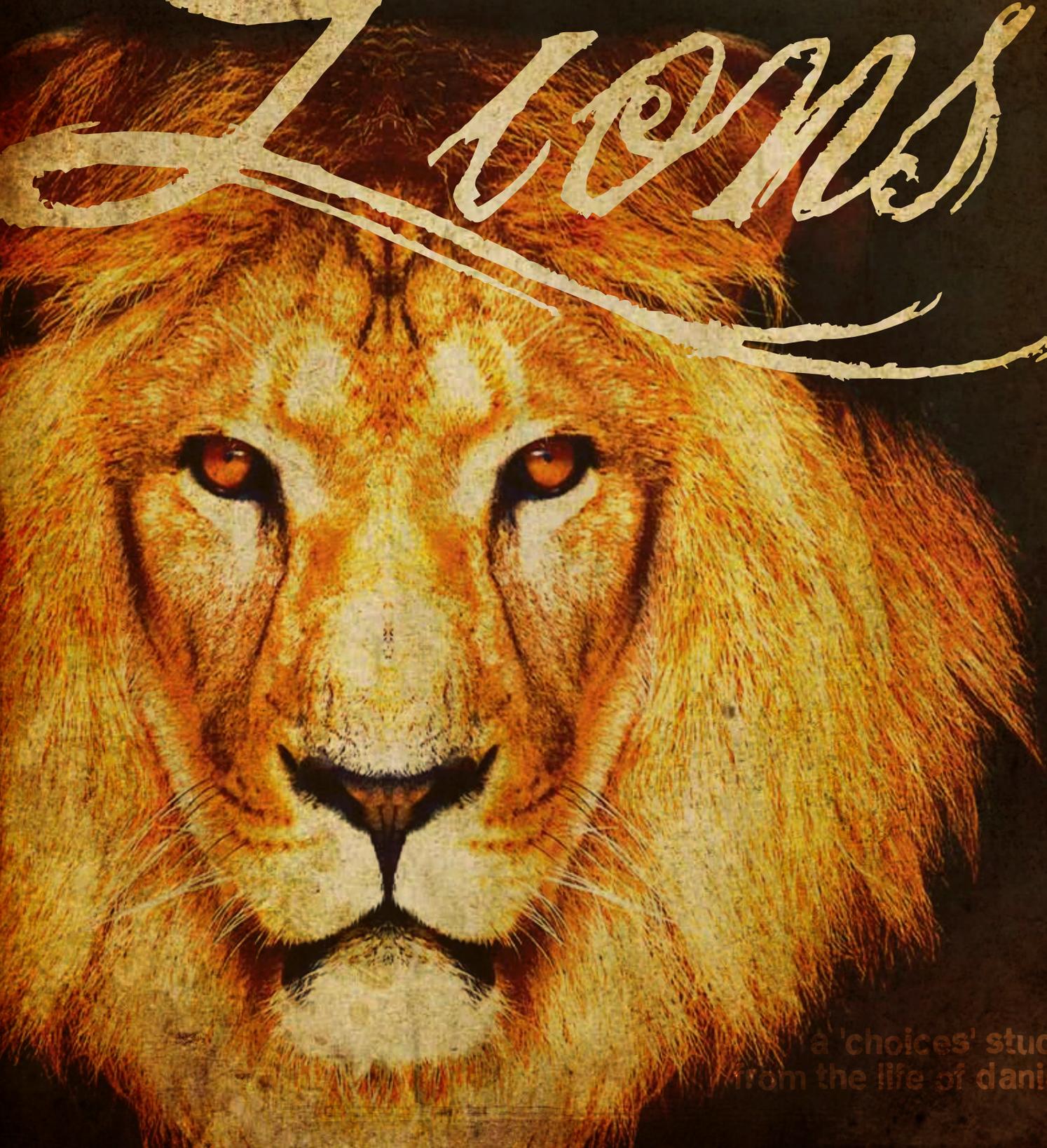


living
among

Lions



a 'choices' study
from the life of daniel



a 'choices' study from the life of daniel!

living
among

Lions

how would you like to come face to face with a lion — not through the bars of a cage, but in a dark pit, sealed off from the outside world? As we'll discover in the life of Daniel, who famously survived the lions' den, this close encounter was no trip to the zoo! In ancient times, lions were used to send prisoners to their death. It certainly wasn't Daniel's choice to snuggle up with the king of beasts, but it was his choice to take a stand and live for God, even when it meant putting his life on the line. Our choices — like Daniel's — don't just reveal who we are; they help shape who we are, and who we will become.

In many ways, the story of the lions' den is a picture of Daniel's life. He lived among lions all along — vicious beings who would just as soon be rid of him; people who were out to harm him; things that could have destroyed him if he didn't escape.

It all took place about 600 years before Jesus was born. The Babylonian army came into Jerusalem and ransacked it, taking all the valuables and making slaves of most of the inhabitants. Prophets had foretold these events, saying that God would give victory to a foreign king as punishment to Israel for breaking their covenant with Him. But there were still people living there who loved and served the one true God. And while they were greatly affected by these events in their country, God had His hand on them.

When you think about it, all of us live among lions — destructive influences, people, and things that are harmful to us. In this study we will talk about 6 things that we can develop to help tame the lions: faith, values, habits, friends, wisdom, and courage.

living among lions /choices from the story of daniel.

all of us live among lions - things that can destroy us if we don't escape their grasp. in this study we will talk about 6 things that we can develop to help tame the lions: faith, values, habits, friends, wisdom, and courage.

week 1: when you have no choice (daniel 1:1-7 and background)

For hundreds of years the people of Israel had been living under the cloud of prophecy that punishment was coming — that an enemy would come and conquer them, occupying their houses and land. Daniel lived in Judah at the time of the fulfillment of this prophecy. Along with many treasures from the temple, Daniel was taken into captivity by the conquering army. But like those treasures, Daniel belonged to God. As a result, he spent his life in a country that was not his home. The culture there was foreign to him. He was often misunderstood, but he had value to that kingdom because of (not in spite of) his faith in God. His story is our story. We belong to God and are living here in exile until He comes to take us home. The culture of this world is foreign to us. If we become like the world, we lose our value to the kingdom.

- 🕒 **Introductory activity: Captive**
- 🕒 **Faith and choices**

week 2: choices and values (daniel 1:8-21)

We are all confronted with things that we would be better off refusing. In media, school, music, and the mall — young people today are bombarded with choices that will determine not only the direction of their lives, but who they will become. What are some things that tempt you, that you need to refuse?

- 🕒 **Introductory activity: Vegetable roulette**
- 🕒 **Learning activity: What Matters Most?**

week 3: choices and habits (daniel 2)

Often, when we have to make a difficult choice, we don't have a lot of time. This certainly was not the time for Daniel to learn how to pray, or to learn how to hear God's voice. Daniel's actions and his choices tell the whole truth about his relationship with God. (Daniel 2:20-23)

- 🕒 **Introductory activity: Lifeline**
- 🕒 **Learning activity: Tough Choices game**

week 4: choices and friends (daniel 3)

Have you ever come to a showdown of faith like this one? Did you choose to trust God and take a stand? Did you have friends to stand with you? In spite of their fear, Daniel and his friends took a stand for God.

- 🕒 **Introductory activity: Stand for something!**
- 🕒 **Learning activity: Friendship Survey**
- 🕒 **Text: Matthew 16:24-26**

week 5: choices and wisdom (daniel 5)

Daniel had apparently been forgotten over the years. And for him, that may have been a good thing. Perhaps he had some years of quiet living, without life and death situations being constantly thrust upon him. But Daniel was suddenly called on once more, because he had a reputation for wisdom. Maybe it didn't take all that much wisdom to read "the handwriting on the wall."

