

How God Makes Men

Daniel: The Principle of Uncompromising Character

Daniel 6:1-28

Good morning, men! The vision of Man in the Mirror is for every church to disciple every man. The mission is to help churches be more effective in discipling men. This Bible Study is part of that vision and mission. What we're trying to do here at this Bible Study is summed up in 2 Timothy 2:2:

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people (that would be you) who will also be qualified to teach others.

So this is an equipping Bible Study. Our mission is to help you lead a powerful life transformed by Jesus, but that's only the becoming part. It's also about making disciples, and equipping you so that you can go out and be more effective in your ministry. The vast majority of you already have ministries outside of this Bible Study. Some of you aren't ready to do that yet, but some of you at any given moment are sensing that God is stirring you to get more involved in men's discipleship or some other kind of ministry. Our mission is not just to equip you for your own life, it's also to equip you to equip others who in turn equip others later. That's what we're about here.

Let's go ahead and do a shout out. We want to welcome a new group from the Seacoast Church in the West Ashley of Charleston, SC. It's a group that's meeting Wednesdays at 7:00am. John O'Brien is the leader of that group. They've asked us to pray for them as they begin their journey, so let's do that!

Father, we do pray for these men as they join us in this Bible Study. Give them the mission that you've given us, to equip the men of Charleston to go out and have ministries to equip other men and lead powerful lives transformed by Jesus. And that you would be glorified, and that the kingdom would be expanded greatly by their ministry. We pray this in your name, amen!

Let's welcome these guys! One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome guys, we're glad to have you with us!

So the series is *How God Makes Men*, the message this morning is called Daniel: The Principle of Uncompromising Character. You probably heard about the Air Force cheating scandal. There's an underground control center, I guess somewhere in Montana, where they have these Air Force personnel wired in to Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles located in silos very close by. About half of these men who are responsible for these nuclear weapons have been found to be cheating on their evaluations. This isn't an immediate danger to us, there's just a lot of pressure for them to have 100% scores on their tests because of the way they are promoted and how their performance is judged. But half of the men in this station got involved in this conspiracy. Is there any doubt in our day and age that we have a crisis of character? We see it at all levels. Government corruption, Medicare fraud, Wall Street corruption and fraud, the explosion of pornography. Not only people seeking it out but it seeking us out! You can't hardly watch a commercial anymore without feeling like you're being accosted! There is this crisis of habitual lying!

I've told this story before about being on an airplane and a man ordered a bourbon and coke. He was sitting next to me, the flight attendant didn't have change for a twenty, so she said I'll come back in a minute. He left the money on the tray and the flight attendant walked back and forth along the aisle in the passing minutes, obviously having forgotten that he hadn't paid. When it became obvious to him that she had forgotten, he took the money off the tray and put it back in his pocket. Financial misconduct, from cheating on taxes to defrauding your customers by not telling them the design flaw. All kinds of different ways that we have this crisis of character today. So in the life of Daniel we see a man that perfectly exemplifies a man of uncompromising character.

By the way, some of you are probably already feeling ashamed, guilty, under condemnation, wanting to crawl under the table, wish you hadn't come this morning. That's not what this is about today. This is about giving you an example of a man who did live with uncompromising character and then talking about how the Gospel of Jesus helps us to be able to live with this uncompromising character as well.

The Story of Daniel

Let's take a look at the story of Daniel, chapter 6. It's the story of Daniel in the Den of Lions. Verse 1:

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel (there's another crisis of character, jealousy, envy of someone else getting ahead) in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."

So, long story short, they go to the king and get him to pass laws making it illegal to pray to anyone except the king. The penalty for disobeying this was to be thrown in the den of lions. Verse 10:

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

He was undeterred in his behavior by this edict to worship the king. You know the story, the leaders went to the king and they were able to get the king to put Daniel into lions' den even though the king really had this deep affection for Daniel. They set Daniel up, the king knew, but because of the rule of law he couldn't do anything about it, so he had him cast into this den of lions. Verse 17:

A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed. Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den. When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

At the king's command, the men who had falsely accused Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

