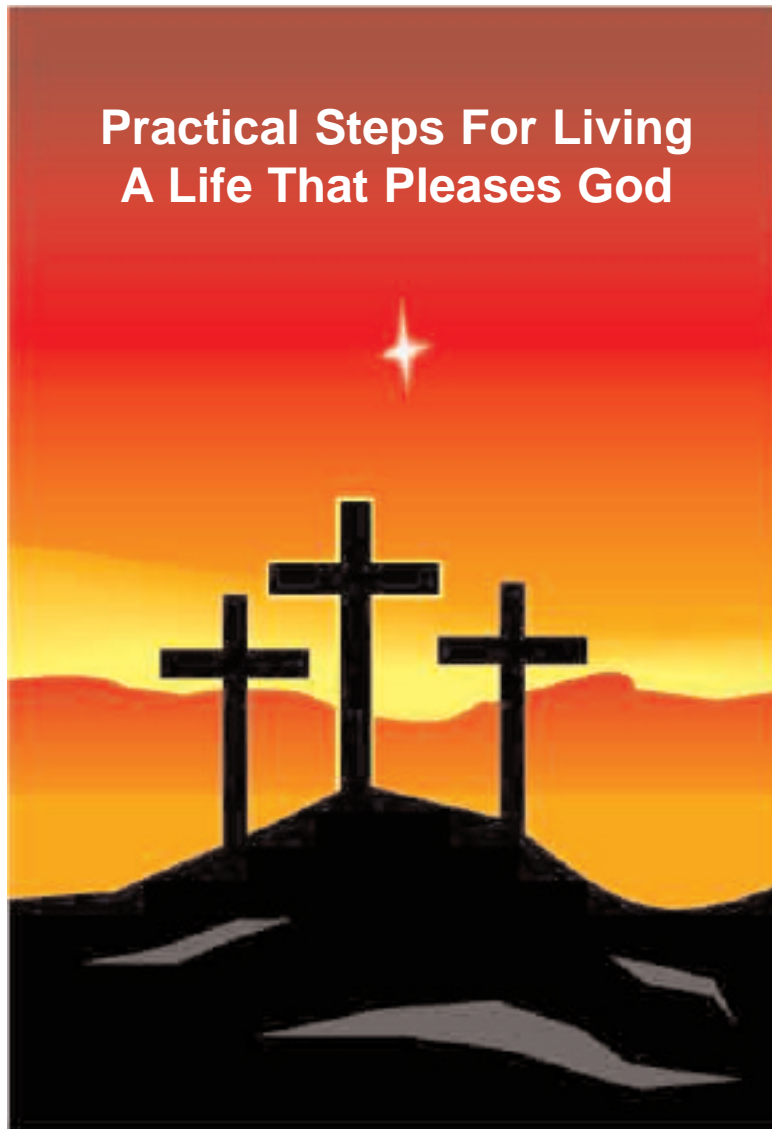


Lifebytes:

9. The Book of Daniel (Chapters 1-3)

Personal Responsibility — Deference — God-dependence



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Introduction

This past Saturday we finished the 13th segment of our video training series, **Jesus In Your Home**. The last three segments we've taped discuss how critical is the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit for anyone who's counting on a heavenly welcome.

This whole project has been such a learning experience for us! As we've completed each video segment, we've become all the more aware of the intense and intimate relationship the earliest followers of Jesus had with Him. What a contrast with the activities and intermediaries peddled in Nicolaitanism today. [For in depth exploration, please see the Hebraic Article on our website, ***I Hate Nicolaitanism.***]

For the past several months we've been receiving revelation as we've perused the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. The insights the Holy Spirit gave us were difficult to bear. It was as though the prophets were addressing Nicolaitanism today, warning practitioners of religion of how far they've strayed from God and His ways, and urging them to repent.

There were mornings that I [Mike] really didn't want to read the prophets' messages any longer. It was emotionally draining, almost too much to bear. But I knew how very painful it must be for our loving Father to look down on so much sin being done and rationalized in His Name. Sue and I both knew in our hearts that our Lord was showing us matters about which He wanted us to write.

Yesterday morning during my daily Bible reading, I was in the Book of Daniel. The Holy Spirit wouldn't let me stop until He'd given us discernment for a series of Lifebytes on Daniel's writings.

