend in—even when the heat is turned up. This is how we faithfully stand out!

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: Christians are to be the chocolate chips in the cookie dough of culture. We are to mix in, not blend in—keeping our form, remaining completely distinct and separate—yet we should make the entire batch great!

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Are you mixing in or blending in with the culture? Can people recognize your Christian witness?

When the heat turns up and you're ridiculed for your faith, are you blending in or standing out?

If your answer is "I blend in," be honest as to why. Is it fear, lack of trust, apathy, or what?

If your answer is "I stand out," share a situation where this occurred and what happened.

Know Your Identity

One of the best ways to live with conviction in today's Babylon is to know your identity in Christ. While we must, of course, *know* God, we must also know *who we are* in relation to Him. We're *His* kids! He's our Father, and this identity in Him needs to be made strong and secure to the level we see in Daniel's life.

Even as a teenager, Daniel understood his identity as a child of the One True King. So right out of the gate, when he was offered the Babylonian king's meat and wine, he politely but courageously said, "No, thank you." His actions issued from his God-centered identity. Not even the most powerful leader in the known world offering a buffet of delicacies could change that.

Daniel resolved he would not "defile himself" (Daniel 1:8). Traditionally, that meant he would not make himself ceremonially unclean as a Jew by partaking of the foreign king's table (Leviticus 18:30).

But Daniel was resisting more than food. He was refusing the king's attempt at identity

theft. Nebuchadnezzar was trying to absorb Daniel into Babylon's culture through Babylon's delights. The king knew that if he could entice Daniel to love Babylon in his heart, then Daniel would permit Babylon to redefine his identity. That is why Daniel saw the king's food and wine as defilement—a corruption he refused. He had possession of his identity and guarded it with his life to remain free from Babylon's attempts to violate his personhood. Now *that's* living with conviction!

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: Knowing our true identity brings conviction, and conviction fuels our actions.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

How was Daniel's refusal to eat from the king's table connected to his identity?

Is there anything about this familiar Bible story you learned that you had not seen before?

What are some "defilements" in our culture today that we as Christians may be allowing but are actually things we should be avoiding?

What are some personal connections you can make from this principle to your life today?

Think Your Identity

Remember the Disney story of *The Lion King*? Simba was heir to the throne of Mufasa at Pride Rock. But after being falsely accused of his father's death, he ran away and lived in the land of Hakuna Matata with a meerkat and a warthog. While he had a carefree life there, away from the responsibilities of being the lion king, Pride Rock drifted away into darkness as Simba slowly forgot who he was. Until one day, a strange baboon reminded him that he was the son of his father, Mufasa. In that moment of realization, Simba ran back to Pride Rock and re-established the kingdom under his loving rule. He ran to the roar! He put things back the way his father had always intended.

Once you are a child of God, His identity is in your DNA. When you recognize this truth, a life of power and faithfulness is in your grasp.

When you see yourself for who you truly are, this sets the stage for you to see the world for what it truly is. And like the young lion, Simba, you will go back and rule with the dominion God has given you—your world that God has destined you to transform. No more sitting in Hakuna Matata land, singing, "It's a problem free philosophy," because there's a very real enemy who seeks to "steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10).

Satan knows one very important fact—how you see yourself determines how you conduct yourself. So if he can rob you of your identity, then he's well on his way to killing you and de-

stroying everything you stand for. But this doesn't have to happen. Know that your heavenly Father lives in you. Remember who you are and run to the roar!

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: To live among lions, *who you are* must come from Who He is.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

How crucial do you think Daniel's convictions from God, first built in Israel, were to his new life in Babylon?

How crucial is your identity in Christ to you being where God has you living today?

How might living out your identity in Christ affect your daily decisions?

Knowing God unlocks the door to your identity—exactly who He created you to be—so your life can overflow with His conviction to stand up and stand out for Him!

Close this study by sharing one important truth you learned.

STUDY TWO: Conviction — Worldview

It's time to take personal transformation to the next level. Our relationship with God, as well as knowing our identity in Him, must now expand into our view of the world. A God-centered worldview is a central theme in the book of Daniel, as well as our focus in this next study. From the personal stories in the first half to the prophecies in the second half, Daniel's story is all about viewing life and history from God's perspective—that is, from the viewpoint of His kingdom. With this perspective, nothing will shake us.

The same truth that determined Daniel's identity and the patterns of his thinking also defined the events of his life and the world around him. That was how he could remain faithful to God in Babylon and exactly how we can live with conviction today.

In the pagan culture of Babylon Daniel's worldview fueled his actions as he chose to *transform* culture rather than *conform* to it, think Godly, value reverence over relevance, and renounce and replace lies with truth.

Don't Conform, Transform

As teenagers growing up in Dallas, Texas, we would spend the hot summer months working outside all day long. For a few weeks one summer, we helped a friend lay concrete, which is not a job for the faint of heart. (*David: I constantly had to drag Jason along to keep up.*)

On one particular job, we were putting in a pool. Our main responsibility was to build the forms—the wooden borders for the concrete—to shape the sidewalks and the surrounding deck. This was a nightmare of a project. Although working with cement in the blistering Texas heat pales in comparison to getting thrown into a fiery furnace, it's still a very painful experience!

