

# Stand Out

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Preacher: Chris Willis

[ 0 : 00 ] So today's reading is taken from Daniel chapter 1 verses 3 to 21.

So that's Daniel chapter 1 verses 3 to 21. Then the king ordered Aspenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring him into the king's service, some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility, 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 in the language and literature of the Babylonians. 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. Among those were chosen were some from Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

The chief official gave them new names, to Daniel the name Belfassar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Mishach, and to Azariah Abednego.

[ 1 : 29 ] 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 in this way.

Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel. But the official told Daniel, I'm 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 of your age? The king would then have my head because of you. Daniel then said to the guard, whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Azariah, 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 young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.

So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food.

[ 2 : 45 ] So the guard took away their choice food and wine. They were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. For 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.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them and he found non-equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

So they entered the king's service. 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.

And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus. Amen. Is this on? There we go. We're about to start a new series in the book of Daniel, but this is where it all begins.

I want to give a little bit of background. If we can have the PowerPoint up, ready to go. So not long before this, Israel has been completely brought to the ground.

[ 4 : 0 6 ] Assyria invaded. They scattered the tribes of northern Israel all over the place, basically took away their defenses, disconnected them from the land that God had promised them.

But then they made it down to the south of Israel. They made it to Judah. And by that point, the soldiers were tired. They were lower in number. They didn't have the same resources. And the people of Judah managed to hold them off.

But unfortunately, things didn't end there. It wasn't long until King Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon came along to invade them. And when he got there, there were no tribes in northern Israel to hold them off anymore.

So they got to Judah at their full strength. They invaded and they won. They brought the city to the ground. They destroyed the walls. They destroyed homes.

They destroyed the temple. But Nebuchadnezzar didn't stop there. He said to the people of Judah, not only am I going to destroy your city and take it over, I'm going to disconnect you from your God.

[ 5 : 0 9 ] And he went into the temple and he took all of their religious symbols and he destroyed them as well. He crushed them. He burnt them to the ground. He did everything he could to disconnect them.

And instead, he wanted to connect them to his own gods. But he didn't stop there. He said to Ashpenaz, one of his leaders, look for all of the young boys who show any sign of potential.

The fit, the healthy, the strong, the intelligent. And we're going to take them all back to Babylon. They're going to come and live with us. And then for three years, I'm going to train them or my people are going to train them in Babylonian ways.

And after those three years, they will serve us. They will serve me and they will serve our Babylonian gods. They will no longer be Jewish people. They will be Babylonian people.

So Nebuchadnezzar, not only did he go in to destroy their home, to destroy their city and destroy their temple, he went in to destroy their future as well. It was the ultimate act of warfare.

[ 6 : 1 8 ] He didn't want them rising up strong enough to fight back someday in the future. But in doing so, I would suggest he made quite a fatal mistake.

He underestimated the people that he was taking. And that's where we are now. At the beginning of the book of Daniel, in Daniel 1, over the next few weeks, we'll be looking through different parts of Daniel and different ways that we are called to stand.

To stand up, to stand out, to stand firm for the things that we believe in. Today, we're focusing on standing out because that is what Daniel does at the start of the book.

And this is where it all starts. In verse 8, I believe it was, It says that in all matters of wisdom pertaining to service to the king, God gave them strength and wisdom better than anyone else.

Everything that is to come in the book of Daniel starts here. It starts here because of the decision that Daniel, that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego made on this day.

[ 7 : 3 1 ] If we can have our second slide. This is directly stolen from somebody who used it in a talk at Spring Harvest.

So don't credit or complain to me about it. But actually, I would potentially summarize, what does it mean to stand out as this? Your talk walks and your walk talks, but your walk talks more than your talk walks.

What does that actually mean? I'm going to turn to Ephesians 4, verses 1 to 3.

At Spring Harvest this last week, we have been looking through the book of Ephesians. And we've been learning about what it means to be followers of Christ and to stand out as followers of Christ from the book of Ephesians.

In chapter 4, verses 1 to 3, it says, As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle.

[ 8 : 37 ] Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

There is one thing that is a struggle, no matter how we look at it. We cannot be kind of Christians. We cannot be part-time Christians.