- 🕒 **Introductory activity: Royal Riddles**

week 6: choices and courage (daniel 6)

In many ways, this story is a picture of Daniel's life. He has been living among lions all along — vicious people who would just as soon be rid of him, people who were out to harm him, things that could have destroyed him if he didn't escape.

- 🕒 **Introductory activity: Truth or Dare**
- 🕒 **Small group activity: Lion Tamers Text: 1 Peter 5:8**





living among lions /when you have no choice

week1//day1 What is the longest time you have spent away from home? Did you enjoy it, or did you get homesick? Were you with friends or family, or were you alone? You may have heard the story of Daniel and the lions' den, but there is a lot more to the story of Daniel. It all took place about 600 years before Jesus was born. The Babylonian army came into Jerusalem and ransacked it, taking all the valuables and making slaves of most of the inhabitants. Prophets had foretold these events, saying that God would give victory to a foreign king as punishment to Israel for breaking their covenant with Him. But there were still people living there who loved and served the One True God. And while they were greatly affected by these events in their country, God had His hand on them. Begin reading **Daniel 1:1-6** and see what happened to Daniel against his will.

1. Name 3 things the King of Babylon took with him after capturing Judah.
2. What did the Babylonians look for when deciding who would be taken?
3. What were the things that Daniel took with him into this new country?
4. How do you think Daniel felt upon arriving in this country for the first time?
5. Imagine that you were living in Israel during this time. Imagine that your home was destroyed and your family's possessions stolen. Imagine that you, like Daniel were taken — taken to a foreign country to live with, work for, and be part of a different family. Assume that you were physically safe, and your physical needs were met. How would it feel to be away from everything familiar? How would it feel to suddenly be put in the middle of a foreign culture, surrounded by a strange language, strange food, and strange customs?
6. This may have been a more common scene in Daniel's day than in ours. But if this had happened to you, what would be the things that would keep you strong? Do you think you would immediately feel close to the others who were taken along with you?

living among lions /when you have no choice

//day2 Daniel was among the first captives to be taken. Many others would follow. He would have been very young, 15 years old at most. He had to travel about 500 miles to the city of the King of Babylon — across vast deserts, probably on foot. He was probably chosen because he belonged to a noble family, and had a good Hebrew education.

1. Look at **Daniel 1:5**. What purpose would these captives serve, once they were acclimated into the Babylonian culture?
2. Do you think there would have been pressure for Daniel to fit in with the ranks of talented young people competing for the king's approval?
3. To our knowledge, these young men held no bitterness for what had happened to them. It doesn't appear that they chose to blame others or felt sorry for themselves. What does that tell you about their view of God and life?
4. Do you think you would have responded similarly? In what ways?
5. What are the circumstances in your life that are difficult for you, but that are not the result of any choices of your own?
6. Daniel's story is our story. We are all often put in situations we didn't choose, or that are beyond our control — places we don't want to be — with people who don't have our best interests at heart. In fact, we are all foreigners in this world. It is not our home. What are the situations in your life right now that allow you to identify with Daniel?
7. When have you suddenly been taken from a situation where you felt safe and secure? When have you been suddenly thrust into a situation where every thing was new, you felt alone, and had only God to turn to?
8. Daniel would have known the words God spoke to Jacob:
"I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." **Genesis 28:15**

As we go through this study, try to be aware of the way that God is using your difficult situations. Even though you did not choose those situations, God is with you in them.





living among lions /choices and values

week2//day1 What is your favorite food item from your school cafeteria? Is this something you choose to eat every day?

1. Read Daniel 1:6-21. What special treatment did Daniel ask for?

2. The customs of the Babylonians must have seemed very foreign to Daniel and his friends — especially when it came to food. The Hebrews had very strict rules about clean and unclean food. But under those laws, everything in Babylon would have been off-limits for Daniel and his friends — even vegetables. It is possible that what Daniel was struggling with was receiving “royal treatment.” Perhaps he felt that by accepting the king’s favors, he would be agreeing to be loyal only to him. As a good Jewish boy, Daniel would have learned the Law of Moses. What do Daniel’s actions/choices reveal about his relationship with the one true God?