We gathered all our materials and went to work on the forms. When we were done, the truck rolled up and poured in the concrete. The wet cement flowed into the frames and filled out the pattern. At the end of the project, we had a sidewalk, surrounding deck, and pool shaped exactly according to the design.

Aside from trying to sneak our handprints into the wet cement, we learned a valuable lesson later in life through this experience. The world has built "forms" designed for us to conform to, and if we're not proactively fighting *against* them, then we'll be shaped *by* them. Building God-honoring forms in our lives, according to His pattern, is vital to living a Daniel life in Babylon.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: The world wants us to *conform*. But God wants us to *transform*, so we can make a difference in this world.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

What are some “forms” our culture has set up that we are expected to conform to?

Why is it sometimes hard for us to see these “forms” for what they truly are?

Why is it often challenging for us to go against these “forms?”

What are some ways we can keep from being *conformed*, but instead be *transformed*?

Godly Thinking

When Daniel and his friends arrived in Babylon, there was a form into which they were to be “poured.” The king of Babylon brought these young Jewish teenagers into his custody so he could fully indoctrinate them into the ways of Babylon. The king didn’t want “Jewish thinking” people in his court. He wanted Babylonian-thinking people, coupled with the excellence of their Jewish roots. So what did the king need to do to accomplish this?

Phase One: Cultivate a taste for the things of Babylon.

Phase Two: Create a paradigm toward the thinking of Babylon.

Does this remind you of the cultural indoctrination going on today? We have allowed ourselves to cultivate appetites for the things of this world and yet we still want to be transformers for God. The two of these cannot and will not go hand in hand.

Daniel’s refusal to conform had to begin right at the point when he was presented with the first bite of the king’s food. He knew if he lost the battle over his appetite, the process of conforming to their culture would begin.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: The enemy can’t get you to act like the world until he’s first convinced you to *think* like the world.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Why would the enemy want us to *think* like the world first? Why does he start there?

What are some ways we are discouraged from being “Christ-thinking” people today?

When we realize there is a “form” we are being conformed to, how can we refuse and find God’s plan, like Daniel did?

Discuss how relationships with other Christians can help us “fight the forms” of culture?

Reverence Over Relevance

Considering the “forms” to which we are tempted to conform, think about this—for the past few years, *relevance* has become a buzzword in Christian circles. The big question many churches and Christian leaders are asking is, “How can we be more relevant to the surrounding culture and still maintain our convictions to God?” We hear this question quite often.

First, Daniel probably would not have asked a question like this. Although relevance to culture is certainly something to consider, the most important question we need to be asking is, “How can we be *reverent* to God?” Then let relevance come in His time and His way.

Reverence means fearing God and not man—worshiping, respecting, seeking to please and honor Him above any other consideration. An attitude of reverence is part of our inner transformation and our conviction.

When everyone did what was *culturally* relevant by bowing to Nebuchadnezzar’s golden image in Daniel chapter 3, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego did what was *personally reverent* by standing up, unwilling to break, or even fit in with everyone else.

“Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” (Daniel 3:16-18 NASB)

By refusing to kneel before the earthly king, they received the smile of their heavenly King.

Only a person whose heart is bowed in reverence would choose to stand on God’s truth, when the surrounding culture demands you bow. These boys properly understood their one duty was to remain reverent to God and allow Him to handle the results. Ironically, these guys probably became the most relevant brothers in Babylon as the entire nation witnessed a powerful testimony of God’s men unscathed by the fiery furnace! (Daniel 3)

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: Those who bow in reverence to God and leave the results to Him will become relevant in His time, in His way.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Why do you think we feel such a pull to be relevant today?

Where is the pressure coming from in our churches to first be relevant to culture before being reverent to God?

In your own life, do you struggle with a desire to be more relevant than reverent? Explain.

Discuss some ways you can move toward reverence, leaving the results to God.

Renounce and Replace

Growing up, our dad taught us a truth we have never forgotten—“*The warfare for your soul takes place on the battleground of your mind.*” So we memorized the following verse ...

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:2 NASB)

Here Paul talks about this process of renewal, which has two crucial components and action steps:

1. Renounce

The old thoughts that conform us to the world are lies we believe to be true. Renouncing the lies you’ve believed is a powerful component to your personal transformation. You must first remove these before you can put on the new truth from God. This leads to the second step.

2. Replace

God’s truth must replace the lie, so the enemy can’t put another one of his back in its place. Find Bible verses that specifically contradict the lies you’ve believed, and make those words your new thoughts. For example, Daniel 11:32: “But the people who know their God will display strength and take action.” Such a statement reveals God’s way of thinking—the kind we need in our minds while living in a pagan culture.

