

September 2021



Bible Study | Missions Project

## Prepare

- Bible
- Journal
- Pen/pencil

## Get Started

How do you react under pressure? What if the opposition you faced was a direct result of your faith in Christ?

Millions of Christians worldwide face persecution for following Jesus. Yet as Nik Ripken, a veteran missionary and leading expert on the persecuted church, points out, persecution is a normal part of the church. Believers facing real discrimination, opposition, and threats because of the gospel should not surprise us but prepare us for the times our faith comes under pressure. This month, we'll look at the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3, an Old Testament example of persecution.

## Study and Learn

### Read Daniel 3.

Daniel's three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, had risen to prominent places. Being followers of God who were in the spotlight, they stood out in the pagan Babylonian culture. By the time we reach Daniel 3, they had years of experience living in an environment unfriendly to the worship of God. Yet we can see some patterns they had already been practicing that led them to come out of the fiery furnace unscathed.

- They resolved not to defile themselves by giving in to the culture.
- They were relentless in prayer.
- They remained faithful in worshipping the one true God.

The trio of friends could have conformed to society and not been seen as a threat or as intolerant. They could have assured their lives would have remained comfortable by assimilating. But they didn't. Even though they had no assurance God would deliver them from impending death, they fully believed God could.

## Apply

Most of us will never have to worry about being thrown into a fiery furnace for not worshipping an idol. But will we ever face pressure for choosing to live godly lives? The Apostle Paul told his protégé Timothy that those living godly lives would be persecuted (2 Tim. 3:12). Although you may not face direct threats to your life or livelihood to the extent Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did, the opposition you encounter because of your faith should be normal and expected. Begin practicing now the things that will strengthen you for when your faith is put under pressure.

1. Resolve not to defile yourself by giving in to the culture, and study Scripture to learn about God's desire for you to be conformed to be more like Jesus and not the world. Are there areas where you feel pressured to conform to culture? Write your answer, along with the following verses, in your journal.

- Romans 8:28
- Romans 12:2
- 1 Peter 1:14

2. Be relentless in prayer to ground yourself in your relationship with God. Take a look at what Jesus said regarding prayer and persecution. Jot down what should mark your life as a believer.

- Matthew 5:44
- Luke 18:1
- Acts 1:14

3. Commit yourself to worship God alone. How do the following verses encourage you to stay the course? Write your answer in your journal.

- Acts 2:42
- Romans 12:12
- Hebrews 12:3–4

## Follow Up

If God has revealed an area of your life where He is calling you to walk in holiness with Him, be thankful. These spiritual exercises can and will strengthen you to stand firm. Daniel's friends were able to stand up under the pressure because they believed God would ultimately deliver them from all their trials. And even if that delivery meant death, God was still good. No matter the obstacles we or our persecuted brothers and sisters may face, we have the assurance of a better deliverance in Christ.

## Commit to Memory

Verse: **Daniel 3:18**

Challenge: **Daniel 3:16–18**



## Project: **Pray for the Persecuted Church**

In the Bible study, you studied faith under pressure in the lives of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Based on what you learned from Daniel 3, how can you allow Scripture to guide your prayer for the persecuted church? This month, focus on praying for and with believers facing persecution for their faith. Gather with other believers to pray for the church around the world.

### BEFORE THE EVENT

- Think about how you can view prayer for the persecuted church as an ongoing pattern in your prayer life rather than a one-time event. Invite friends and family to join you for a time of prayer.
- Consider how you can use verses of Scripture to guide your prayertime for the persecuted church. Search for verses you can use in this group or individual prayertime.
- Take time to read [this article](#) on persecution by Nik Ripken before you meet together. Focus on what he says is the primary cause of persecution.
- Read Matthew 5:10–12. We often pity our brothers and sisters who face persecution, but note what Jesus said about those who are persecuted. He called them blessed and said their reward in heaven is great.

### DURING THE EVENT

- Share [this infographic](#) on persecution from 2020. Ask your group or yourself what your first reaction is to persecution or pressure for being a Christian.
- Say, *Consider the vast numbers of believers facing opposition for their faith in Christ. Even if you have never personally met a persecuted brother or sister, what should your response be? Do you simply ignore it, or do you bring it before God in prayer?*
- Discuss with your group or write in your journal how Christians can have a [biblical response](#) to persecution or opposition.
- Help your group or other Christians be aware of the global church. Point out resources on the persecuted church, such as [Open Doors](#) or [Nik Ripken's ministry](#).
- Spend time praying for the persecuted church. Use the verses you gathered before the event as prayers for believers around the world.
- Discuss as a group or consider where you need to grow in faithfulness. Do you feel pressure to cave in to the culture? Are you relentless in prayer? Are you steadfast in worshipping God? Remind your group that as believers, we must develop these habits now before the pressure begins to grow.

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## AFTER THE EVENT

- Challenge yourself and others to make praying for the persecuted church a regular practice. For example, choose one country from the [World Watch List](#) to pray for each week. By the end of the year, you will have prayed for 52 countries and numerous brothers and sisters in Christ from those countries.
- Want to go further with encouraging yourself or your group to stand firm under pressure? Follow up with a movie night featuring *The Insanity of God* or a [book study](#) by Nik Ripken.

## ADAPTATION

This prayer event can be done in person or online.