

Watching Our Consumption

Devotional Reading: Titus 1:5–9

Background Scripture: Daniel 1:8–20; 1 Corinthians 9:19–27;
1 Timothy 4:7–12

Daniel 1:8–17

⁸ 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. ⁹ Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰ 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.”

¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Haniah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ 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.” ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

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

¹⁷ 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 Timothy 4:7–8

⁷ Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Key Text

Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. —1 Timothy 4:7b–8

Social Teachings of the Church

Unit 1: Fulfilling Our Obligations to Neighbors

Lessons 1–4

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. List the components of Daniel’s proposal and its results.
2. Outline ways to cultivate mental, physical, and spiritual health by seeking true and wholesome things.
3. Make an inventory of daily habits and plan adjustments to honor God with time, diet, and attention.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Consequences of Neglect
- B. Lesson Context

I. Firm Resolve (Daniel 1:8–10)

- A. Daniel’s Favor (vv. 8–9)
Wearing White

- B. Official’s Concern (v. 10)

II. Agreeable Arrangement (Daniel 1:11–14)

- A. Trial Proposed (vv. 11–12)
- B. Comparison Accepted (vv. 13–14)

III. Clear Results (Daniel 1:15–17)

- A. Contrast in Appearance (v. 15)
- B. Change in Provisions (v. 16)
- C. Blessings from God (v. 17)

IV. Preferred Path (1 Timothy 4:7–8)

- A. Avoid Foolishness (v. 7a)
- B. Pursue Godliness (v. 7b)
- C. Reap Benefits (v. 8)

Physical and Spiritual Nourishment

Conclusion

- A. The Ultimate Goal
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Consequences of Neglect

When I was a teenager, taking care of my body seemed effortless. As an athlete on the cross-country team, exercise was built into my routine. I could eat whatever I wanted without feeling any adverse effects, so I didn’t pay attention to what I ate.

Several decades, two children, and a stint in graduate school later, I wish I could still say the same. While it brings me joy, most of my work is done at a desk, in front of a screen. The demands of family and church take up whatever time I have left, and I find myself neglecting the care my body needs. On a trip with our church’s youth group last summer, I struggled physically. At that point, it occurred to me that while I spend a lot of energy studying, writing, and teaching about God, I hardly put any effort into caring for the body God gave me. That neglect was getting in the way of serving God. It is impossible to separate my physical body and my service to God. As both texts for this lesson show, neither should be ignored.

B. Lesson Context

The book of Daniel is divided into two parts: chapters 1–6 consist of narratives about Daniel and his companions in service to various kings, while chapters 7–12 consist of Daniel’s visions. Because of these visions, the book is found in the “prophecy” section of the Bible. Today’s lesson comes from the first half of the book.

The epistle of 1 Timothy was written more than 500 years after Daniel’s time. Timothy was a traveling companion and coworker of Paul’s. In this letter, Paul gives Timothy instructions regarding the situation in the church at Ephesus, particularly in countering false teachings that threaten to muddy the good news of the gospel and cause distress within the church.

I. Firm Resolve

(Daniel 1:8–10)

A. Daniel’s Favor (vv. 8–9)

8. 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.

Daniel and his companions are forcibly removed from their families and brought to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1:1–3). The intention behind bringing them to the palace was to “reprogram” them, so to speak. At the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar, they are trained to serve in the royal court, a process meant to thoroughly assimilate them into the culture of their conquerors (1:3–5). To begin this process, *the chief official* gives Daniel and his friends new names (1:6–7). Daniel’s refusal of the food prescribed to him is an attempt to hold on to his identity as a servant of God instead of as a servant of his conqueror.

It is not clear, however, what it is about the king’s royal food that may *defile* Daniel. The Law of Moses forbids eating certain kinds of meat, but other kinds are perfectly acceptable (Leviticus 11:1–46; Deuteronomy 14:1–21). *Wine* is not forbidden (Numbers 6:20; 18:12; 1 Samuel 1:24; Psalm 104:14–15; etc.), though it is spoken of in negative terms when excess is involved (Isaiah 28:7; 5:11, 22; Proverbs 20:1). Daniel may be avoiding food and drink associated with pagan temple offerings and thus idolatry (compare 1 Corinthians 8). But under this theory, the vegetarian alternative he proposes in verse 12 would be equally suspect since flour is also offered to pagan idols.