Christians cannot just try to un-think the old, but must deliberately and intentionally think the way God thinks. He has provided His thoughts for us in the Bible; revealed to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, for exactly this purpose.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: Renouncing Satan’s lies and replacing them with God’s truth brings renewal.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

What are your thoughts about our dad’s truth: “The warfare for your soul takes place on the battleground of your mind”?

Why are the lies we believe and tell ourselves so hard to let go of?

How can God’s Word help us renounce and replace those lies?

Allowing God alone to transform your life into His image will create a reverent *and* relevant life where He may have victory in the culture through your life of conviction.

Close this study by sharing one important truth you learned.

STUDY THREE: Commitment — The Internal Life

Daniel's *conviction* was his internal reservoir of strength. His *commitments* created a pipeline for this to flow into everyday life in Babylon. That's how he was able to resist the pagan influence and, instead, transform its culture. As we develop the same commitments, we will reap the same results.

Quite often, the problem with uncommitted Christians is their *internal convictions* are not cemented by *external commitments*—they've never accepted God's challenge to transform the way they actually live.

In this study, we'll explore three of Daniel's internal commitments that transformed his every day life: purity, humility, and excellence. By *internal* we mean the things he committed to be. In the next section we'll explore the things Daniel committed to do.

Purity

When we were eight years old, there was a huge lightning storm late one summer night in Dallas that struck dozens of trees around our neighborhood. We'll never forget when a bolt hit our big maple in the front yard, snapping the tree nearly in half. The *crack* was incredibly loud!

After the storm was over, we went into the front yard to look. The tree was charred like it had been on a barbeque grill. Massive branches lay on the ground. The sight was surreal. But the most striking part (pun intended) was how crisp and clean the air had become. For summers in Texas, this was not the norm. The atmosphere was no longer hot and humid, but cool and fresh.

Our first big experience with lightning was pretty cool. This also eventually taught us a vital kingdom principle. God uses lightning to purify the air. These natural, electric bolts do more than generate power; they purge the air of pollutants, allergens, and insects, while producing nitrogen oxides and ozone to balance the atmosphere.

God has given us His Spirit so we can have the same effect. He not has called us to be lighting *bugs*—blinking our light off and on when convenient—but lightning *bolts*—powerful points of light that purify the environment.

But first we must be personally pure. Jesus said in Matthew 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." If we want to clearly see God and be used as His purifiers in the culture around us we must be pure in heart—free from the pollutants of the world.

Later in Daniel's life, he strikes like lightning into King Belshazzar's drunken party, purifying the "air" with the crisp clarity of God's message to the king (Daniel 5). When Belshazzar took the sacred Jewish cups meant for God's purposes and used them to get drunk at his pagan party, suddenly, God's hand appeared in the room, writing the king's judgment on the wall.

When Daniel was summoned to interpret the writing, the king offered him gifts for his interpretation, but he held on to his inner resolve to be personally pure—“Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else” (v. 17). He kept himself free from self-promotion, which allowed him to clearly see God’s hand at work and strike with precision and power, generating a considerable change in the air.

Daniel transformed the atmosphere of Babylon because he had transformed the atmosphere of his own life first. As a result, he was a powerful purifier amid Babylon’s spiritually polluted environment.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: To be powerful purifiers, we must first be personally pure.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Where do you see purity—especially Biblical purity—being challenged today in our culture?

Why do you think our culture, along with the entire world, is becoming increasingly impure?

What are some practical ways God can purify us in our own lives?

What are some practical ways we can be purifiers in the world around us?

Humility

Daniel’s transformed lifestyle was not only marked by a commitment to purity but also humility. This defining characteristic put him on the path of no resistance toward God and characterized the entire narrative of his life.

Although God gave Daniel powerful talents and influence in Babylon’s highest court, he never positioned himself for promotion or tried to “brand” his name. Rather, he saw himself as God’s person, serving God’s purposes, in God’s place. So Daniel left his personal success completely in God’s hands.

Daniel had no agenda except to be a lowly servant of the highest King. This position of humility enabled him to walk in supernatural power. He did not pursue gifts, praise, or promotion. So he did not shrink before liars, laws, or lions.

When brought before King Nebuchadnezzar to interpret his first dream, Daniel responded that he was not the one that could do it, but “there is a God in Heaven” who could (2:28). Now that’s humility, especially when so much personal advancement was available to Daniel for delivering the interpretation.

Daniel did not have to try to be humble. He simply spent time in God’s presence, and noth-

ing creates humility in the human heart like being in His presence!

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: Whether in promotion or persecution, God's presence empowers the humble heart.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

How do you think purity is connected to humility? Or is it?

Why do you think our culture is becoming more prideful rather than humble?

When you experience victory in your life, do you tend to give credit to God or receive the glory for yourself?

What are some ways we can be intentional about staying humble before God?

Excellence

We have already seen that Daniel was a man of excellence. This commitment not only transformed his personal lifestyle but also the world around him.

Fresh out of pro baseball as newbie real estate agents, we didn't have much business coming in the door. So we'd show up to the office early in the morning before anyone else and hit our knees in prayer.

