



## **Daniel – Stumbling Block or Stepping Stone?**

### **Welcome and Opening Prayer**

How did you react to change when you were a child? Some children deal very well with change and others do not. Children study the life cycles of various insects and animals. They consider how an egg becomes a caterpillar, forms a chrysalis and then emerges as an adult butterfly. They observe how the seasons pass, clouds shift and change shape and how tall sunflowers grow from tiny seeds. Our experiences of change in our early lives can have both positive and negative effects on how we react and adapt to change as adults.

Change is something we all have to deal with. As we read about and study Daniel, this week and next week, we'll think about he dealt with unexpected and challenging situations and how he continued on in Godly faith, prayer and trust.

### **Reading – Daniel 1:1-21**

We have seen and read of people who have tapped into and become part of the divine blueprint. One of the major themes our of studies has been that of *less than favourable circumstances*. This time we see it played out in the life of Daniel.

Yet again we have one of God's children thrust into a situation not of their choosing. Daniel is taken captive as a young man and sent against his will into a foreign land, with strange customs and culture, unfamiliar foods, and practices. During many of the long, cold, lonely nights Daniel must have questioned God's participation and action in his life. He probably would never see his family again, his prospects were decidedly limited and he even had to endure a change of name given to him by his new masters.

Its very useful to pause, look at and consider this early stage of Daniel's life.

How many times have you heard fellow believers give their present circumstances as reason for why they can follow or serve God fully? Difficult family issues, an unreasonable boss, financial constraints, uninspiring worship at the church meeting, lack of time or energy, having too much on their plate and so on. We've all faced these times in our lives. These are all genuine issues and it would be silly to dismiss or ignore them as trivial.

The key question here is how we respond to these times and circumstances in our lives. Daniel had every reason to be angry and upset with his life. He may have felt abandoned, under pressure, distressed, sad, lonely, or depressed. He made a key choice however – a choice of whether to be a victim or an overcomer.

Martin Luther King Jr told his fellow black Americans that if they saw themselves as victims, they would always remain victims. He challenged them to rise above their circumstances and strive for excellence wherever they could.

Daniel showed a similar attitude – either he could lie down and submit to his circumstances, or he could believe that God was indeed God and keep Him at the centre of his life, seeking to connect the divine call with human will. He made a choice to trust God.

We can place Daniel in the category of 'ready and willing' to do God's work – despite all that he faced and what seemed like limited opportunities. If we dare to do the same, then who knows how the divine blueprint can be implemented in our own everyday extraordinary lives?

### Questions

1. How would you respond to being abducted and forced to live in a foreign land?
2. What would be the toughest thing in your life to live without?
3. Think of a time when you made the most of a difficult experience. How has that affected your life? Looking back are you able to see God at work in that situation?
4. In the light of what we have read this evening, consider if and how you might respond differently to difficult situations in the future.

It could be said that a large proportion of the church remains largely unavailable to God due to a disabling submission to circumstances. His desire to use His people is significantly curtailed by a distorted idea that says 'if only I were free of this this, or if only I had the same opportunities as that person – then I'd be a giant for God!'

We can easily idealise other people's lives and compare them to our own seemingly disadvantaged humdrum existence. The great irony of that is that time and time again

God takes the ordinary, the difficult, and at times, the downright outrageous circumstances of His children and uses them to act as a vehicle of His power.

Jesus was in many difficult situations and turned them around to His advantage. I think He enjoyed doing this! We can only imagine the pressure He was under as He was constantly chased, questioned and accused. His way of dealing with this was simple – He did the things that the Father had set out for Him to do. It's a simple but profound life motto.

*Any thoughts/questions?*

*Closing Prayer*