No, this Lifebyte isn't for those who

enjoy religious practice in the Nicolaitan system. It's for you who seek to relate to our Lord with your whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Not only does our Lord want to keep you from personally being enticed by the lawlessness so pervading religious practice. He's also calling you to *greater deliberateness* as you raise your children and grandchildren with the character it will take for them to survive during the Dark Days of Chastisement soon to come.

This past Sabbath Sue and I broke bread with our friends, the Zappas and the Gartons. The Holy Spirit impressed on my spirit a visual image: the children in our midst would soon be under threat of their lives when they broke bread in their home. They could be killed for doing what we were doing in peace.

Just as Caiaphas offered up Jesus to forestall Roman retribution, so too will those in Nicolaitanism persecute the true followers of Jesus to escape the wrath of the State. **YOU CAN COUNT ON THIS!**

God is issuing a wakeup call at this time to encourage His remnant to be true to Him. Nicolaitan "mega-churches" are prospering by preaching a false gospel of presumptuous lawlessness — a blatant disregard of God's commands and standards. But our Lord is urging those with ears to hear to examine more closely the lives of those who stood tall in obedient trust during the evil times recounted in the Older Testament.

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We've often cited this passage to stress the unity and continuity of our Father's Word in both the Older and Newer Testaments:

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (1 Corinthians 10:11-13).

Let's heed the warnings of Daniel and the other prophets as they point out to us examples of both God's ways and man's disobedience. They were crying out to a people as complacently religious and as arrogantly self-righteous as the practitioners of religion are today!

Christ-like Character Qualities in the Book of Daniel

The Book of Daniel takes place during the early part of the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century BC. The holy God of Israel had banished the unrepentant Israelites to Babylon when He could take their sins no more. Perhaps their forced exile would turn their hearts from sin and stir them to once again cry out to Him in repentant trust.

Many other writers have tried to understand the apocalyptic visions that God gave Daniel. But that is not our intent in these Lifebytes. We want to share with you that which the Holy

Spirit revealed to us for you to engrain in your children and grandchildren while there is still time.

The focus of this Lifebyte is that you and your family acquire the **personal responsibility, deference, and God-dependence** that's required of those whom He will use to represent Him to an evil nation. The **fear of God** is your foundation for these character qualities that are so esteemed by God to be developed within you. [See **The Fear of God** in our **Jesus In Your Home** video series.] And it's these three character qualities so vividly portrayed in the Book of Daniel that the Holy Spirit produces in each person who hungers to be true to our Lord.

As with ancient Israel, God has been warning us for some time what is soon to happen to this nation if it doesn't repent. Sadly, so many aren't listening.

When our Father drove the Israelites from the Land and sent them into captivity in a faraway country, even the pagan Babylonian commander understood why God had permitted Jerusalem to be destroyed: "*The LORD your God decreed this disaster for this place. And now the LORD has brought it about; he has done just as he said he would. All this happened because you people sinned against the LORD and did not obey him*" (Jeremiah 40:2,3).

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Today, many who *don't* profess to be "Christian" look at the Nicolaitan church system and see *no difference* between unabashed sinners who "practice religion" and themselves. As Christian pollster George Barna confirms, **THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE!**

Fear of God Produces Responsible Character

The Book of Daniel shows us people who were caught up in world events far larger than themselves. Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed Jerusalem and hauled away many captives to Babylon. After settling the Israelites throughout the territory, the King ordered his servant Ashpenaz to select very particular Israelites, "*young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace*" (1:4).

The servant chose Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Consider the sovereignty of our Lord to ensure that these four God-fearing young men were selected. He has a way of making sure that people who fear Him and walk uprightly to represent His character get noticed. These are the kind of individuals who can be raised up to strongly influence unbelievers.

These young Jewish men were following the footsteps of others who preceded them and had walked righteously. Our Lord used their influence to help their people in time of desperate need.

- Joseph was a man who feared God. His brothers had unjustly sold him into slavery. Then he was falsely imprisoned. But God gave

him the ability to interpret dreams, and raised Joseph to be the #2 man in all of Egypt. Thus he was positioned to save his people from famine.