So that's what happened. What kind of a man was Daniel? We see what kind of a man Daniel was in verse 4. They could find no corruption in him because he was faithful, he was neither corrupt nor negligent, and he was a man of integrity. He had courage, but first and foremost a man of integrity. Look over at verse 10. When he learned the decree had been published, he went home and just like he'd always done, he prayed three times a day. In other words, he was a man on a mission, he was not conformed to the world, and he was not going to exchange the truth of God for a lie and the glory of God for an idol. In verse 21 it says my God sent his angel and he shut the mouths of the lions. I was found innocent in his sight, nor have I done any wrong to you. So he was a righteous man leading a righteous life and we have many other examples of men like Daniel in the Bible. There's Joseph who when his master's wife seduced him did not succumb to that temptation. We have men like Noah who God gave this incredible command to and he was obedient. The Bible says repeatedly that Noah did what God commanded him to do. Then Job. Keep your finger in Daniel and turn there. Job 1:8 says the Lord said to Satan when the devil appeared before the heavenly court have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him. He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. In verse 3 in chapter 2 he says later after the first test again, have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him, he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. He still maintains his integrity, though he was incited against God. We have many other examples like Daniel in the Bible, but we also have many examples of men who had bad character, weak character, or lapses in character. Even King David, a man after God's own heart, we know he had this incredible lapse in character, and committed adultery. But we also have Cain, Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery, Saul who was made the first king of Israel, but then had this incredible crisis of character and was removed from office.

What was the difference between these men? Back in Daniel 6:23. What was the difference between these men of uncompromising character, and the ones who compromised their character? It says no wound was found on Daniel because he had trusted in his God. It's faith men! The difference is not that these men were strong men, it's not that they had a determination and strong will, it's not that they were able to perform, but rather in every case it's because they put their trust and their faith in the Lord Jesus, in their God to save them. That's the Big Idea: **Godly character doesn't come from "obeying the rules," but out of the overflow of a faith-filled heart.**

I honestly try to come up with a more clever way to say this. I always work to what is called the exegetical idea, in other words the raw idea that the scripture is trying to get across. Then I try to word smith it a little bit to make it clever, make it more of a turn of phrase or more memorable. Sometimes that just doesn't do it justice, so the exegetical idea is the Big Idea today. **Godly character doesn't come from "obeying the rules," but out of the overflow of a faith-filled heart.** A heart of faith.

Where Does This Kind of Character Come From?

I have my worksheet, it's like 8 pages and I use it to develop the message. This is the first thing I read when I'm getting started. Whether I'm preparing a message, writing a book or article, or listening to another man speak, I'm always thinking the same questions. What is the urgent problem screaming for an immediate solution? In this case, it's the crisis of character. You certainly see the crisis of character in the men who accused Daniel! Then I have written, what one question best captures what must be asked and said at this moment? How does the Gospel of Jesus solve this problem? What truth stirs me so deeply that I feel compelled to come here on Friday morning and tell you about it? Of all the things that could be said, what is it that needs to be said and must be said? I think this is the question: Where does this kind of character come from? Where does this uncompromising character come from? We've already started to answer the question.

Let me tell you about Lou. Lou and his family belonged to a church for about 15 years. He was a rock and a pillar in the church. He was actually a deacon for a period of time. From the outside the marriage looked like it was going very well. The kids were very active in the church. At about the 15 year mark, Lou got invited to become part of a small group that was meeting in the church. For several months he sat in this small group. He didn't say much, but when he did say something, it was worth listening to. Then after a few months, the leader of the small group called the other members in the small group to let them know that Lou had walked away from his wife and his children. He said he needed some time to think things over. He never went back. How does that happen? How does it happen that somebody who looks like they're firmly grounded in Christianity walks away? How is it even possible? Where does the kind of character come from that doesn't do that?

Turn with me to Matthew 15. You've all known men like this. They walked away from everything, just chucked the whole thing. In the movie Groundhog Day, Bill Murray you may remember pulled his car up on the railroad tracks and he started driving towards the train and he says, "I'm just not going to live by their rules anymore!" You know men like this, men who have been in and around the Christian faith for years, maybe decades, and they just walk away, and say I'm not going to do that anymore. The core problem was that they were never living out of the overflow of a faith filled heart, they were always living by the rules! They were living a performance based faith based on their own effort, their own will, their own ability to sort of suck it up and gut it out which is really just bringing the world's value system into Christianity! But Jesus has a very different way of living a life of uncompromising character. We see it in chapter 15, let's start at verse 8. He says:

"These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

Lou was saying all the right things but where was his heart? Verse 9:

They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules."

