

**Daniel:**  
**Conviction in an Age of Compromise**

**The Making of a Hero**

*Daniel 1:8-21*

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# The Making of a Hero

## Scripture

The movie *Cinderella Man* tells the true story of boxing legend James J. Braddock, who made an incredible comeback during the Great Depression. Injured and arthritic, Braddock's promising career was cut short, and he had to go on public assistance when he couldn't get work at the docks in New Jersey. But when an opportunity came for him to get back in the ring—and provide for his family—he took it, and his world changed.

Fighting with a purpose, Braddock started winning fight after fight. He inspired the nation with his perseverance in the midst of hardship. As his comeback built steam, he kept remembering the faces of his children and his wife, and how important it was for him to provide for them. Finally, Braddock won his way into a showdown with the World Heavyweight Champion, Max Baer.

Baer was a vicious fighter. In fact, he was notorious for killing two men in the ring! In the days before the fight Baer ridiculed, threatened, and mocked Braddock, and as the world looked on there was great concern for Braddock's life.

When the big day arrived, Braddock's wife—who had never attended any of his fights—sneaked into the bowels of the arena to find her husband in the locker room just moments before the fight. The look in her eyes sent everyone else from the room, and she marched straight up to Braddock. With a tender fierceness that could only come from a loyal wife, she locked her husband in her stare for the final words he would hear before the big event.

“So you just remember who you are,” she said. “You're the Bulldog of Bergen, and the Pride of New Jersey. You're everybody's hope, and the kids' hero. And you are the champion of my heart, James J. Braddock.”

Braddock then went into the ring to fight Max Baer. After a bloody and brutal contest, Braddock won the fight.

Remembering who we are truly makes a difference.

Knowing that he belonged to God made the difference in Daniel's life. Daniel endured difficult times and encountered tremendous opposition, but he knew that he belonged to God. And that knowledge enabled him to stand alone for God.

So, with that in mind, let us read Daniel 1:8-20, which is the text for today's sermon titled, "The Making of a Hero":

**<sup>8</sup> But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. <sup>9</sup> Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel, <sup>10</sup> but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."**

**<sup>11</sup> Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." <sup>14</sup> So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.**

**<sup>15</sup> At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. <sup>16</sup> So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.**

**<sup>17</sup> To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.**

**<sup>18</sup> At the end of the time set by the king to bring them in, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. <sup>20</sup> In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. (Daniel 1:8-20)**

## Introduction

If I were to take a poll of your past and present heroes, who would be on your list? Perhaps you might list a teacher, a professor, a grandparent, Neil Armstrong, John Wayne, Tony Dungy, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Billy Graham, Mother Teresa, Francis Schaeffer, Jim Elliot, the apostle Paul, the apostle Peter, or even Jesus himself.

I rather suspect that no-one would have the prophet Daniel on his or her list. I hope that this series of sermons will change that.

One common thread that seems to be woven throughout the lives of most real heroes, past or present, is that their heroism did not develop overnight. It wasn't a sudden creation.

Instead their hero status was almost always achieved after being tested over and over again in the many small, mundane trials of life. Present heroism usually cannot be explained apart from past faithfulness under fire.

This was true of Daniel. Without question, Daniel should be numbered among one of the greatest heroes of Scripture. In fact, even by today's Hollywood standards, Daniel deserves hero status.

In the next five chapters we will be going from one cliff-hanging, spine-tingling adventure to the next, as Daniel and his friends face death-dealing kings, dazzling dreams, a golden idol, a fiery furnace, a king turned into an animal, a palace plot, and a literal lions den. Steven Spielberg would love this material!

## Lesson

But what I want you to notice today is that Daniel does not appear in Daniel 1 as a full-blown hero on the scene of history. Instead, he is introduced to us as a young disciple facing very difficult and compromising temptations and choices—and all of these are very much *out* of the spotlight!

In Daniel 1, God gives us an inside look at the making of a true hero. In Daniel 1:8-20 I want you to see in Daniel three distinguishing marks of a true hero in any age.

## I. Courage (1:8a)

The first mark of a hero is courage.

Last time we saw that when Daniel was faced with the temptation to compromise his moral convictions, verse 8 tells us that he resolved to do what was right before God, no matter what the price: **“But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.”** He was willing to stand alone. He realized that for the child of God there were certain things that could not be negotiated or compromised. So he refused the king’s delicacies.

In many ways, Daniel’s future usefulness in the kingdom of God depended on this single, seemingly mundane decision about what kind of food he was willing to eat—food that was forbidden to him by God’s law. If Daniel had not made this decision, he would never have found himself in the positions he later occupied, nor would he have been faithful enough to cope with them the way he did.

Instead, from the very beginning, in what to others seemed to be a trivial matter, he took a stand. And in doing so, he gained a bridgehead into enemy-occupied territory and found himself increasingly strong in the Lord.

