

*ALIVE! Bible Study Series*  
**SCRIPTURE READING FOR SESSION 9**  
**DANIEL 1:1-20 NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (NIV)**

**The Faithfulness of Daniel and the Three Hebrew Young Men**

<sup>1</sup> In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

<sup>3</sup> Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— <sup>4</sup> 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. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. <sup>5</sup> The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

<sup>6</sup> Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. <sup>7</sup> The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

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

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

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

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

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

*The ALIVE! Bible Study Series*  
**STUDY AND REFLECTION GUIDE FOR SESSION 9**  
**“FAITHFULNESS AND THE DISCIPLINE OF HEALTHY LIVING”**  
**Daniel 1:1-20 (NIV)**

**Objectives:**

- To understand the importance of faithfulness to God and the link that faithfulness provides toward healthy living.
- To appreciate afresh what “God’s Food” means for your health.
- To consider what disciplines you need to put in place to reach your ALIVE! health goals.

**INTRODUCTION:**

**The first chapter of the Book of Daniel speaks very clearly and succinctly to what a close relationship with God can mean for how you govern your life – body, mind, spirit, relationships, and community.** What of this world will you have to forsake or minimize in your quest for better health? You may no longer be as physically fit as you were when you were younger. Yet, if you eat right, stay active in some kind of exercise or activity regime, take time to rest and replenish, and keep a close relationship with the God of your creation, you can still be in the best position to have vital energy, strength, and a stimulated intellect.

This session is about the disciplines needed to support health and abundant life. You will read and reflect on Daniel and the three young Hebrew men who made a pact not to defile their bodies with food and wine from the king’s table during their three year period of training for the court of the king. Although from the elite social class of Judah, they had a **strong spiritual foundation of faith and hope** in God. They followed the guidelines provided in “God’s food” for humankind from the beginning of creation knowing that God’s food would sustain them physically and mentally for the duration of their training. The four of them were able to keep their vow regarding the purity laws for diet because they formed a bond of support for each other that would help them remain steadfast in their dietary choices despite other influences around them. Throughout the Abundant Living sessions you have been encouraged to share your triumphs and backsliding during your small group Q & A sessions so that you can, like the Hebrew young men, form a bond of support and encouragement for each other.

May you glean and say “yes” to new and exciting attitudes and disciplines as you journey with **Daniel** (Belteshazzar), Hannaniah (**Shadrach**), Mishael (**Meshach**), and Azariah (**Abednego**) **during a time of trial when they remained faithful and self-disciplined witnesses to God’s grace and cover. To God be the glory!**

**BACKGROUND:**

This first chapter of Daniel starts by explaining that the king of Judah, Jehoiakim, was abducted by the king of Babylon and was brought into exile, along with articles from the temple of God in Jerusalem and Israelites from the royal family and nobility.

It is important to consider the actions of Jehoiakim and several kings of Judah before him, prior to the destruction of Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Several kingdoms earlier, King Josiah ruled Judah from 640-609 BCE. His servant found the Book of Law, written by Moses and King Josiah, and made sure that the people followed the rules and rituals prescribed therein. *“He did what was right in*

*the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father, David, not turning aside to the right or to the left” (2 Kings 22:2).*

The kings after him, however, did not follow the Book of Laws and reverted to worldly lifestyles that did not honor God. Alliances with other countries and other kings were formed in order to keep Babylon from invading Judah. **King Jehoiakim and his predecessors depended on others rather than on God for protection and “did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord” just as their fathers had done. Many things they did angered God (2 Kings 23).**

#### **REFLECTION FOR DISCUSSION:**

The kings of Judah, the southern province of the Israelites (as with the kings of Israel, the northern province) lost their country because they made alliances with people who did not have their interests at heart. **What alliances have you formed that are not pleasing to God?** These alliances are not necessarily with people but with fast food restaurants, snack and soda companies, and with negative attitudes and self-destructive actions you take against keeping your body as healthy as you can. **What are you learning from your involvement in the ALIVE! Bible Study and Abundant Living sessions about building healthy alliances? Which of these alliances help you to choose to live abundantly?** *Note, however, that even if you follow everything being taught, disease, illness and serious accidents may still besiege you. Your ability to rebound or stabilize, however, is so often dependent on your overall health when illness strikes – that is, your stamina, your determination, AND your faith and trust in the Presence that never leaves you nor forsakes you. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me, Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4)*

**Jesus, the incarnation of God’s love and mercy, gave us another view of God. God** does not punish us because of past sins. Rather, God stands with us in the midst of the messes we create and cleans us up when we allow ourselves to be washed in the life-blood of faith and hope that is found in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

#### **SCRIPTURE FOR STUDY AND REFLECTION: DANIEL 1:1-20**

- **Dan. 1:1-2: “And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim, King of Judah” into the hands of the Babylonian king.** Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets warned the Israelites that their country would be destroyed and that they would go into exile because they did not take care of the poor, the widows, the orphans, and the aliens. They used unbalanced scales in their business dealings and did not forgive debts at the appropriate time. God was not pleased with his chosen people, especially the royal family and the nobility. Everyone suffered because of the doings of the power brokers of the lands. *(May you consider the messages of the ancient prophets as you assess the political, economic, social, and moral ethics of today.)*

Along with taking the king and the elite people of Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon also took articles from the temple of God in Jerusalem. He ordered that the articles be put in the treasure house of his gods. The articles of the temple of God were put under the articles of King Nebuchadnezzar’s gods so that the Israelites were insulted and belittled about the things that were important to their faith. The king’s attitude was truly means of demoralizing the Israelites.

**Questions for small group discussion:**

- **How have you felt when your customs, your traditions, your faith was devalued?**
  - **How have you felt as you strive to live an abundant life, and yet find that the foods and recipes that have been so much a part of your tradition are not healthy for you?**
  - **How have you reconciled these findings with your sense of community and hope for a healthy future?**
- **Dan. 1:3-5: Ashpenaz, chief of the king’s court officials was to take the “cream of the crop” of young Hebrew men and “teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.” The young men were to receive “a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table” and be trained for three years in preparation for the king’s service.**

These young men were “*without physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace.*” They would make the king proud when their assimilation training into Babylonian culture was complete. Ashpenaz would be able to rely on them to do the business of the king’s territories. The king was wise to indoctrinate the young men and build loyalty for himself with the young men. His offering of food and drink from his table set these young men apart from the rest of those Hebrews exiled from Judah to Babylon. Because these young Hebrew men were from the upper echelon in Judah’s society, it is likely that they were already separated from the culture of the common people of Judah. The king was making sure that these men got used to the “good life” of Babylon by way of rich food and wine and the pleasures of the palace life.

As citizens of a country of plenty, you may be accustomed to special celebration dinners and festivals including juicy steaks, other rich meats, seafood, cheese, and wines of many varieties. Finding ways to eat lean meats or baked/broiled fish, a little olive oil with herbs and spices on your pasta and vegetables, and ice water with a lemon or cucumber wedge may be new. **Eating in healthy ways often requires a whole new change in your mindset of attitudes and traditions about food and what is life-giving.**

**Question for small group discussion:**

- When we have been so indoctrinated, like the young men chosen by Ashpenaz, to think that an expensive steak dinner or shrimp and crab meat or swordfish dinner is a reward for some accomplishment or endeavor, how do you get past that attitude to have something tasty and healthy instead?
  - How might you modify your menu choice to have an exquisite meal and yet be careful about your ALIVE! goals?
- **Dan. 1:6-10: In verses 6 and 7 you are introduced to Daniel and the three young Hebrew men. Their Hebrew names were changed to Babylonian names as a way of assimilation into Babylonian culture. It seems that the four young men did not object outwardly to their names being changed.**

In verses 8-10, however, when they learned that they were to eat food and drink wine from the king’s table, Daniel, as spokesman for the small group, let the chief official know that they would have no part of the king’s table. **Daniel asks the chief official for “permission not to defile himself” with**

**food and wine from the king's table.** For Daniel, the acceptance of the food and wine would be a breach of the Levitical laws regarding purity. Meat eaten by Hebrews was to be prepared in the kosher tradition to assure cleanliness and purity. **Ezra, the rabbinical priest, asserted that, in times of exile and in subordinate positions, it was very important for the Jews to remain true to their laws of purity as a way of sustaining spiritual and community integrity. These mandates were to support Jews in remembering their history, their culture, their faith in God, and the rules regarding food and purity.**<sup>1</sup>

Wine had never been forbidden as a part of the purity laws but was used most frequently in times of festivity. Meat and wine were not only food consumed at times of festivals but were also viewed typically as the foods of the wealthy. Because the Jews were in exile, it was appropriate for Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to assume a position of mourning rather than of festival.

Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were from the aristocratic community of Judah, otherwise they would not have been chosen to participate in the training. They were, however, dedicated to God and the laws of their faith. In verse 9 you find that God had not forsaken the four young men because God “caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel.” In verse 10 the use of “you” and “your” are the plural forms of those pronouns meaning that the three Hebrew young men stood with Daniel as the official talked with Daniel about his request to abstain from the food and drink offered.

**Questions for small group discussion:**

- When plans for a church or family gathering are being made, do you feel strong enough in your resolve for better health to speak up and offer healthy alternatives for the meal preparations? Yes? No? Why?
- Do you get much resistance? Yes? No? How does that make you feel?
- Daniel's request brings to mind that being faithful to God often means being a nonconformist in the world: to have a different set of moral, ethical and faith values. **Have you ever had an occasion where you chose to stand hard and firm for your right to live out your Christian morals and values in the midst of pressures from others to “do something different for a change?” What kept you strong? How does this apply to your ALIVE! goals?**
- **Dan. 1:11-16: “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the (other) young men...”** Daniel proposed a rather risky request from the viewpoint of the guard. Yet, he agreed to grant Daniel's request and gave them only **God's food** (Gen. 1:29) for ten days. In just ten days, they were looking healthier and better nourished than the other young men in training. Therefore, for three years, the diet for the four young Hebrew men was vegetables and water. Note that God designed human beings and put our bodies in perfect working balance from cells with specific functions, to organs that do specific work, to body systems that interrelate with other body systems to keep us healthy body, mind, and spirit. **Moreover, before God created human beings, God put everything in the garden**

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<sup>1</sup> The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Abington Press, Nashville, 1996, Vol. VII. Smith-Christopher, Daniel L., Associate Professor of theological Studies, Department of Theology, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, CA, The Book of Daniel, p. 40

**for them that would keep their bodies in good order, running smoothly, strong, muscular and full of good energy (Gen. 1:29).**

**Questions for small group discussion:**

- Have you ever tried to be a vegan – a person who eats only God’s food – nothing that contains animal products, even egg, cheese and milk products?
  - Do you know anyone who is a vegan? How does he/she maintain such a way of eating? Is he/she healthy?
  - Have you or do you know anyone who has done “The Daniel Fast?” How did you/he/she feel after the experience?
  - What did you think about Daniel’s request the very first time you ever read the first chapter of the Book of Daniel?
- **Dan. 1:17-20: “In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.” (v.20) Daniel and the three other young men honored God by setting their minds and hearts on remembering who and Whose they were and keeping to their purity laws. They were disciplined in their approach to their lives, not giving in to the worldly pleasures offered by the king. It was as if they were on a mission to stay strong – body, mind, and spirit with Spirit leading the way.**

The four young men set a standard of living for themselves. They did not waiver but set a pace and order about their lives that allowed them to move forward without sluggish and dulled minds and bodies. Keeping their faith kept them strong and on target for the responsibilities they accepted to learn. **In the same manner, when you walk on the path to health that God set in place for you from the beginning of time**, you too will feel stronger and more alert. When your faith is the guiding force for your actions, you gain peace even in the midst of the storms of life. Your head is clearer and your spirit will hear the words of wisdom from within moving you away from people, places, and things that are not about your good. *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (KJV).*

**Questions for small group discussion:**

- What health disciplines have you developed before or during your involvement with the ALIVE! Initiative?
- What disciplines – spiritual, physical, mental, stress relief, mind strengthening – do you want to develop? What do you think Step 1 is to moving into your new everyday lifestyle?
- Daniel had three compatriots to share his path. What kind of support do you need to bring about the changes that support the disciplines you want?

**PLENARY SESSION TO DISCUSS GLEANINGS FROM THE SMALL GROUP SESSIONS**

**CLOSING REMARKS, REMINDERS, AND PRAYER**