3. What plans did the king have for their minds, bodies, and loyalties?

4. It seems that Daniel and his friends realized the importance of the things that fed their lives. Do you think it was Daniel’s diet that caused him to stay strong and healthy?

5. Notice that Daniel and his friends did not create a lot of drama about their request. They didn’t stage a protest, go to the king, get emotional, or draw attention to themselves in any way. They just asked to be able to make their own choice. How do you think this shaped the impression the official had of Daniel and his friends?

6. What impresses you most about Daniel?

- a. his faith
- b. his willpower
- c. his courage
- d. his intelligence

7. How easy would it have been for Daniel to just follow the crowd? Who would have known or cared?

prayer

Throughout this study, we will be talking a lot about making choices. Spend some time today thinking about the difficult choices that you have to make. Pray about those choices today.

living among lions /choices and values

//day2

1. Can you think of a difficult school assignment you have had, on which you worked very hard, but your hardest just wasn't enough?
2. **Psalm 111:10** says, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding"* (NIV). Have you ever considered that knowing God and following Him could help you be smarter? Where does wisdom start?
3. Read **Daniel 1:17-21**. Daniel had just been thrust into a very demanding situation. Babylon was a highly competitive place. He and his friends probably felt competitive with the other Babylonian students surrounding them. How did God bless them, according to verse 17?
4. We are all confronted with things that we would be better off refusing. In media, school, music, and the mall — young people today are bombarded with choices that will determine not only the direction of their lives, but who they will become. What are some things that tempt you that you need to refuse?
5. First **Corinthians 6:19-20** says, *"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body"* (NIV). How does this verse relate to Daniel's decision?
6. What decisions are you facing that might be affected by remembering this verse?
7. Daniel's faith mattered more to him than anything else. How is that the choice that affects all other choices?
8. Read these words from **Joshua 24:15**: *"If you decide that it's a bad thing to worship GOD, then choose a god you'd rather serve — and do it today. ... As for me and my family, we'll worship GOD"* (The Message). What are the things that we sometimes choose to serve instead of God?
9. What are the things that we often put ahead of Him?
 - a. Popularity, or what our friends think
 - b. Ourselves and what we want and enjoy
 - c. An easier way
 - d. Other: _____

10. Sometimes the choices we make require us to take risks. Daniel, by rejecting the king's "royal treatment," risked punishment, poor health — and a rumbling stomach! Yet because he valued God more highly than the king, God caused Daniel to thrive. When was the last time you made a "risky" decision for God — when you cared more about obeying Him than what others thought of you?

11. What did you gain or lose as a result of that decision? Was it worth it?





living among lions /choices and habits

week3//day1

1. Have you ever experienced having the same dream over and over? Did you ever discover why you had the dream or what it meant?

2. That was the king's problem in the story in **Daniel 2:1-3**. He went through a time when he was deeply troubled and unable to sleep. During this time, he had a recurring dream that upset him. It is possible that he simply forgot his dream. It is also possible that for some reason he had come to distrust his astrologers, the men that he was in the habit of relying on. What unusual request did he make of them in **Daniel 2:4-11**?

3. What was their punishment if they could not fulfill his request?

4. How did this situation end up affecting Daniel and his friends (**Daniel 2:12-15**)?

5. Can you imagine how they must have felt? They had been taken from their homes and families, had done their best to continue to serve God in everything they did in this difficult situation, and now they were to be executed! Seriously? But rather than give in to this situation, Daniel took action. What did he do first (**Daniel 2:16**)?