The best time to take a stand is early. Daniel didn’t wait to decide what he was going to do. He made his mind up early.

The best time to make up your mind is that first moment you walk onto a new job and see those alluring opportunities. As a young person, it’s that first time someone tries to get you to go past those sexual limits God has set for your own protection and welfare. It’s the first night you unpack your suitcase at college. It’s the first day you fly out of town on your way to a week on the road away from your wife and family. In each instance, take a stand and say, “By God’s grace, I will honor God in all things.”

Another practical lesson we can learn here is that taking a stand in the little things is usually the biggest test.

Don't say things like, "If terrorists dragged me from my home and threatened to kill me unless I denied my faith, I would stand firm. I would never deny Christ."

As we dream about taking a strong stand in such a dramatic situation, we often let the little things slide in the meantime. We are less willing to offer our lives in all those little battles for honesty, integrity, commitment, and chastity that rage about us daily.

The fact is that many people lapse in the face of a test. Many a husband has walked out on his wife and children because he was no longer committed to his marriage. Many a wife has engaged in an extra-marital affair because she was wanted more sizzle and romance in her life. Many a young person has become addicted to drugs because he was curious about the euphoric feeling.

Learn to take a stand in all the little things in life today. Learn to be faithful in all the little things today. Then, if you should face a large test, you are much more likely to stand.

The week before September 11, 2001, America's "Tuesday of Terror," 32-year-old Todd Beamer and his wife, Lisa, had spent a romantic getaway in Italy. The couple, both 1991 graduates of Wheaton College, returned home Monday rested and relieved to be reunited with their boys David, 3, and Andrew, 1.

But extended family time would have to wait. The next morning Todd, an executive with Oracle, had to be at a sales reps meeting in Northern California. He kissed Lisa goodbye, who at the time was five months pregnant with their third child, and headed to the Newark, NJ airport where he boarded United Flight 93 for San Francisco, CA.

About 90 minutes into the westbound flight, the Boeing 757 was approaching Cleveland when three hijackers onboard identified themselves to the 34 passengers and 7 crew and proceeded to take control of the cockpit and cabin. The plane, now piloted by the would-be terrorists, made a sharp turn to the south.

Todd reached for the GTE Airfone in the back of the seat and was connected to a GTE supervisor on the ground. He explained to her what was happening and indicated that he and the other passengers would not likely survive. He presumed the pilot and co-pilot were already seriously injured or dead.

The GTE employee explained to Todd what had already happened at the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Upon hearing this news, Todd must have realized that the hijackers were intent on crashing the plane into another prominent building near Washington D.C. (the direction in which they were now headed). Even though the hijacker nearest to Todd had a bomb belted around his middle, the former Wheaton College baseball player told the GTE representative that he and a few others were determined to do whatever they could to disrupt the terrorists' plan.

He then asked the person on the other end of the phone to call his wife and report their entire conversation to her (including how much he loved her). Before hanging up, this committed Christian and devoted family man, who taught Sunday school each week, asked the GTE employee to pray the Lord's Prayer with him. With the sound of passengers screaming in the background, she complied. When they concluded the prayer, Scott calmly said, "Help me, God. Help me, Jesus."

The GTE employee then heard Todd say, apparently to the other three businessmen he'd alluded to earlier: "Are you ready, guys? Let's roll!" With that the phone went dead.

Within a few minutes, Flight 93 was nose diving into a rural field 80 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, where it left a crater 40 feet deep as it disintegrated upon impact, killing everyone on board.

Because Todd Beamer was committed to Jesus Christ and his kingdom, because he was faithful in the little things, he was willing to do whatever was necessary to put the needs of others above his own fear of danger and imminent death. Thanks to him and the three other businessmen who joined with him, the intended target in the nation's capital was not reached and who knows how many lives were saved because of that. No one on the ground was killed.

According to Todd's wife, Lisa, "His example of courage has given me, my boys (and my unborn baby) a reason to live."

That's what can happen when we, by the grace of God, learn to obey the Lord in all the little things of life.<sup>1</sup>

Like Daniel, your growth in grace and your usefulness in God's service do not begin in the world of your dreams but in the context of life's harsh realities. It is in all those small matters in life that victories are won.

God means for all of your smaller battles to be a training ground to prepare you for the major conflicts that are coming. If you walk away from Christ on today's training ground, believe me, it will not be easy to follow him on tomorrow's field of battle.

## II. Humility (1:8b)

The second mark of a hero is humility.

If you think the strength of Daniel's stand is impressive, look even closer now at these next verses to see the manner in which he took his stand. Verse 8b reads, ". . . **and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way.**"

Notice that Daniel did not send around leaflets encouraging a riot. He didn't begin a protest movement. He didn't start a hate campaign. He didn't try to embarrass his superior because of his own strong convictions. Instead he responded to his situation with a spirit of humility and respect by requesting permission of the chief official not to eat the king's food.

Daniel does not seem to have explained to this official that no matter what his response to Daniel's request, he had already resolved that he would never eat the king's food and defile himself. Instead Daniel seems to have patiently explained his situation and his desire to be faithful to his God and ask respectfully that he might receive this privilege.

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<sup>1</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, (9-17-01).



There is something very Christ-like about this humble spirit of Daniel. True faithfulness to God is seen not only in your determination to take a strong stand but also in the way you do that.

Daniel learned how to take a strong stand for the Lord in a way that showed the greatness of God, not in a way that left people staring at Daniel himself, and there is a world of difference. To take a strong stand for Christ today and to still be humble is a grace that far too few of us ever attain.

### III. Faith (1:9-14)

The third mark of a hero is faith.

The response of the chief official to Daniel's request to forego the king's food was not too positive. Even though verse 9 tells us he was sympathetic toward Daniel, he was also very concerned about the personal ramifications of such a decision.

In verse 10 we find that **“the official told Daniel, ‘I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.’”**

But this first rejection didn't cause Daniel to waver. He remained steadfast in his commitment, as is then evidenced in his creative appeal later to the guard that the official had placed over him and his three friends.

Verses 11-14 say, **“Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ‘Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.’ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.”**

It is evident from his request that Daniel sincerely believed that God would honor the strong stand he had taken. Daniel dared to believe that as he stood for what was truly right, God would su-

pernaturally intervene on his behalf! Although it might not have been God's will to intervene, Daniel still knew that he had a very good reason to believe God would intervene. Why? Because Daniel knew that the issue at stake was God's glory and name.

Learning what it means to live for the sake of God's glory will produce in you a spirit of humble faith that God will act on your behalf as you put him first. It was just this confidence that has always marked the lives of the heroes of the faith, in both the Old and New Testaments. And it's this kind of confidence in God that continues to mark men and women of faith today.

The confidence of true Biblical faith is an assurance that is based on what God has promised in his word to do. If you know that God has promised to do something, you have every reason to join with Daniel and have a genuine spirit of expectancy that he will work on your behalf.

### **Conclusion**

Allow me to close with a practical application. In 1 Samuel 2:30 God makes a very special promise, "Those who honor me I will honor." You handle your situation right and God promises to honor that. God's response may not be exactly what you want, or exactly when you want it, but his promise stands: "Those who honor me I will honor."

Daniel knew that about God. That is why he lived with a spirit of expectancy. And that is why I don't think Daniel was too surprised at what happened next. In verses 15-21 we discover how God honored Daniel's faithfulness. Daniel and his friends were healthier than the other young men and the king was so impressed with their knowledge that he hired them into his royal service.

The faithful stand that Daniel took was not in vain. God honored his faithfulness. And he will honor your faithfulness as well!

I continue to hear the testimonies of those who say, "I was in a compromising, high risk situation. My job and my reputation were on the line. I bit the bullet. I took it to God and I dared to take

a stand and trust God. And God honored that in my life. He granted me his favor.”

The development of Daniel’s character began by learning the importance of honoring God in the little things—like what he would and would not eat to obey God’s law. Daniel soon learned that these smaller battles were actually God’s training ground to prepare him for the much more major conflicts that were coming.

Philip P. Bliss wrote a children’s song titled, “Dare to be a Daniel.” Some of you know that song. But perhaps you did not know that the song was written by a man who knew what he was talking about. Philip Bliss was born in a log cabin. At the age of 11 he left home and lived a rough life in logging camps for years. When Christ saved him, he decided he would leave that wild life-style. He soon got married and he went on the road as a teacher of music. He went from place to place teaching churches and children music for the glory of God. He committed his life to honor and obey God in all the little things of life.

That was put to the test many times in his life. On the last day of his life he was tested again. It was December 29, 1876. He was only 38 years old. He had become famous and was on his way to Moody Tabernacle to lead the singing at a great crusade for Dwight L. Moody. The train in which he and his wife were riding crumbled as the bridge beneath it gave way. He escaped. But he soon realized that his wife was still inside. He knew that his life would be in danger if he went back in but that didn’t stop him. He crawled back in the cabin and found his wife. While he was in there it caught fire and he died, arm in arm with his wife.

The refrain to his simple song went like this, “Dare to be a Daniel, Dare to stand alone, Dare to have a purpose firm. Dare to make it known.”

Philip Bliss, like Daniel before him, learned the importance of honoring God in the little things. May God help you and me to obey him in all the little things that come our way so that we may grow in courage, humility, and faith. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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**PRAYER:**

Our gracious God that is our prayer: make us men and women, boys and girls that dare to be like Daniel. You know the issues before us even now where you are calling us to take a stand. Grant us your grace that we might have the kind of courage, humility and faith that brings glory and honor to the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Our world is in desperate need of a few more heroes. People of integrity who not only talk the talk but who truly walk the walk—even when it costs. My challenge to you today is very simple: Dare to be a Daniel! And as you do so, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.