After several weeks, our big break in business came with one call. A banker was looking for someone willing to sell a few dumpy foreclosure houses located in our area. "We'll sell them! Where are they?" we asked. Within a few hours of the banker's initial call, we had gone out to all the properties, changed the locks, taken pictures, and provided an analysis of the market value for each house. Although we had *no* idea what we were doing at the time, we were committed to excellence. That was the goal that guided us.

Arriving back at the office, we sent all the information back to him. Within a few minutes, our phone rang. It was the banker saying, "Are you kidding me?! In all my years in this business, I've never seen this before. What you boys just did in a couple of hours normally takes agents several days. Do you think you can keep this up?"

We responded, "If you send us everything you've got in our area, we guarantee to keep this same level of excellence." Six months later, we had sold nineteen houses for him and *landed* at the top of the sales board. Seven years later, we had a hundred offices in thirty-five states.

When excellence becomes a commitment that transforms your lifestyle, this opens the door for God to receive great glory. He determines who, what, and where you serve; you just have to stay faithfully committed to serving with excellence.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: The favor of God gets you in the door, but excellence keeps you there.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Do you believe excellence is an increasing or decreasing quality in our culture? Why? How are purity and humility connected to excellence?

How does our commitment to excellence (or lack of) impact our Christian witness?

What is it about a relationship with Christ that should inspire and motivate our personal commitment to excellence?

A life today committed to the Biblical brand of purity, humility, and excellence is going to shine, just as Daniels' did in Babylon. The darker the culture becomes, the brighter this light will shine for God's great glory! May we be His people committed to an internal life of righteousness, found only in Him.

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

Close this study by sharing one important truth you learned.

STUDY FOUR: Commitment — The External Life

Those who turn their conviction to follow Jesus into a disciplined life are known as *disciples*. The most distinct mark of God's genuine disciples is their commitment to spend time alone with God, praying and studying His Word. And those committed to do this *will* be transformers.

Today, the word *disciple* doesn't have the same meaning it once did back in Bible times. As a matter of fact, we've watered it down so much that very little of what we do today would be considered true biblical discipleship—especially when it comes to prayer and knowing God's Word.

The only Jewish boys that could become disciples of a Rabbi back in Jesus' day had to know the first five books of the Bible—by memory! Not only that, they had to be able to provide context to any individual verse about which the Rabbi asked them. Needless to say, not all Jewish boys could become disciples. Those that didn't make the cut went to work in a common trade.

But here's what's amazing—Jesus, the greatest Rabbi, chose twelve guys who were all employed in common trades. He didn't get the top dogs who already knew God's Word like the back of their hands. Sure, the disciples knew Scripture, as most Jewish boys did, but they didn't know it like those who could become disciples of a rabbi.

Jesus picked the guys who failed the test. He chose the ones the world would consider the B team. Is there any wonder that these guys immediately dropped their nets and followed Him? They had been chosen by Rabbi Jesus, and He believed they could become *just like Him!*

But it doesn't stop there. Jesus believes we can be just like Him too. But it takes full surrender, which is why we must also be people of prayer in addition to disciples of His Word. Prayer and God's Word are to the human soul what sunlight and rain are to plants and trees. These are external commitments Daniel made that allowed him to shine brightly amidst the darkness of Babylon – he studied God's Word, submitted to it, and infused powerful prayer into his daily life.

Study God's Word

We cannot forget the connection between discipleship and knowing God's Word. As Christ asks us to follow Him, we should fully commit to knowing His Word, so we "may be adequate, equipped for every good work" in our Babylon (2 Timothy 3:17 NASB). Ultimately, and most importantly, a disciple *does* the Word of God—he or she knows that *learning* must lead to *living*. As our dad says, "Your theology must become your biography."

Dad told us when we were kids that if we read the Bible just five minutes every day, we'd still have twenty-three hours and fifty-five minutes left to do whatever we needed to do.

He said that eventually our hearts and minds would transform to be like Christ's—if only we would commit to consistent time in His Word.

By the time we graduated from high school, five minutes was no longer enough time. We craved much more of God's Word. This commitment was the single best decision we ever made as Christians to transform our lives.

In the same way that people don't find most precious jewels just sitting on the surface of the ground, we had to dig deep in the Word and spend time alone chiseling away before valuable nuggets of truth emerged. And once we started discovering, we couldn't stop digging! The more we read and meditated on God's Word, the more we realized why we had seen Dad spend so much time reading his Bible. Every morning, he would either be praying on his knees by the couch or sitting on his kitchen stool reading Scripture. So we began forming the habit of doing the same thing each morning, not because we had a natural desire to wake up early, but because we knew this was best for us as disciples.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: If we want the transformational life of Jesus to flow through us into our world, we cannot do it apart from a commitment to His Word.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Do you feel like our current Christian culture values the Word of God? Why or why not?

Would you consider yourself to be a dabbler in Jesus or a disciple of Christ? Why?