6. What did he do next (**Daniel 2:17-18**)?

7. What does this tell you about Daniel?

- a. He was a good listener.
- b. He was a smooth talker.
- c. He trusted God.
- d. all of the above

8. How did God answer their prayers (**Daniel 2:19**)?

9. Often when we have to make a difficult choice, we don't have a lot of time. There certainly was not time for Daniel to learn how to pray, or to learn how to hear God's voice. What do Daniel's actions and his choices tell you about his relationship with God (**Daniel 2:20-23**)?





living among lions /choices and friends

week4//day1

1. This week's story about Daniel's friends is one of the best known in the Bible. It is the story of the fiery furnace. What is the biggest fire you have ever seen?

- a. A campfire
- b. A house fire
- c. A firefly
- d. A Fourth of July celebration gone bad

2. It seems that King Nebuchadnezzar did not learn much from the dream God sent to him. Read the next part of the story in **Daniel 3:1-6**. What did the king create, and what did he command?

3. Why do you think he would have taken such an extreme measure?

- a. Out of his own pride or insecurity
- b. To unite his country
- c. To test God
- d. To get back at Daniel
- e. None of the above
- f. All of the above

4. Of course, Daniel's friends were in this crowd, though we don't know where Daniel was or why he was not mentioned. How do you think they felt when the command was given?

- a. "Oh, no. Here we go again."
- b. "God will take care of us."
- c. "We'd better do what the king says."
- d. "Maybe the king won't notice."
- e. "Break out the hot dogs!"

5. They were not about to worship an idol. Why did the other officials report them?

- a. They believed in the idol.
- b. They loved the king.
- c. They were jealous of these foreigners.
- d. They wanted to discredit them in front of the people.

6. What was the king's response (**Daniel 3:7-12**)?

7. Do you think this was the first time Daniel's friends had to stand up for what they believed? Why or why not?

8. You would think that once the king saw that it was Daniel's friends, his wisest and most faithful servants, who refused to bow to his statue, he might have reconsidered. But instead, what did he do (**Daniel 3:13-18**)?

living among lions /choices and friends

9. Why do you think the king was so furious? (See verse 15.)
10. Which verses best describe the faith of Daniel's friends?
11. How do you think you would have responded to a showdown like this?
12. When have good friends helped you to take an important stand?

//day2 After giving them a second chance, the king followed through on his promise. Read the rest of the story in **Daniel 3:19-30**.

1. Who do you think the fourth figure in the furnace was?
2. What was the king's response to what he saw?
3. What did his response tell you?
4. What was God's message here?
 - a. He is more powerful than any earthly king.
 - b. He loves bonfires.
 - c. He is the one true God.
 - d. He doesn't like statues.
5. How did it all turn out for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?
6. What are the fiery furnaces in your life, those areas of your life where you often feel pressured to compromise?
7. Have you ever come to a showdown of faith like this one? Did you choose to trust God and take a stand? Did you have friends to stand with you?





living among lions /choices and wisdom

week5//day1

1. Can you name one lesson that you learned from your dad or mom? Can you think of one thing that he or she has said to you over and over? Are there habits or characteristics of his or hers that you truly hope you resemble? What are they?

2. Years went by and Nebuchadnezzar's son, Belshazzar, became king. He apparently was very much like his father. Not only that, but he didn't seem to have learned much from his father's difficult history. (You can read all about how Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind in **Daniel 4**.)

Read **Daniel 5**. One day when Belshazzar was feasting and celebrating with thousands of friends, he suddenly remembered the treasures his father had brought from the temple in Jerusalem. (Remember, we read about those in **Daniel 1:1-3**.) Among the treasures were some magnificent goblets. He ordered his servants to bring them so that he and his friends could drink from them. As they drank, they praised their gods for giving them victory over the land of Israel (**Daniel 5:1-4**). How was this risky behavior for the king? What made it so offensive to the one true God?

3. This story would make a great mystery thriller. What frightening sight did Belshazzar see that made him grow suddenly and deeply afraid (**Daniel 5:5-6**)?