- David may have been a mere shepherd boy, but he loved and feared God. In righteous indignation David rose up in God's behalf and killed the blaspheming Philistine giant, Goliath. Like Joseph, young David was positioned to serve the king. But despite ongoing deference to Saul, the mad king was determined to kill him. Yet David refused to seize power, instead waiting on God to fulfill His promise that he would be King of Israel.
- Mordecai, Queen Esther's older cousin, feared God more than he feared man. By saving the king's life, he was in position to save the Jewish people through Esther's intervention. God once more acted to ensure that evil Haman would forfeit his place of influence and be hung on his own gallows. Through obedience to His holy God, Mordecai was appointed #2 man in Persia.

Let's put it simply: The fear of God causes us to *act responsibly* toward Him, yearning to keep His commands and please Him as our Lord. This is the kind of person God raises up, the one who fulfills His heart's desire as expressed in Deuteronomy 5:29: "*Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to **fear me and keep all my commands** always, so that it might **go well with them and their children forever!***"

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God-fearing, Responsible People Don't Defile Themselves With Sin

In the Book of Daniel you recognize immediately that Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were men after God's own heart. Their fear of God far exceeded any apprehension toward the king. And, they were determined in their hearts to not violate God's commands.

These young men walked in the wisdom they'd gleaned from God's Word and His ways: "*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***" (1:8).

Just think, these youths were from families that were taken captive to Babylon because of Israel's sins. We aren't told about the upbringing they had that prompted them to stand for God in the face of almost certain death. But, we do know that Daniel and his friends had a greater fear of God than they did of people.

Perhaps they called to mind the biblical warning, "*Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe*" (Proverbs 29:25).

Implications for Today:

Nicolaitanism is Satan's final attempt to seduce you and your children. Behind the veneer of successful "mega-churches" is a spirit of *lawlessness* that makes it all the harder for us who fear God to raise Godly children. Public schools, youth groups, and even many Christian schools contribute to lowering God's character standards in young people. And, too many well-meaning parents have been duped into *outsourcing* their God-mandated responsibilities to agents of Satan.

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Fear of God Produces Deference

We have written in our book, *Pastoring By Elders*, and elsewhere how important the character quality of deference is.

- Deference is shown when you avoid choices and decisions that would offend those in authority over you.
- Deference causes you to fulfill your responsibilities with a willing heart rather than as a burden of obligation.
- Deference is linked with *humility*, giving honor and esteem to those who have a right to them.

Deference Epitomizes Trust In God

Jesus was pleasantly astonished to discover in the Roman centurion an understanding of deference to authority that paralleled His own relationship with His Father. That's why this military man who had charge over a hundred could be commended by Jesus for his strong faith. In like manner, the soldier could readily identify in Jesus our Lord's submission to His Father's authority. In light of that kind of deference, the centurion was assured that Jesus' promise would be accomplished.

*The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But **just say the word**, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a **man under authority, with soldiers under me**. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "**I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith**" (Matthew 8:8-10).*

You can readily recognize from this passage the centurion's humility as he felt unworthy to have our Lord even enter his house. How Jesus must have rejoiced at this encounter because He was truly under His Father's authority. He did only that which His Father directed Him to do. And that centurion understood deference and obedience as well.

The humility found in deference always brings honor to the one who is served. ALWAYS! All that Jesus said and did was aimed at giving glory to His Father in heaven. The throngs readily recognized this. Throughout the gospels, whenever Jesus did a mighty work, the people *praised God*.

Paul commands all followers of Jesus to walk in deference toward all people when he writes, "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, **but in humility consider others better than yourselves**. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*" (Philippians 2:3,4).

This is a critical consideration as you follow Christ:

- Do you live in deference toward our Lord and the authorities He has placed over you?

- Do you view other people through eyes of humility as those made in God's image and for whom Jesus died?
- Do your actions cause others to praise our Father?

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Deference, The Character Trait for Greatness

Deference precludes the desire for control over your own life. Its presence in your character is vital for developing Christ-like character.

Deference:

- helps you avoid sin.
- helps you fulfill your responsibilities.
- enables you to honor those whom our Lord wants to be honored.

In a culture that strives to protect and exalt the ego, deference empowers you to be poured out on behalf of others, without regard for yourself or how you might benefit. Deference enables you to "die daily" and to please God and those He has placed over you.