Would you consider yourself to be a disciple that is "adequately equipped for every good work" as 2 Timothy 2:17 states? Why or why not?

Have you made the commitment to spend time in God's Word every day more than any other book? (If your answer is no, consider starting this discipline today.)

Submit to God's Word

We were once asked to speak at a theological seminary on a panel discussing Christian influence in society. We encountered some interesting dialogue among the panelists about how each of them approached the Bible. When asked what their personal Bible studies looked like, each responded in similar fashion: "We just open the Bible and try to find *our own* truth." They were basically saying, they start with their own experience and then look to the Bible to support what they think.

I (David) was just about to speak when Jason grabbed the microphone and said, "There are only two ways to approach the Bible—start with *you*, where you take your beliefs and experience and wrap the Bible around *them*—or start with *God*, where you take the Bible and

wrap your beliefs and experience around it.”

He continued, “If you approach reading the Bible with *you* as the starting point, then you can get God’s Word to say almost anything you want—and you’ll then justify any behavior you want. There’s no such thing as your *own* truth.”

He then added, “Biblical Christians start with God first and then allow our experience to be interpreted through His Word as it tells us what we should believe—not the other way around. We submit to His Word—His Word does not submit to us! He is Truth.”

Despite what our panelist friends believed, we must approach God’s Word on *His* terms—not ours. He is the beginning—our starting point. He is the end—the One with the final say. He is Alpha *and* Omega, the first *and* last (Revelation 22:13).

Though our experiences certainly affect what we understand the Bible to say at different times in our lives, we cannot allow our own circumstances to ultimately determine what God’s Word says. This is at the root of humanistic (man-centered) Bible study. When reading God’s Word, we either begin with *God* or we begin with *us* as the starting point—there’s no middle ground. You’re either worshiping God through Bible study or worshiping yourself.

True disciples never mold what the Bible says to fit their own ends. Rather, they allow the Bible to mold *them*. This is exactly what God-centered Scripture study will produce.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: Wrap your beliefs around the Bible. Never wrap the Bible around your beliefs.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Why is it so easy for us to filter the Bible through our own emotions, needs, and desires?

How can we be certain we are “starting with God” in our own Bible reading and study?

What are some ways we could hit the reset button on our approach to Scripture?

Powerful Prayer

Another commitment that transformed Daniel’s lifestyle was prayer. Daniel’s prayer life matured into more than a tool for survival; it became a celebration of God’s greatness. This is the kind of prayer life that transforms the world. Even though we must pray for our needs, Daniel’s example shows us that genuine prayer, like our Bible reading, is not “me-centered,” but *God-centered*.

A prayer life filled with praise opens the floodgates of deep friendship with God, connecting our hearts and making prayer an intimate bond, rather than a religious exercise or a mere business transaction. Transformational prayer then must include our personal petitions, but must soar beyond those into recognizing the awesomeness of God Himself.

Too often, we limit our prayers to things we want as if God were a spiritual vending machine, but fail to “pour out our hearts before Him” in high praise and intimate worship (Psalm 62:8). Above all, prayer should be first about God, not us. Think of the difference between a love letter and a to-do list. Which would you rather receive?

Over time, Daniel developed an active prayer life; he didn’t wait until he was in trouble to pray. Prayer became a commitment that turned into habit. That habit then intertwined with his character. As with David, prayer became part of Daniel’s constitution as a human being (2 Samuel 7:18-29). Even when the laws of the land singled him out and targeted his petitions, he never cowered in fear or hid his faith but stood strong. He could do nothing else.

Prayer transforms *everything*—our lives and the world around us. People who pray like Daniel merge Heaven and Earth in their souls. They become doorways for God’s kingdom to enter Babylon. They don’t just become prayer warriors, but warriors through prayer.

When Daniel prayed, he stood upon the two greatest commandments—loving the Lord our God and loving others as ourselves (Matthew 22:37–39). This provides the foundation upon which we are to stand when we pray. It’s all about the *person* of God and the *people* He’s created.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: We aren’t to focus on getting answers to our prayers, but on growing with the God who answers them.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

What are some ways we could see prayer as “pouring out our hearts” rather than engaging with “a vending machine?”

Discuss the “love letter” and “to-do list” analogy of praying.

The statement “Prayer transforms *everything*—our lives and the world around us.” What might happen if we truly believed and practiced this?

How could applying the greatest commandment—“loving God and our neighbors”—transform our prayer lives?

Being a committed disciple of Jesus Christ with the goal of continually becoming like Him will be a life increasingly centered on Scripture and prayer. Knowing Him through His Word and His heart transforms us into a people who will be changed, and then will change the culture, and ultimately the world.

Close this study by sharing one important truth you learned.

STUDY FIVE: COURAGE — Refuse to Bow

As former professional baseball players, we've just got to begin this first study on courage with a baseball analogy. When we have a talent to play the game (conviction), coupled with a solid work ethic to be the best at the sport (commitment), we then just have to go out there and play the game (courage).

And when we set foot on the field, we swing for the fences! Daniel stepped onto Babylon's "field" and did just that.

Our playing field is right where God has placed us—with our family, friends, workplace, and community—in *our world*. When we're faithful to transform our own circles of influence, God then allows us to take part in transforming the rest of His world—the city, state, nation, and ultimately the whole earth.

God has equipped us to be His agents of transformation in the culture. But how do we do this in a world where evil is called good and good is called evil? How do we interact with those who not only disagree with us, but actually oppose us?

The answer is courage.

As we live faithfully with conviction and commitment, we *will* have the courage to stand like Daniel did in Babylon.

In this study we'll discuss three steps of courage: having a hard head and a soft heart, reaching out to individuals while resisting ideas, and letting it be known that you will only bow to God alone.

Hard Head, Soft Heart

The first step of courage is to have a hard head and a soft heart.

A soft heart means that the motive behind our courage is not self-righteous frustration, but *love*—genuine love for God and love for people.

A hard head means that our goal is to please God, not man—to stand firmly on His principles and timeless truths, regardless of what others say or do.

In today's volatile and sometimes hostile culture, if we don't have a soft heart and a hard head, we have little chance to courageously transform anyone's world—including our own.

Daniel displayed a soft heart and a hard head when he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's second dream. He had the courage to tell the king that God was about to judge him. But his heart was so soft toward Nebuchadnezzar as a human being that he delivered the bad news with genuine compassion. This was the same king who destroyed Daniel's nation—so he had every reason to treat the king poorly.

But notice Daniel's grace-filled language here. "My lord, *if only* the dream applied to those who hate you and its interpretation to your adversaries! ... Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins ... in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity" (Daniel 4:19, 27 NASB).

Daniel's head was hard enough to tell the king what he *needed* to hear, not what he *wanted* to hear. But his heart was soft enough to approach the king as a friend, and to desire his wellbeing. Daniel's soft heart burned with compassion toward the man. But his hard head barreled through any fear of that man.

Being softhearted by itself becomes people pleasing. Being hardheaded without compassion becomes mean-spirited and angry. Erring to the extreme on either side can be easy, but good leaders embrace the tension between the two and live it out. That is courageous.

"But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). Notice how Paul placed truth (the hard head) and love (the soft heart) together in strong partnership.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: Soft Heart + Hard Head = Courage.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

What are the positives of a soft heart? The negatives?

What are the positives of a hard head? The negatives?

Why is finding the balance between a soft heart and a hard head so important today?

Ideas & Individuals

After HGTV fired us from our reality show, we found ourselves pushed out of our safe little comfort zones and put smack-dab in the middle of a media firestorm. As we desired to stand with courage we learned the need to separate ideas from individuals.

We knew Jesus taught us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. But until we were actually thrown into the fire did we experience how this works. The amazing thing is, as the interviews and controversy swirled, we felt genuine love toward the individuals who were criticizing us but a righteous anger toward the ideas holding them captive. The Holy Spirit enabled us to reach out with compassion to these individuals while resisting with courage their ideas set against the knowledge of God.

Jesus taught us not to worry beforehand about what to say when we are falsely accused

and brought before governing authorities. In those moments, the Holy Spirit will give us the words to speak (Mark 13:11). But we didn't know exactly how all that worked, until this time in our lives.

We discovered that genuine love for the people targeting us paved the way for God's Spirit to speak through us. It was surreal—God guided us *through* love. Again—this was the work of the Holy Spirit. Nothing in our flesh could have drummed up an emotion that strong in those tough moments. That is why we never had anything hateful to say toward anyone. We actually felt genuine love and concern for all the people coming against us. But love doesn't stop with a feeling. Love always takes action to serve the other person's best interest. And when someone is held captive by ideas against God's best for their lives love steps in to resist.

"We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Although we resisted with courage ungodly ideas, God empowered us to reach out with compassion to the people who held those ideas.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: A Christian boldly *resists* with courage the ideas exalted against the knowledge of God, but *reaches out* with compassion to the people who hold them.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Share a situation where you experienced the opportunity to share the love of Christ with an individual while also taking godly action against an unrighteous idea.

Share a situation where the Holy Spirit gave you the words to speak.

What are some practical ways we can fight ungodly ideas today while still loving individuals?

Let It Be Known

When you stand with courage for the truth of God you will have enemies as a result. Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego proved this to be true as they refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's idol. A certain group of people within the intellectual community of Babylon—the Chaldeans—told the king about their refusal to bow and eagerly waited to see how he would respond.

The king's pride took a hit when he heard they wouldn't bow, so he was enraged and asked the three if they properly understood the punishment. He challenged them by saying, "And what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" (Daniel 3:15)

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, *let it be known* to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (v. 16–18, emphasis added).

"Let it be known." These boys responded with supernatural, hardheaded courage! They let all in attendance know their God was *the* living God. They *stood* with courage and then *spoke* with courage. The two went hand in hand. Walk before talk.