4. Just as God was faithful to reveal Himself to Nebuchadnezzar, so He revealed Himself to his son, Belshazzar. What should Belshazzar have learned from his father? (*Circle all that apply.*)

- a. That there is a God who is in charge of the universe.
- b. That there is a God who puts kings in place and takes them down.
- c. That there is no such thing as God.
- d. That they, the kings of Babylon, were gods.

5. What did Belshazzar offer to the man who could explain the handwriting on the wall?

6. What does this offer tell you about him?

7. Apparently, the wise men of Babylon had not learned any more than King Nebuchadnezzar or his son had learned. Were they able to tell the king what the writing meant (**Daniel 5:7-9**)?

living among lions /choices and wisdom

//day2

1. Have you ever been at camp, gathered around a fire, telling ghost stories? Are you the type of person that likes to be scared?
2. King Belshazzar and his guests have just experienced the fright of their life. Who remembered Daniel in the midst of it all (**Daniel 5:10-12**)?
3. Daniel had apparently been forgotten over the years. And for him, that may have been a good thing. Perhaps he had some years of quiet living, without life-and-death situations being constantly thrust before him. But Daniel was suddenly called on once more because he had a reputation for wisdom. How did Daniel respond to the king's offer of reward? Why?
4. Daniel didn't pull any punches; he told the king exactly what the words meant, even though it was bad news. Is it easy to tell the truth under pressure?
5. How do you think Daniel's wisdom helped him to do what was right?
6. You may have heard someone say, "The handwriting is on the wall," which is an expression that comes from this story. It means that someone's fate is sealed, that the outcome is unchangeable, that judgment has been pronounced. What happened to King Belshazzar that very night?
7. From this story, does God seem merciful or just? From this series so far, would you describe Him as slow to judge or quick to judge?
8. Surely, Belshazzar and the Babylonians learned what happens to people who mock God. Can you think of any examples of people who mock God today?





living among lions /choices and courage

week6//day1

1. What are the toughest decisions you make each day?

- To get up
- What to wear
- How to deal with people
- When to do your homework
- Other:

2. For many of us, life really isn't easy. But if you think living in your neighborhood and going to your school requires you to make difficult choices, just consider the situation that Daniel and his friends lived in. The choices they faced often threatened their lives. They did not have the same beliefs, values, or worldview as any other members of the king's royal court. Read about Daniel's next difficult choice under another new king (**Daniel 6:1-5**). What did this new king intend to do as a result of Daniel's outstanding service?

3. Why do you think Daniel's fellow workers were jealous of him? (*Check all that apply.*)

- He was too honest; it made them look bad.
- He was too good-looking.
- The king liked him too much.
- He was an Israelite.

4. What scheme did they come up with to get Daniel in trouble? Read **Daniel 6:6-9** to find out.

5. It was not unusual in these days for kings to set themselves up as gods. Of course, it was wrong, but it was fairly common. Did Daniel change his behavior as a result of King Darius' new decree (**Daniel 6:10-12**)?

6. If you had been Daniel, what would you have done?

- Quit praying.
- Prayed only with the doors and windows locked.
- Prayed silently.
- Worshiped the king.

7. What situations do you face that seem like life-and-death situations?

8. How might Daniel's example give you courage?

living among lions /choices and courage

//day2

1. Can you think of a time when you have been betrayed? Accused of something you didn't do? What was the outcome for you?
2. How is this situation like or unlike the others that Daniel has been in?
3. How might that have affected his actions in response to the king's command?
4. How did the king feel about having to throw Daniel in the lions' den (**Daniel 6:13-16**)?
5. Compared to serving in the king's palace, do you think Daniel felt more or less threatened by lions?
6. What or who saved Daniel (**Daniel 6:17-24**)?
7. What did King Darius do as a result (**Daniel 6:25-30**)?
8. In many ways, this story is a picture of Daniel's life. He has been living among lions all along — vicious people who would just as soon be rid of him, people who were out to harm him, things that could have destroyed him if he hadn't escaped. Do you ever feel like that?
9. Whom do you turn to when you feel surrounded, helpless, and attacked?