We can't receive a calling from God and then decide once a week we're going to live up to that. Having a gym membership but never going isn't going to keep you in shape.

Being in a marriage but choosing to once a year say to your partner, I love you, isn't going to help your marriage. Going to church one day a week or to Spring Harvest one week a year isn't going to help your faith.

It's not none of these things are going to help you to grow. None of these things are going to help you to be where you want to be, to be the person you want to be. It's great to come here on a Sunday morning.

[ 9 : 53 ] It's important to be part of a church. But there's got to be more to it than that. In Ephesians 6, Paul talks about the armor of God.

So I'm trying to keep two pages visible at the same time. In Ephesians 6, Paul talks about the armor of God.

He says, put on the full armor of God so that you may make your stand. Something that I learned at Spring Harvest that I wasn't aware of before is in Isaiah 11.

Isaiah talks about the coming Messiah wearing the armor of God. It's not Paul's original creation. He is referring to something that the prophet said in the scriptures.

So when we wear the armor of God, it's not just about us picking up the Bible or us remembering that we're saved or us remembering to stand firm.

[ 10 : 54 ] It's about us being like the Messiah. The Messiah came wearing the armor of God. So for us to wear the armor of God, all we need to do is be like him.

But to be like him means to stand out. If you're never standing out, if you're always blending in, then are you truly committed to following Jesus?

If you're always blending in the same as everyone else, are you truly committed to being like Jesus? If we can have our next slide.

Before we go more into that, I want to suggest that actually there's something else we have to do to be as well as standing out. And that is to stand in.

We have the next slide up. Oh, slide. Yes, that one. Actually, that's where I was going to read. If we go to Isaiah chapter 11, verses 1 to 5 says, He says, And verse 5 is what we have up there.

[ 12 : 41 ] Righteousness will be his belt. And faithfulness, the sash around his waist. If we can go back to slide 3. So I would suggest that before we try to stand out, actually we've got to stand in.

That is a picture that I couldn't find one that I was looking for, so I ended up getting AI to generate that for me. But that's a picture of somebody wearing armor, but then just going out to a coffee shop.

And they're going to stand out. Hopefully, if you see them in a coffee shop, you're going to notice them and pay attention. But actually, what good is somebody wearing a knight's armor if they're just going to stay at home?

What good is it standing out if we're just going to stay at church? Actually, to stand out, we've got to first stand in. Going back to chapter 1 of Daniel, Daniel didn't try to run away back to Judah.

He didn't hide away at home. He didn't do everything he could to stay away from this sinful land, from this sinful nature and culture that he had been placed within.

[ 13 : 54 ] But he surrounded himself by it. He engaged with the teaching that he was receiving. He allowed himself to be part of the culture that he had been taken into.

In order to stand out, he first chose to stand in. At the end of the book of Matthew, Jesus says, go and make disciples of all the nations.

He doesn't say, sit in this church you're going to form soon and stay there and pray that disciples will be made somewhere outside. He says, go out into the world and make disciples.

If we are not there, if we are not out in the world, what good is it if we stand out? We could all stand out on a Sunday, but then I'd argue we're all fitting in because we're all doing that the same way.

It's when we stand out, out there in the world that God has placed us in, that it really makes a difference. We can have the next slide.

[ 15 : 10 ] The media, we'll so often hear on the media, whether it is in the news or in politics or something else, to sit down, to be quiet. To just let the world get on with things, to not make a fuss, unless it's something that you really care about, then speak up.

But otherwise, just sit down and be quiet, especially if you disagree. But actually, we're called to do the opposite. But what I do want to suggest is the opposite of sit down and be quiet is not stand up and shout.

If we can go on to the next one. The opposite of sit down and be quiet is to stand up and be different. Going back to the words that I had up at the beginning, your talk walks and your walk talks.

Sorry, just one second. Your talk walks and your walk talks, but your walk talks more than your talk walks.

The point of that is our actions should reflect our words. But actually, what we do says so much. And what we do should say more than what we say.

[ 16 : 33 ] We should be focusing on being different. Because if we are different, if we are standing out, people will notice. People will see us.

And then they'll care about what we have to say. The opposite of sit down and be quiet and just get on with things that you don't like. Is not to stand up and shout out about it.