Part of Babylon’s success was its practice of assimilating bright, educated young men from among the peoples the empire conquered. If the best and brightest from these conquered people groups ate Babylonian foods, practiced Babylonian customs, worshiped Babylonian gods, and loyally served the Babylonian king, they would have no reason to cause costly uprisings. They would be thoroughly invested in Babylon’s well-being. This is the reality that Daniel is trying to resist.

The Hebrew word translated here as *defile* is used elsewhere in the context of ritual purity in connection to blood (Isaiah 59:3) or impure offerings (Malachi 1:7, 12). Some commenta-

tors interpret the use of the word to indicate that Daniel is concerned with the ritual purity of the *royal food* and requests a vegetarian diet as a way of ensuring that he will not accidentally consume impure food.

Daniel’s decision is less about maintaining ritual purity through diet and more about maintaining a sense of identity by refusing to be completely assimilated into the empire that conquered his people. Daniel chooses to use his body and the food he eats as a way of honoring God.

What Do You Think?

How do we decide which issues and situations call for setting a boundary in service to God and which do not?

Digging Deeper

Describe a time that you honored a boundary to stay faithful to God’s will. What did you learn from the experience that could help others?

Wearing White

It was the first week of a new job. I was nervous, excited, and keen to make a good first impression. One morning, I chose to wear my favorite white trousers. On the way to work I picked up a breakfast bowl with egg and tomato. As I sat down at my desk, I managed to spill all the contents onto my white trousers. The accident happened just minutes before a business meeting with senior leaders.

Panic set in as I rushed to the restroom to assess the damage. I learned a valuable lesson: when you wear white, you are more conscious of where you sit and what you eat (or at least you should be) to avoid staining or spoiling your trousers. Daniel knew he belonged to the Lord and was clothed in the fear and favor of the Lord. He knew that being God’s servant required one to be set apart. Consider what you regularly consume with your body, mind, and spirit. Where might you make adjustments to serve the Lord more faithfully, just as Daniel did?
—N. V.

9. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel,



Visual for Lesson 1. Have this visual displayed prominently as a backdrop as you allow one minute for silent reflection on the question.

For the first time in the book of Daniel, *God* is credited as the active force. Daniel's situation echoes the relationship between Joseph and the prison warden (Genesis 39:20–23). In both cases, the person who obeys and follows God finds favor and approval from others.

The sentiment expressed by *the official* is more than a feeling of sympathy toward Daniel. The Hebrew word translated *compassion* is also translated as “merciful” in Daniel 9:9, and that is the sense here. The phrase evokes ideas of faithfulness and loyalty. Moreover, the two Hebrew words translated as *favor* and *compassion* appear together throughout Scripture to describe God's commitment to his people (Psalms 25:6; 40:11; 51:1; 69:16; 103:4; Isaiah 63:7; Jeremiah 16:5; Lamentations 3:22; Hosea 2:19; Zechariah 7:9).

B. Official's Concern (v. 10)

10. 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.”

The official does not give Daniel an immediately desirable answer. It's not a flat refusal, but it points out that if things go wrong, more people than Daniel will suffer the consequences. What Daniel is requesting—to reject a visible and substantial sign of allegiance and assimilation—could

be dangerous. The desires of kings are not to be taken lightly. The death penalty is a very real possibility (example: Daniel 6). What we might think to be hyperbole on the part of the official seems to be a genuine fear to him.

The main concern seems to be that by refusing the *food and drink* appointed by the king, Daniel and his companions will be eating inferior food. The official anticipates this will render them visibly less healthy *than the other young men* around Daniel's *age*.

The word *age* is difficult to translate since this is the only place in the Old Testament where the underlying Hebrew word occurs. The old Greek version, the Septuagint, translates this with a word that means “to bring up together.” This most likely refers to fellow Judeans who are being trained up at court.

In the end, by not giving a flat refusal, the official gives Daniel tacit permission to continue pursuing his request. As a loyal servant, he cannot promote Daniel's request. Nevertheless, the favor and tender love that God kindled in him causes the official to allow Daniel to continue pursuing his request without interference.

II. Agreeable Arrangement

(Daniel 1:11–14)

A. Trial Proposed (vv. 11–12)

11–12. 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.”

The underlying Hebrew word translated *guard* appears only here and in Daniel 1:16. Older English translations, such as the *King James Version*, translate the word as the proper name “Melzar.” However, more recent studies suggest that the word means “overseer,” “steward,” or “guard,” as reflected in the *New International Version*. This individual is likely a guard serving the chief official.

Although Daniel is now speaking with a different person, he is continuing the same request. The addition of *Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah*

underscores the fact that Daniel is making this dietary request for his community. Unless individuals only eat what they grow, kill, or forage entirely, food is always sourced in the context of connections between people or groups. Our modern, detached system of purchasing food can cause us to forget those connections. Daniel chooses to use diet as a means of maintaining his identity, including his connection to his people and God. It is fitting that he does this in the company of his fellows.

By asking for *ten days* to test his dietary request, Daniel acknowledges the warning the official has given (Daniel 1:10, above). Daniel also offers an alternative to the king's food: *vegetables*. The Hebrew word used here is rare, occurring only here and in Daniel 1:16 (below), where it appears with a slightly different spelling. It is related to the Hebrew word for *seed*. It could refer to a diet of seeds, meaning legumes and grains. It could also indicate things that grow from seeds, including fruits and vegetables. This diet resembles what God gave humans to eat in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 1:29).

We do not assume that Daniel requests an entirely vegetarian diet. In Daniel 10:3, he temporarily stops eating meat, so it must be concluded that he consumes meat more or less regularly.

No matter what we assume the “royal food” and vegetables to be, there remains a strong contrast between what Daniel is ordered to eat and what he is requesting to eat. The portion of the royal food and wine are symbols of power and privilege. Even if it is just a fancy loaf of bread, it is something that can presumably be obtained only by the king's permission. It is, therefore, a

tangible way in which the king demonstrates his power. By contrast, requesting the humble vegetables and water could be seen as an act of solidarity with those conquered of Judah. Perhaps this food is more in keeping with what inhabitants of Judah who had not been whisked away to court have available to eat. Again, the key point is that Daniel uses the food he eats, and thus his body, as a way to honor God.

What Do You Think?

How should Christians respond to a policy that goes against their convictions?

Digging Deeper

How do you square the example of Daniel with Acts 5:27–29; Romans 13:1–7; Titus 3:1–2; and 1 Peter 2:13–17?

B. Comparison Accepted (vv. 13–14)

13. “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.”

Daniel places the outcome of his request in the guard's hands. This keeps the experiment behind the scenes while also ensuring that the guard will feel confident in the outcome.

14. So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

The guard gives his permission. *Ten days* is a very short amount of time for such an experiment. It is unlikely that the guard expects a significant change in their appearances—especially a negative one.

III. Clear Results

(Daniel 1:15–17)

A. Contrast in Appearance (v. 15)

15. At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

Despite expectations, Daniel and his companions all appear much healthier than *any of the young men who ate the royal food*. The *ten*

How to Say It

Azariah	Az-uh-rye-uh.
Babylon	Bab-uh-lun.
Babylonian	Bab-ih-low-nee-un.
Ephesus	Ef-uh-sus.
Hananiah	Han-uh-nye-uh.
Mishael	Mish-a-el.
Nebuchadnezzar	Neb-yuh-kud- <i>nez</i> -er.

days should not have made that big of a difference. Although God is not explicitly stated to be active in the situation, this is clearly divine intervention.

B. Change in Provisions (v. 16)

16. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

Having passed the test, Daniel and his companions are granted a dietary exemption on an ongoing basis.

C. Blessings from God (v. 17)

17. 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.

This verse sets the stage for the narratives to follow. *God* is once again explicitly active, granting Daniel and his fellows *knowledge and understanding* beyond what they were brought to court to learn. This is particularly true regarding Daniel's understanding of *visions and dreams of all kinds*. The text makes it clear that Daniel will succeed in the Babylonian court, not because he earned it, but because God wills it.

What Do You Think?

In what ways has God blessed you beyond what you have asked or imagined? (Ephesians 3:20–21)

Digging Deeper

How do you use these blessings to serve God and others?

IV. Preferred Path

(1 Timothy 4:7–8)

A. Avoid Foolishness (v. 7a)

7a. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales;

This verse begins an expansion of the discussion in 1 Timothy 1:3–7, where Paul warns Timothy about false teachings and teachers that have their origin in legends and myths (compare Titus 1:14). Paul's caution against *godless myths and old*

wives' tales here employs an imperative verb, which means it is an order, not a suggestion. This is the first imperative in a paired exhortation; the other appears in the second half of the verse.

B. Pursue Godliness (v. 7b)

7b. rather, train yourself to be godly.

The second half of the paired imperative instructs Timothy to *train* himself. Paul uses athletic imagery, but the training he has in mind is not that of the athlete in pursuit of peak physical performance. Instead, Paul instructs Timothy to take the same drive and passion that an athlete devotes to his body and apply it to pursuing godliness (compare 1 Corinthians 9:24). It's not enough to merely avoid evil; one must pursue holiness.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways a Christian can train for godliness?

Digging Deeper

How do these ways compare with the training we do for our physical bodies?

C. Reap Benefits (v. 8)

8. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Paul begins by acknowledging that there is *some value* in *physical training*. It is not worthless. The Greek word used here indicates that something is small in comparison to something else (compare 1 Timothy 5:23). The physical body is a gift from God. Jesus cared for his physical body (Mark 6:31; 11:12–13), and so should we.

On the other hand, genuine *godliness* is beneficial both in the present and in eternity. The godly life yields peace, harmony, and contentment that cannot be found by any other means. And unlike physical health, spiritual health lasts forever. Death cannot conquer it.

Physical and Spiritual Nourishment

Years ago, a friend and I decided to com-

plete a metabolic program together. The 28-day plan promised to revive our metabolisms if we abstained from processed food and regularly ate nutrient-dense foods instead. The idea was to make a strategic lifestyle change.

The concept was based on the analogy of burning logs. Just as proper fuel enables the fire to continue burning, human metabolism thrives on the right kinds of food. Though initially skeptical, after 28 days, I achieved a level of physical fitness of which I had previously only dreamed. I was energized, experienced mental clarity, and slept better.

More significant than the physical discipline I gained, however, was the spiritual fitness that also resulted. I was able to spend more time in prayer, worship, and reading the Bible. The result was growth in my closeness to God. As I attended more carefully to the food I consumed, I ended up doing the same regarding spiritual food. What habits will you adopt to help build your spiritual fitness as well as your physical health? —N. V.

Conclusion

A. The Ultimate Goal

Both texts for this lesson deal with the connection between bodies and honoring God. In Daniel 1:8–17, Daniel and his companions resisted total assimilation into Babylonian culture and religion. This resistance took the form of tactfully refusing to eat the food and drink the wine given to them. Instead, Daniel requested water and food that was more in line with God’s desires. Through God’s intervention, his request was granted, and the resulting trial period was successful. Daniel and his companions resisted being fully assimilated, maintaining their connection to their people and God.

Strong connections can be formed through food and other kinds of consumption. These connections may be relational. They may be philosophical or societal. Being mindful of what you consume and its effects on both your body and soul will be noticed by others. Daniel and his friends used their bodies to honor God. For us,

this can take the physical forms of eating healthy foods, drinking water, exercising, getting enough rest, and being proactive about preventative care.

The text of 1 Timothy 4:7–8 puts this into a spiritual perspective. While celebrating the goodness of God’s creation, Paul instructed Timothy to make the pursuit of godliness his highest priority. The language he used alluded to athletes’ training (compare 1 Corinthians 9:24–27). This reminded Timothy that pursuing God gains a believer far more than focusing primarily on the body ever could.

Living within misaligned cultures, it can be easy to allow the pursuit of bodily health to rise above its proper place in our priorities. Paul’s words remind believers that faithfulness to God matters more. Read together, Daniel 1 and 1 Timothy 4 encourage us to honor our bodies so that we might honor God.

What Do You Think?

What questions will you ask to evaluate whether your consumption honors God?

Digging Deeper

How do these questions differ regarding dietary consumption? media consumption? material consumption?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, you created all things and pronounced them good. Thank you for making us in your image. Help us honor that image so that we may bring glory to you in all that we are and in all that we do. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Honor God by honoring your body.

Visuals FOR THESE LESSONS

The visual pictured in each lesson (example: page 236) is a small reproduction of a large, full-color poster included in the *Adult Resources* packet for the Spring Quarter. Order No. 9780784740132 from your supplier.