Manmade rules and regulations. Do this, do that, don't do this, and for God's sake don't look at that. Manmade rules and regulations that had the outward appearance of righteousness, but they're coming out of a man trying to live in his own strength, his own power. Drop down to verse 17. He's talking here about the laws of the Jews. He says:

“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what defile a person...

What are these things? They’re bad character! Out of the overflow of a heart that’s not filled with faith, but still plugged into the world’s system. Turn with me to Matthew 12:34. Jesus says:

For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

Where does this kind of character come from? It comes out of the overflow of what’s in our hearts. It’s by faith! There are a lot of men out there right now who are trying to be good men. The operative word is trying. They are trying to be a good boy, to make God happy, avoid his wrath, and earn his favor by their behavior. They are doomed to fail unless it is out of the overflow of a faith filled heart. Godly character doesn’t come from obeying the rules, but out of the overflow of a faith filled heart.

How to Become, or Remain, Men of Uncompromising Character

Finally, how can we become or remain men of uncompromising character? What do you do if you have compromised your character? In other words, when I was talking at the beginning, if you felt like crawling under the table, how can you deal with that and get out from this sense of condemnation? How do you recover from that? Turn with me to Hebrews 4:15. It’s the same answer:

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

If you have blown it, if you have your own crisis of character, the answer is not to suck it up and do better next time! The answer is to come humbly to the foot of the cross and just lay your sin there and confess it. This throne of grace is so accessible! Anyone, anytime! Muslim, Buddhist, Jew, Confucian, Republican, Democrat, Liberal, etc.! Anybody, all the time, this throne of grace! That’s what this Gospel is, it’s the Gospel of Jesus. It’s not based on your performance, it’s based on our faith. Faith alone, by Christ alone, by grace alone.

One application. I believe that a man’s character is most revealed by how he treats his family. In other words, what goes on behind the closed doors of your private castle, that’s who you really are. This is where a lot of men today are experiencing their character temptations. Some of you may remember that David Delk and I co-authored a book called *The Dad in the Mirror* and the whole premise of this book is the difference between fathering for performance and fathering for the heart. You may want to take a look at that book. Some of you will remember the story I told about the man whose parents said they were going to get divorced and he said no you’re not! You’re not going anywhere! And after an hour’s worth of arguing, the mother turned to the husband and said well I guess that means we’re not going to get a divorce! That was 25 years ago and they’re still together. So another man in our Bible Study told this story that his family situation was very different. Nobody was there to challenge his mom and dad when they said that they were going to get a divorce. He has four sisters, all of whom are messed up in their families. Two of them are divorced, very mixed results in the children. If I remember it correctly, none of them are walking with God because there was a wrong approach to how to handle

this crisis of character. I want to urge all of us to throw off this intergenerational curse that comes by trying to get our kids to perform, obey the rules, and do the right thing. That doesn't mean that you're not going to teach them some of those things, but we need to get beyond that and get to what's going on in the heart. It's not only for us, but for what we pass along to our kids and the next generation. This is the Big Idea for today, **Godly character doesn't come from "obeying the rules," but out of the overflow of a faith-filled heart.** Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Our Father in heaven, Lord, we look at a man like Daniel or a guy like Joseph and we say we want to be like that. But then we immediately tend to think we need to man up. That's not it! What we need to do is faith down! I pray for all of the men who feel like they are under any condemnation or guilt that they would just simply come and lay that before you and ask for your forgiveness. That you would give them your grace and your forgiveness and lift that burden of guilt off of them. But then, Lord, instead of them getting up off of their knees and feeling like they now have to go and prove that you haven't made a bad decision to forgive them; instead, Lord, help them to walk by faith and not by performance. Let the result of that be the uncompromising character that they so want, and you so want to give them. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen!