



I am so glad you are here and I'm excited to jump into this new series with you. Over these next few weeks, we're going to be talking about something that probably everyone in this room has dealt with at one point or another: FEAR! I don't think it's a stretch to say that most people in our world are living in fear of something or someone or somewhere.

[LEADER NOTE: tell a story of something that you were really scared of when you were growing up. I shared about my fear of sharks (they actually still scare me today). This should be something light, so don't get too intense this early in the message.]

So, what about you? Whether you think it's rational or irrational, what is something that you fear? What is that thing that gives you a cold sweat at night or sends a shiver down your spine? Maybe it's snakes or spiders or clowns. Maybe it's a fear of heights or public speaking or fear of the dark. [LEADER NOTE: Google some pics of different fears to display on a screen as you talk.]

My guess is that everyone in this room (if we're being honest), has something that they fear. When you're a little kid, most people think your fears are cute and funny: "Isn't it so cute that she's scared of Santa Claus?" Or, "Oh how funny that he's scared of broccoli." The older you get, it's not so cute or funny anymore. Fear has a way of getting a grip on us that seems to only get tighter over time. Maybe for you it's not so much a fear of things that can eat you (like sharks), but maybe it's a fear of rejection, or loneliness or failure. Some of you know exactly what I'm talking about because you battle your particular fear every single day. Maybe no one else even knows about it because you're embarrassed or ashamed. If you have a hidden fear, then I encourage you to open up to a friend about it or tell a small group leader because I guarantee you that you're not alone. But I want you to know some really good news: it doesn't have to be this way! Jesus didn't come so that we would live our lives cowering in fear. Instead, **Jesus came so that you and I would live FEARLESSLY by FAITH in Him!** That is what this series is all about.

We're going to start by looking at the story of one young man who was around the same age that many of you are right now when his world was

turned upside-down. If you have a Bible, we're going to look at his story in Daniel chapter 1. Daniel's story takes place around 605 B.C. and God's chosen people (The Jews) were being led by King Jehoiakim. Even though they had been warned by prophets about the consequences of their sins, God's people continued to disobey Him and lived how they wanted by worshipping false gods. As a result, God allowed them to be captured by a foreign nation and that's where we pick up in Daniel chapter 1.

Daniel 1:1-2 (NLT)

During the third year of King Jehoiakim's reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah and permitted him to take some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God. So Nebuchadnezzar took them back to the land of Babylonia and placed them in the treasure-house of his god.

Nebuchadnezzar was the King of Babylon and he was feared all over the world. Whenever he invaded a nation, he would kill whoever he wanted and take whatever he wanted (including people!). That's exactly what happened here in this story: the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem, things were stolen and people were killed. Others were taken from their own land and exiled in Babylon.

Daniel 1:3-5 (NLT)

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief of staff, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah's royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives.⁴ "Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men," he said. "Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good judgment, and are suited to serve in the royal palace. Train these young men in the language and literature of Babylon."⁵ The king assigned them a daily ration of food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for three years, and then they would enter the royal service.

When the King invaded, he took the best and brightest and most talented people to serve in his palace. Look back at verse 4. Some of you are freaking out right now because you're thinking: "that would have been me!" These guys were taken and trained for three years in the ways of the Babylonians to learn their language, literature and eventually their religion. It's important for us to understand that Babylon was a place where people

worshipped multiple false gods. As you might imagine, this culture was against God in every way including their values and morals. It's into this new world that these young Jewish men (including Daniel) had been taken.

Daniel 1:6-7 (NLT)

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. ⁷ The chief of staff renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego.

Imagine what this would have been like for these four guys. Most of them were in their teens (16-17). Most of their family and friends were now dead and their homes were gone. They were living in a new world with a new language, new customs and new gods. As if any of this was not enough, they were also given new names. But these weren't just any names – each of their new names came from one of the Babylonian gods! If anyone ever had a reason to be fearful, it was Daniel and his friends. They were living in a strange new land with new gods and new names. I wonder if they ever felt like God had abandoned them.

Think of how easy it would have been to just give up and embrace their new culture in Babylon. It wasn't all bad as there was free lodging, clothes and food. However, food was part of the problem because the Jewish people had strict dietary regulations. Under their Levitical law, there were certain meats that were off-limits because they were considered "unclean" (such as meat that had been sacrificed to idols). For Daniel, to eat the meat he was being offered would mean compromising his faith. However, imagine the consequences if he didn't comply!

What do you do when you get to the place in life when you have every reason to be fearful? What do you do when it seems like nothing has gone your way or that everyone is out to get you and there's no light at the end of the tunnel? What do you do when it's hard to imagine how things could get any worse? You remember that: **even when we're FEARFUL, God is still FAITHFUL!** God hadn't forgotten about Daniel and his friends. While their present circumstances had gone from bad to worse and they had plenty of reasons to fear what was coming next, God was right there with them in the midst of all of it. Even when we're fearful, God is still faithful!

The same is true for us. Whether it's a situation at home, school, with your friend or even a private battle you're facing, God hasn't forgotten about you and He hasn't abandoned you. He's with you and for you even when you're afraid and you don't know what to do. Some of you need to hear this truth because, like Daniel, things in your life have not gone the way you've planned. If you're being honest, you'd say that you're afraid right now. I want you to know that even when you're fearful, God is still faithful.

The truth is that God has bigger plans for our lives that are in the works – even if we can see them in the moment. Back to our story of Daniel. The king had given him a daily ration food that included the unclean meat. Now Daniel had a decision to make; he could eat the meat and compromise his faith or refuse and suffer the consequences. Ultimately, it's a question that comes down to what we're talking about: did he fear God more or this earthly king? Listen to how he responded.

Daniel 1:8 (NLT)

But Daniel was determined not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief of staff for permission not to eat these unacceptable foods.

Despite his fear and despite the consequences, Daniel stood his ground. He chose to honor God and “determined not to defile himself.” But he also did this respectfully. It says he “asked permission” not to eat the food and then he came up with a creative alternative that would allow him to live in the culture without compromising his convictions. Daniel asked that for the next 10 days, he and his friends would only be given vegetables and water. At the end of this time, he said that they should be compared to everyone else eating the meat to see who looked healthier.

Daniel 1:15-16 (NLT)

At the end of the ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked healthier and better nourished than the young men who had been eating the food assigned by the king. ¹⁶ So after that, the attendant fed them only vegetables instead of the food and wine provided for the others

So, the moral of the story is “eat your vegetables,” right? Not exactly! It's that even when we're fearful, God is still faithful. For Daniel and his friends, despite all their hardships and suffering, God came through in a big way. But the story gets even better because God wasn't done with Daniel yet. In

the next several verses, we learn that Daniel and his friends gained knowledge, wisdom, understanding and impressed the king, becoming “ten times more capable” than others in the kingdom. After this time, God blessed them even more with significant positions of influence and leadership that you can read about in the rest of the book.

You see, God had never forgotten about Daniel and his friends. God hadn’t abandoned them. Even when life was hard and he had every reason to be fearful, God was still faithful and came through at exactly the right time. The same is true for you and I today. No matter what you’re going through, no matter how bad your circumstances may be (and I know for some of you they may be bad right now), I want you to know that the God of Daniel is the same God that we worship today. In the midst of your fear, your doubt, your insecurity and your loneliness, remember that God hasn’t forgotten you or abandoned you. Remember that even when you’re fearful, God is still faithful!

[LEADER NOTE: share a story about a time in your life when you were fearful and didn’t know how things were going to work out. Then talk about how God came through for you in some unexpected ways.]

Some of you may be in a similar situation where you’re fearful about the *future* because of all the unknowns: where you’re going to attend college; what you’re going to study; what you’re going to be when you grow up; or if you will be successful. Others of you have a fear of the *present* because you’re dealing with a situation at home or school that seems impossible right now. Then some of you are dealing with fear about the *past*: some choices you’ve made or things you’ve said and done that have come back to haunt you. You may agree with what I’ve said: that Jesus didn’t come so that we would live our lives cowering in fear and that even when we’re fearful, God is still faithful. But the real question is, how do we live our lives right now in the midst of all the fear, worry and anxiety that seems like it’s trying to strangle the life out of us? So, here’s what we do and how we respond as followers of Christ: **When we TRUST that God is faithful, He helps us to be FEARLESS.** That’s our response: to trust in God’s faithfulness. It’s to remember Who it is that we’re talking to: the God of the Universe! It’s to remember that our God is big, strong and powerful and that there’s nothing our God cannot do! As we trust in Him and His faithfulness, He helps us to be fearless.