Note that an attitude of deference does *not* mean blind submission. For example, while living under the oppressive regime of the Babylonians, Daniel and his friends were forced into a **decision of conscience**. Rather than rebel against those in authority over them, the young captives instead made an **appeal** to the guard to eat foods which did not violate their consciences.

Deference empowers you to be poured out on behalf of others, without regard for yourself or how you might benefit.

Deference enables you to “die daily”, and to please God and those He has placed over you.

Because of that deference, the guard accepted their request:

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. Now God had caused the official to show favor and sympathy to Daniel. . . So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days (1:8-12).

Deference is not just a matter of correct behavior. It's an **attitude** that flows from **deep within your heart**. Those who receive your deference know whether they are being honored by your actions. And, true deference often causes those in authority to look favorably on you.

God brings about seemingly impossible events so that He may raise up those who fear Him and will act responsibly toward His commands. This was the position of these youths: *“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” (1:17).*

Implication for Today:

On several occasions during our retreat ministry, men would complain to Mike about the lack of respect from their children. Mike would ask if the men had slandered or gossiped against their superiors at work. In many cases, their lack of

deference on the job was reaping the same fruit on the home front.

Over the years some of the men shared that they'd asked forgiveness from their superiors for the slander and gossip. And, many discovered that the home climate then improved as well!

Focus on our Lord's perspective of the role of the authorities He has placed in your life. Then you can serve with joy rather than chafe in selfish irritation. And that attitude of deference will overflow in *your* home as well!

Faith and trust are inseparably linked. To have one is to have the other! Despite the faithful service of Daniel and his friends, peril in this strange culture confronted them a number of times. Nebuchadnezzar was agitated by a dream that his astrologers couldn't interpret. The king commanded, *“This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble...So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death” (2:5,13).*

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The deference in Daniel's character opened the door for him to be heard. *“When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact” (2:14).* First, deference kept him from being killed. Next, *“Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream*

for him” (2:16). Daniel offered no excuses or objections. His deference gave him a hearing, and His God-given anointing to “understand visions and dreams of all kinds” would reveal to the king the true and only God. Remember, deference ultimately leads to the *glory of God!*

Fear of God Produces Dependence on God

Deference to God-given authority intertwines with our dependence on God. Remember, when you have deference, you don’t want to be in control. And, your dependence on God is proof you’re *not* in control.

Daniel was a man totally dependent on God: “*Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah [their Hebrew names]. He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon*” (Daniel 2:17,18).

Implication for Today:

Personal responsibility, deference, and God-dependence are the ingredients that get God involved. These qualities ultimately bring Him praise and adoration. What do unbelievers need to see in followers of Jesus today? *Transformed character* that stirs our Lord to answer, resulting in praise that gives Him the glory.

How beautiful are Daniel’s words after he received God’s revelation! Don’t you want to hear similar praise to our Lord from your own family?

Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He

changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king (2:20-23).

Remember, when you have deference, you don’t want to be in control. And, your dependence on God is proof you’re *not* in control.

God Uses Dreams and Visions

Our God enjoys revealing Himself. If He gave Daniel the ability to understand dreams and visions, then He is able to *provide* dreams and visions as well. And He does! In the rationale-focused minds of Hellenistic Nicolaitans, few (men in particular) expect or even seek the variety of ways through which God communicates with His people — even through dreams and visions.

One of the first non-Jewish converts was led to the Lord by Peter (Acts 10). But how did Peter end up in the house of an “unclean” Gentile in order to share Jesus? Earlier we mentioned how important the character of a God-fearing man is as a beginning step to get God involved. Cornelius was such a man of character.

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly [God-dependent] (10:1,2).

So God intervened as He so often had in the past: *“One day at about three in the afternoon **he had a vision.** He distinctly saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, ‘Cornelius!’ Cornelius stared at him in fear. ‘What is it, Lord?’ he asked. The angel answered, ‘Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter’”* (10:3-5).

Now, this wasn't just a one-man/one-vision intervention by our Lord. The Apostle Peter needed to get straightened out concerning his anti-Gentile attitude.

*...[Peter] fell into a **trance.** He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, ‘Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.’ ‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” The voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.’ **This happened three times,** and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. . . While Peter was still thinking about **the vision,** the Spirit said to him, Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them’ (10:10-20).*

God had to repeat the vision three times for the reluctant apostle. When God repeats things, whether in visions, dreams, or in His Word, pay particular attention!

We know the joyous results of the visions of both Cornelius and Peter: All of Cornelius' family and invited friends put their trust in Jesus.

Implication for Today:

If you deny that God works the same way today as He did in the Scriptures, you're deceived. You're living without a holy fear of Him and His amazing ways to reach the hearts of His people. And without that holy fear, you lack the character qualities that get Him involved. It is that simple!

Our God doesn't lie. On that Pentecost day in which the Holy Spirit fell upon the first believers, He repeated His promise: *“In the last days, God says, ‘I will **pour out my Spirit** on all people. Your sons and daughters will **prophesy,** your young men will **see visions,** your old men will **dream dreams**’”* (Acts 2:17).

Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream had both immediate and long-range application. Daniel not only relates that which he saw in the king's dream. He also foretells the coming of the KINGDOM of Jesus:

*While you were watching, **a rock was cut out, but not by human hands.** It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But **the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth** (2:34,35).*

What a wonderful God Who gives such power to people who love and fear Him! Daniel was given an apocalyptic interpretation of the king's vision:

‘This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not

by human hands—*a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy.*’ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him (2:45,46).

The Bible tells us that **Jesus** is the Rock, even before His incarnation: “[The Israelites] all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and **that rock was Christ**” (1 Corinthians 10:3,4; see also Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 Peter 2:6-8).

In God’s prophetic timing, a Rock would come that would destroy all the earthly kingdoms controlled by Satan. The Rock also destroys Nicolaitanism. In his dream the king noted that the statue had both clay and iron mixed in its feet. “Mixture” in the Bible often connotes lukewarmness: professing to be “Christian” while embracing the world’s values.

Daniel brings forth the meaning of the clay and iron feet: “*And just as you saw the iron **mixed** with baked clay, so the people will be a **mixture** and will **not remain united**, any more than iron mixes with clay*” (2:43). With over 22,000 competing Nicolaitan denominations claiming to have the truth, unity in Jesus is sorely absent:

- So many man-made creeds;
- So many revisions of God’s Word to suit personal agendas;
- So many worldly methods to lure people into their religious establishments.

Nicolaitan institutions lead the nation in divorce by a wide margin, and clergy far outpace most other occupations in divorce. The Rock is now striking the clay and iron. The destruction caused by the Nicolaitan system that excuses broken covenants hasn’t gone unnoticed in heaven. “*God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them and **afflict them** — men who **never change their ways and have no fear of God**” (Psalms 55:19).*

If you’ve read our materials, you know that the Hebraic Restoration flows out of understanding the trust-filled obedience of the first Hebrew, Abraham. He related to God, both fearing and trusting Him. Not only did the Patriarch’s fear and trust result in a righteousness that was credited to him, but an eternal Covenant was promised through his Seed.

Today’s lack of fear of God in the Nicolaitan religious system is the fruit of Hellenism, the ancient Greek world view and culture. Man, not God, is the center of all things. In a later vision God showed Daniel that Hellenism is one of the kingdoms that would be destroyed. Its offspring, Nicolaitanism, will fall with it.

The Hebraic restoration was revealed to us in Israel as the prophetic interpretation of Zechariah 9:13: “*I will bend Judah as I bend my bow and fill it with Ephraim. **I will rouse your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and make you like a warrior’s sword.***” Now, throughout the world, an Hebraic understanding of the

Now, throughout the world, an Hebraic understanding of the Scriptures is being poured forth to undo what Hellenism has done.

**Fear of God, Personal Responsibility,
Deference, and God-dependence
are foundations of the
Hebraic Restoration.**

Scriptures is being poured forth to undo what Hellenism has done.

Many of today's "mega-churches" rely on the same tactics as corporate America to attract people. This mixture of "clay and iron" is what the Rock, Jesus, is destroying through the Hebraic Restoration.

Followers of Jesus are called to be *in* the world representing God and His ways — but we are *not* to be *of* the world. In particular, His followers should never use the world's ways to extend God's KINGDOM. We're warned, "*You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God*" (James 4:4).

**When You Fear God,
Unbelievers Experience God and
Honor His Children**

God's response to Daniel's deference, responsibility, and God-dependence brought praise to our Lord from him and his friends. But someone else also lifted his voice in praise! Nebuchadnezzar proclaimed, "*Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery*" (2:47).

God has ways of raising people to positions of influence that are totally unlike the world's ways. Not only did the king give glory to God, but he "*placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and*

placed him in charge of all its wise men. Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court" (2:49).

Obedience to God may indeed bring honor. But that doesn't mean you won't face trials as well, as we shall see in chapters to come.

**When You Fear God,
You Flee Idolatry — The True
Test of All God's Children**

The Apostle John ends his first letter with a simple exhortation, "*Dear children, keep yourselves from idols*" (1 John 5:21). This almost seems like a "by-the-way" postscript. Yet, John wanted to leave a strong, lasting thought for his readers, an impression that would keep them from getting into trouble with God.

The deepest and most prevalent form of idolatry is embedded in the person who trusts in himself rather than being dependent on God. The human ego seeks flattery and praise and approval. The adulated ego is a man's downfall: "*The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives*" (Proverbs 27:21).

If you've read our workbook, ***Demolishing Strongholds***, then you know the symptoms that idolatry produces in a person:

- Frustration
- Hopelessness
- Greed
- Selfishness
- Financial problems
- Wrong goals
- Poor decisions
- Living a lie
- Apathy

Another sinister form of idolatry is man-made images that represent God's likeness or that of others. Religious images and icons hin-

der the personal relationship our Lord desires with those who love Him. Again, Hellenism has seduced Christianity so that graven religious images are treasured and revered.

This practice is as pagan as it is ancient. The same Nebuchadnezzar who had praised God as supreme then ordered the construction of an enormous idol for all the people to worship. “King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon” (3:1).

All of Babylon’s leaders and ruling officials were summoned to dedicate this image. “Then the herald loudly proclaimed, ‘This is what you are commanded to do, **O peoples, nations and men of every language**: As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must **fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up**’” (3:4,5).

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego’s refusal to worship the idolatrous image brought them to a crisis point, one they confronted with trust and courage:

*Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are **thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up**’* (3:16-18).

Their character revealed total confidence in their Lord — the epitome of God-dependence. Can you picture the joy our Lord must have had in these three men? All of us like to be part of joyful occasions, and so does our Lord!

*So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, **were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king’s command was so urgent and the furnace so hot***

*that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, ‘Weren’t there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?’ They replied, ‘Certainly, O king.’ He said, ‘Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, **unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods**’* (21-25).

God shows up when those who uphold His character need Him. This is a given! Rather than cringing that we may go through what these men did, we should envy them. Look at the wonderful outcome:

*Then Nebuchadnezzar said, ‘Praise be to the **God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way**’* (28,29).

The God-fearing character of these men impelled them to fully trust as their ancestor Abraham did. Trust-filled obedience enabled them to not hesitate at the test that confronted them. Their character qualities were key to both their response to the flames and to their unflinching confidence in God’s ability to glorify Himself through their trust.

And, as we have seen before, God honors such people: “Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon” (3:30)

Implications for Today:

First, let's remind ourselves about the nature of mankind when God acts. People have a habit of creating idols of remembrance after God does great things. After Gideon's great victory over the Midianites (Judges 6-8), he too forged an idol:

*Gideon made the gold into **an ephod** [a ritual vest], which he placed in Ophrah, his town. All Israel **prostituted** themselves by **worshipping it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his family** (8:27).*

Again, while Moses was on the mountain receiving God's commandments, the people down below compelled their priest Aaron to make a calf idol to worship. The thirst to worship something tangible is so predominant that only a living, loving trust in Jesus can hold you back from it!

Help your family develop the key character qualities that will equip them to stand in the difficult days to come. Idolatry will be rampant, leading to the persecution of many who will not bow down. Be among the faithful and watch what our Lord will do!

Don't think that the temptation to give way to idols is history's problem. Idolatry is anything or anyone who displaces God in the devotion and honor that are due Him. All God's children are tempted by idols of some sort. To *not* yield to them is a character issue.

And this is the focus of this Lifebyte: Help your family develop the key character qualities that will equip them to stand in the difficult days to come. Idolatry will be rampant, leading to the persecution of many who will not bow down. Be among the faithful and watch what our Lord will do!

Men of Character Are Still Making Choices Today

Our close friends, Barry and Betty Eitelman, have a son, Mike, in the Army. A few weeks ago I heard from Barry a testimony about a critical choice Mike had made. As we wrote this Lifebyte, the Holy Spirit prompted us to ask Mike to share his testimony to include here.

Please remember Mike and other men like him in the military who are living for Jesus and representing him in their daily lives.

Mike Eitelman's Testimony:

When I joined the Army almost five years ago, it was with the ultimate goal of joining one particular elite unit. Finally, I was given the opportunity to go and try out with the unit.

Over the course of the 24-day tryout, I performed very well. In fact, it occurred to me that if they gave out an award for an honor graduate, I was probably on the short list. The last event, however, was a role-playing exercise designed to assess our abilities to interact with people from military organizations in other countries. Unfortunately, I did not perform well in this exercise.

When all of the events were finished, the cadre called out a list of soldiers who would have to stand before a board in order to answer questions about their performance. I was on that list. Boards are nerve-rattling experiences — you are thrust into the spotlight to be interrogated by numerous high-ranking officers. Only after the board would I know if I had been accepted to the unit or not.

All of the soldiers attending the board were confined to a laundry room to await their turn to go before the board. I was the second-to-last, so I had about four hours to sit in the laundry room and ponder my fate. My initial reaction was disbelief: I had done so well in this course except for the one event! I have known disappointment on more than one occasion. Had God really brought me this far just to see my

dreams crushed again?. I had seen Him open and shut doors to bring me to this point, why was I now being abandoned?

Fortunately, Jesus spoke to me through His Holy Spirit, and He said several things:

(1) "Don't think that the men on that board hold your fate in their hands. *I* am sovereign and *I* will decide what happens to you."

(2) "Don't let this goal become an idol. Are you placing your goal above Me? Remember that this goal is an earthly one. When you die, this job and all of its glory will remain here. Your focus must be to serve Me and advance My kingdom. That is why I made you. Whether you get this job or not, your status in My eyes will not be changed."

In my mind, I started repeating Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. The life which I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." I made peace with God's sovereignty. He has always been faithful to steer me towards His will for my life. It could be that this just wasn't what He had for me. If that was true, it was because He had something better.

I also knew that I wouldn't be able to explain myself to the Board without revealing my faith in Christ. I didn't know how that would play or if they would understand what I was going to tell them. I knew that they would ask about the scenario on which I had performed poorly, and I would have to explain the spirit of rejection that I struggle against. I hoped that they would be able to grasp the truth of spiritual warfare on some level, or at least not think that I was crazy.

Finally, my turn arrived and I was summoned before the board. It was intimidating. There were about 20 people in the room. As I had assumed, their questions were about the scenario. I explained to them that I wrestle with a spirit of rejection that causes me to crave the approval and acceptance of other people. I went on to explain to them that this was a spiritual issue that could only be dealt with spiritu-

ally, through the power of Jesus Christ. I answered the board's questions and they told me that I could go.

One hour passed. A representative from the board came back into the laundry room and called off the names of six people whom the board wanted to see again. My name was one of them. The six of us returned to the board, where we were informed that we had been accepted into the unit.

A few minutes later, a high-ranking board member approached me. He told me that he is also a believer, and that he had been very impressed with my conduct in front of them. He informed me that there were other members of the board who were also believers, and that I was not alone. He offered me some more spiritual encouragement and some very pertinent professional advice.

Immediately after he left, a second board member called me over to him. He told me that he too is a believer, and that the body of Christ is growing very quickly in this unit. "We are taking this unit over from the inside," he told me.

Finally, a third board member pulled me aside. He revealed that he too is a believer, and he told me that after I had left the board room, he stood up in front of the whole group and said, "What a powerful witness for our Lord and Savior." It took every ounce of strength that I had to keep from breaking down at that point.

Looking back, I know that God orchestrated my board experience to deliver some very valuable messages to me. If I had not gone to the board, I would have missed out on the encouragement and spiritual discernment of the Christian board members. It also forced me to exercise my faith. I had to step back and make sure that my focus was on Christ where it should have been.

Deference, responsibility, and God-dependence are ingredients that get God involved. These qualities ultimately bring Him praise and adoration.