And to shout from the rafters. To get on the soapbox. To make a big fuss about how society is going wrong in every area. But actually, the opposite is to stand up and to be what we want to see in society.

If we can have our next slide. Going back to the book of Daniel. Again.

One of the first things that... There were two things that it tells us that King Nebuchadnezzar wanted to do for Daniel and for his friends. The first was to change their name.

[ 17 : 44 ] The second was to give them the king's food. Actually, if you're taken into the king's court and you're offered the king's banquet.

The same food that is cooked for the king. Score! That's brilliant, isn't it? Actually, maybe not. But starting with their name. Their name was the identity they were given.

But actually in Israel at that time, for the Jewish people, their names were something that directly connected them to God. Their names were an identity that was given to them when they were born.

Their names have a meaning, each and every one of them. And that was taken away from them. Because the king said, I don't want you to have a name that connects you to your God.

I want you to have a name that connects you to my God's. And then he took away their food. And he gave them the king's food. It's not just that this is food that was grown and cooked in Babylon.

[ 18 : 48 ] But this was food that was first dedicated to the Babylonian gods. And that is what Daniel is taking a stand towards. You'll notice the Bible does not tell us that Daniel complained about his name being changed.

Or Shadrach, or Meshach, or Abednego. They did not make a fuss about that. But what they did do is take a stand when it came to eating food that had been dedicated to other gods.

So I want to suggest that taking a stand, like Daniel did, requires both conviction and wisdom. Daniel had the conviction to not eat food that was dedicated to other gods.

But he had the wisdom not to fight against his name being changed. That's not because he didn't care about his name being changed.

But it's because in the grand scheme of things, it didn't matter. It didn't change his identity. He was okay with it because he knew it didn't change who he was.

[ 20 : 02 ] Who he was was grounded in God. And that wasn't going to change no matter what name they gave. One of the other things that was said throughout the week at Spring Harvest was that actually we are not reading the Bible during Old Testament times.

We're reading the Bible with the knowledge of Jesus, of Jesus' life, of what he said, of what he did. And actually, we should read the whole Bible through the lens of Jesus.

Not just the New Testament, but the Old Testament as well. Because Jesus also calls us to stand out. Jesus stood out more than anybody else.

And we know where that led him. But one of the first ways he stood out was by having dinner with Zacchaeus.

By spending time with rejected women. With prostitutes. With Samaritans. With sinners. Jesus was in the world meeting the people who need it.

[ 21 : 20 ] Healthy people don't need a doctor. It's the sick that need the hospital. So Jesus spent his time with the people who needed him.

He didn't spend his time with the people who were supposed to agree with him. Albeit he disagreed with the Pharisees a lot. But he disagreed with the Pharisees a lot. He spent his time out in the world where standing out would make a difference.

But he stood out with both conviction and with wisdom. So what does that mean with us? If we reflect back on Ephesians 4.

Live a life worthy of the calling that you have been given. What is your calling? Have you been called to be a good parent? Or a teacher? Have you been called to make a difference in politics?

Have you been called to look out for the needy? Whatever it is. Whatever our calling is. Live a life that is worthy of that. First and foremost, we are called to follow Christ.

[ 22 : 42 ] But in whatever calling we're in, have the conviction and the wisdom. When I was first asked to preach on standing out, my initial reaction was, actually, why am I being asked to preach on this?

I work in a church. I spend most of my time in the church, surrounded by church. Actually, I'm not often out there in the world where I need to put this into practice.

That's not entirely true. I am. I have those opportunities. One of my favorite things to do in the week is to go into St. Jude's School. Because I get to go out from the building into the world.

I get to go and meet the children where they are. And they can see me be different to their teachers. They can see me be different in a way that they may not understand or in a way that they may not recognize.

They can see me walk and talk. And then I can follow that with my talk walking. I also love blue on Fridays.

[ 23 : 50 ] Partly because it's a fun evening where we do a lot of games and have a great time. But also because it's another opportunity to stand out.

It's another opportunity for my faith, for my Christian life to make a difference to what I do. For people who may not see that anywhere else.

I know we have some non-Christian youth, particularly, who come in, who come to us on a Friday evening, who don't get any other kind of Christian input.