The king knew they publicly rebuked him, and they knew he would publicly rebuke them back. With conviction and commitment already on their side, they had all the courage they needed to stand strong as God's men, even in the face of fire. But their concern was not their fate. Their focus was God's glory in Babylon. As they told the king, even if God chose not to deliver them from the fire, they would not serve his gods or worship the golden image. Their universe was not me-centered, but God-centered.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: The resolve to stand is our responsibility; the result of our stand is God's.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Why do you think showing strong courage for God today is often viewed as being "radical," "hateful," or even "extreme?"

How is keeping our eyes on Christ such a crucial component of Christian courage?

How can we take steps toward becoming courageous like Daniel's friends in our culture?

Working toward the balance between a soft heart (love) and a hard head (truth) while reaching out to individuals and resisting ideas helps us to courageously stand for Christ and let the world know He is our King. We must remember God is able to deliver us from any situation, but even if He chooses not to, as Daniel's friends told the king, He is still our God—and He will give us the courage we need to stand strong.

Close this study by sharing one important truth you learned.

STUDY SIX: Courage — Choose to Stand

God is calling modern Christians out of hiding! We are heralds of truth, declaring God's Word on the spiritual battlefield of our culture. There is far too much at stake to stand down when pressured to conform or capitulate. Rather, we must choose to stand up with courage declaring that Jesus is the answer.

During an interview on *Fox & Friends*, we were asked, "So you guys were fired for having an opinion?" I (Jason) responded, "We weren't fired for *having* an opinion; we were fired for *voicing* an opinion."

Daniel's three buddies—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego—could've sat in silence and chosen to bow out of the fight, living to fight another day. Yet they provide us with a lasting example of courage as they chose to stand while everyone else bowed in submission (Daniel 3).

They had government jobs in a pagan nation. They served with excellence among people steeped in idolatry. Yet their conviction and commitment would never allow them to bow to any god but their own. At some point there had to be a clash. And the clash would create an opportunity to turn commitment to courage—and transform the world.

In this section we'll explore how Daniel courageously kept his windows open (did not change who he was) and told the king to keep his gifts (he wasn't going to sell out). We'll also discuss where lions lurk and how to face them with courage.

Keep the Windows Open

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego faced the fire inside the furnace. Daniel felt the lions' breath on his face in the den. All four men made their stand publicly—courageously placing their private convictions and commitments on full display for all to see.

There comes a time in all of our lives when, after living with conviction and commitment privately, the Spirit of God will call on us to stand with courage publicly. Stephen in Acts 6-7 was a man full of faith, chosen to serve the widows in the early church. When he was falsely accused and brought before the Sanhedrin, he was filled with the Holy Spirit to speak courageously for Jesus.

The cultural campaign today is to privatize our Christian faith—"just keep it to yourself." Yet, courageous champions like Daniel and his friends kept it public. And so should we.

All the commissioners of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the high officials and the governors have consulted together that the king should establish a statute and enforce an injunction that anyone who makes a petition to any god or man besides you, O king, for thirty days, shall be cast into the lions' den. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document so that it may not be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which may not be revoked." Therefore King Darius signed the document, that is, the injunction. Now when Daniel knew that the document was signed, he entered his house

(now in his roof chamber he had windows open toward Jerusalem); and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously. —Daniel 6:7-10 NASB

A law targeting Daniel's faith was enacted, and he was commanded not to bow. But we see that he "kept his windows open," kneeling before the One God and King, even after the law forbade his prayers. This was a public profession of faith requiring supernatural courage—a courage that transformed Babylon.

By keeping his windows open toward Jerusalem, Daniel demonstrated that he didn't care who saw him—his neighbors, the administrators, or anyone else. He was going to pray no matter what the law said, courageously defying the king's command. This story reveals how we, as followers of God, must refuse to compromise who we are, even when the culture and the governing laws are changed to target our faith.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: If everything outside you changes, everything inside you shouldn't!

STUDY QUESTIONS:

What would be some current versions today of "keeping our windows open?"

What do you think is creating the "just keep it to yourself" attitude toward Christians today?

Why would our culture not want to hear Christ's truth or see His followers standing up for faith?

Discuss the principle: "If everything outside you changes, everything inside you shouldn't!"

Keep Your Gifts

Daniel's friends *let it be known* that the God of Heaven was their King. Daniel himself kept his *windows open* and prayed in defiance of a king's decree. Later in his life, Daniel *refused the king's gifts* because his faithfulness to God didn't have a price. He refused to be bought.

By *gifts*, we mean the goodies of the world that stand in the way of the greatness of God's kingdom. They come in any form of fame, fortune, or future promised by getting along with the world.

In our first book, *Whatever the Cost*, we explained how Satan tries to move us off the track of God's mission by either scaring us with fear or luring us with gifts.

On the one hand, he uses fear and intimidation to back us down, and keep us quiet. On the

other hand, he tries to lure us away with our own dreams, desires, passions, goals, and gifts, if he can find our price to sell out. If the devil can keep our hands full of gifts from the world, we won't have a hand free to pick up the sword of the Spirit.

Daniel's life didn't have a price tag. His services weren't for sale. No amount of worldly gifts or kingly accolades could deter him from his mission. He was a man of deep conviction, dedicated commitment, and undeniable courage—the grace of Heaven was far more important to him than the gifts of men.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: If you can be bought, there will always be a buyer.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

Consider these personal questions:

Can I be bought?

What would it take to silence my faith?

To cower from my convictions?

To keep my relationship with God private?

Is it a six-figure salary? A major promotion? Elected office? Celebrity status? Growing church membership? The promise of keeping your platform?

Here's a deeply personal question: *What would I take in exchange for my silence?*

The Bible has something to say about this: "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36)

Lions on Our Path

Did you know that Daniel wasn't the only man in the Bible to face a physical lion? Below are a few men who faced the beasts as well—two on the path of obedience and two on the path of disobedience.

Samson faced a lion for the wrong reasons. He took an ungodly path to have a relationship with a woman. On the way to her house, a lion attacked him—one he most likely would never have met had he not been going in the wrong direction (Judges 14).

A young prophet met a lion on the road in 1 Kings 13. God sent him to deliver a word of rebuke to Israel's idolatrous king. Yet God instructed him not to remain in Israel, but to return to Judah without eating or drinking with anyone. An older prophet invited him for a meal, claiming God instructed him to do so. But he was lying. The younger prophet believed

him—contrary to what God had already told him—and went home with the older prophet to eat. He disobeyed God’s original command. As he returned home, a lion killed him along the way.

Before he confronted Goliath, David also faced a lion. The beast showed up to devour one of his sheep, but he took him out (1 Samuel 17:34). The attack came as he faithfully fulfilled his calling, so David had the strength to destroy the threat.

An account of one of David’s mighty men, Benaiah, “a doer of great deeds,” tells of all the fearsome enemies he struck down, including one time when he went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. The warrior proactively attacked—he didn’t wait for the beast to stalk him. We believe he went down and killed the lion before the beast could harm anyone else.

As we can see from these Bible stories, lions hunt along the paths of obedience and disobedience. So the question is, which path are you on? You’ll encounter them on both roads, so you have to be ready. But you only have the superiority of God’s strength in you when you walk the path of obedience.

We must stay on the right path. As God’s people, we live among lions. But when we walk the path of obedience by faith—like David, Benaiah, and Daniel—God gives us the strength to overcome, the courage to live among lions!

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: You will cross paths with lions, but the cross of Christ will always overcome.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

What can we learn from Samson being at the wrong place at the wrong time?
In the story of the young prophet, how can even spiritual leaders manipulate and divert us from God’s will?

Why do you think God tested David with a lion attacking his sheep?

In Benaiah’s case, what can we learn from being pro-active to face a “lion” and not wait for him to attack us?

How has this study inspired you to greater courage as a Christian?

Face the Lions

Shrinking back before the enemy of our souls is not an option. Surrendering to what we know isn't right, just so we can keep what we have, is the epitome of cowardice. Daniel wasn't a coward. He refused to shrink back for fear of lions and instead stood with courage and faced them!

Daniel knew His God well, this Lion seated on heaven's throne. So he chose to stand his ground and face the lions of his culture—the physical lions in the den, as well as the ideas and arguments of Babylon those lions represented. But because Daniel fought with courage and kept the faith, he overcame them all. "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4 esv).

Daniel didn't back down from his faith, even in the face of certain death. Surrender was not an option. Retreat to safety was nonexistent. God was his God, and nothing would change the fact that he was indeed lionhearted—a lion among lions.

BENHAM PRINCIPLE: When God is your God and your faith is yours alone, courage will come.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

What are some of the lions of culture we face today?

Why do you think our culture, and even at times the church, decides to just surrender to what we know is not acceptable to God?

How is courage to face lions contagious?

Study Conclusion

We wrote *Living Among Lions* and this companion study guide because we see a storm coming. Maybe you see it too. No, there may not be a pagan army headed this way to take us all captive, but a new pagan *nation* is approaching, nonetheless, from within. Sure, we can turn our backs and ignore the invasion, but it won't change the fact we are living in a very *different country* right now than the one we were living in just a few years ago.

We want to help you get ready, ahead of the approaching storm. Our Christian brothers and sisters are being thrown into a cultural lions' den, as the battle lines are clearly drawn.

In the entire history of our faith, the gospel of Jesus Christ has *never* been based on the defense, rather always, *always* on the offense—on the march, on the move, pressing on, and advancing on the gates of hell.

In our generation, the time of purifying, cleansing, and refining is at hand. We pray you will decide to live a transformed life, in order to transform your world, with conviction that transforms your heart, commitment that transforms your lifestyle, and courage that transforms your world—courage to stand firm and be found living among lions.

CLOSING QUESTIONS:

What was your favorite or most impactful Benham Principle?

What is one truth you know you will take away from this study?

What is one thing you believe God has spoken to you through this study?