I could respond to that by saying this is a time for me to stand up and to preach to them. Or I could respond to that by saying this is a time to stand up and be different.

Conviction and wisdom. Standing out is the conviction to not engage in workplace gossip.

[ 24 : 57 ] The conviction to not go out and get drunk with people at the pub. The conviction to speak up and to stand up about the conflict in Israel and Gaza.

Not because British aid workers have been killed in that conflict. But because ever since the conflict began, long before the war started, God's people, God's creation was being put in harm's way.

The conviction to do what we know is right. The conviction to speak up on behalf of people. The conviction to love people.

To honour them. To respect them. The conviction to be different. To be like Jesus.

Every other Monday evening, I am online with a group of friends. And in that group, there's five of us. And only two of us are Christian. The other three have lifestyles that I don't entirely agree with.

[ 26 : 13 ] But that won't stop me from being their friends. That won't stop me from spending my Monday evenings with them. Because my conviction is to be a light in their world.

It's to be like Jesus for them. But my wisdom is to know that standing up and say, actually, I think what you're doing is wrong, is going to achieve nothing more than harming that relationship and taking away every opportunity that I have to make a difference.

The conviction to do what we know is right. But the wisdom to understand that it's not always the right thing to stand up and shout.

The opposite of sit down and be quiet is not stand up and shout. We will not agree with a lot of things people do.

We will not agree with some of the ways that culture operates in this country or in other countries. We're never going to agree with everything.

[ 27 : 26 ] That is the point of that. That's the point of us being in the world that is not yet God's world. We are living in a world that doesn't have things right.

But that doesn't mean we should stand up and shout about everything that's wrong. Yes, we should speak up for what we believe in. Yes, it is important for us to talk.

Our talk walks. The things we say do matter. The things we say do make a difference. And our walk talks.

Jesus says, stand up and be different. The things we do make more of a difference. Just before finishing, I want to go into actually what is something practical.

When Daniel went to Babylon, they already knew that the food there was dedicated to the Babylonian gods.

[ 28 : 43 ] They already knew before they got there, they weren't going to eat the Babylonian food. Actually, sometimes maybe standing out and doing the right thing is about making a premeditated decision.

About making a premeditated decision to say, yes, I'm going to go out to the pub, but I'm only going to have one drink. Or yes, I'm going to talk to my colleagues about their week, but I'm not going to engage in gossip about other people and other colleagues.

Making a premeditated decision to do what is right. Rather than finding ourselves in the situation where it's already too late.

The template that this series is built on, they give a great example about actually, I mean, I personally have made the decision to not engage in sex before marriage. That is my decision as a Christian.

I've based that on what I believe the Bible says. Not just what I believe the Bible says, but on why I believe the Bible says it. But I have made that decision to do that.

[ 29 : 51 ] Which means if I meet a girl that I like, that I get on with, I can stand up and I can have that decision ready to go. Not find myself walking home with them and then thinking, oh, what do I do?

God, please tell me what to do now. Please give me the strength to do the right thing. It's about making that decision to do the things that we know are the right thing to do before we get into that situation.

But that doesn't mean I have to go around telling everybody, telling any girl I meet on the first date, by the way, I'm not going to have sex until we get married. So coming into end, if we can have the last slide.

Daniel went to Babylon. He was part of the king's court. He chose not to complain about his name being changed.

But he chose not to eat the king's food that had been dedicated to Babylonian gods. His talk walked and his walk talked.

[ 31 : 03 ] But actually, what's more important is that your walk talks more than your talk walks. The things you do, the way you live your life is going to make far more of a difference than the things you stand up and speak out about.

And what happened to Daniel and to his friends? They became the greatest of the king's advisors. It wasn't easy for them.

Daniel was thrown into a lion's den. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into a furnace. It's never going to be easy when we stand out. But they also made a difference.

They made a difference to the people in Babylon. And to the people in Persia who came along next. Even to the point that the Persian king said to these right people, you know what?

You can go home if you want to. Because they chose to stand out in the right way, with conviction, but also with wisdom.

[ 32 : 13 ]    God used them to do amazing things. So how are we going to stand out this week, this month, this year, in our workplace, in our homes?

How are we going to take our faith on a Sunday morning and let that make us stand out, out there, in the real world, where we are called to be?

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.