

MIDDLE SCHOOL IDENTITY IN CHRIST

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UNITE
I AM CALLED

JESUS FOLLOWERS PURSUE HOLINESS

SERIES:
GOD IS KING —
I AM A DISCIPLE



Property of Tri-Cities Baptist Church
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UNITE: I AM CALLED

The Unite Year is an exploration of what it means to be united in Christ as the family of God (Romans 12:5). When we are saved, we are given a spirit of adoption as sons (Romans 8:15-16), are made a child of God, and we are also saved into a family- the Church. The Unite Year explores how we are to live as a part of a family, and to live in light of our calling as servants and disciples of Christ. We use our gifts to build up the church as we pursue unity, humility, and gentleness with our brothers and sisters in Christ (Ephesians 4:1-2).

BIG TRUTH: JESUS FOLLOWERS PURSUE HOLINESS**BIBLE VERSE: DANIEL 1:8**

“But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuch to allow him not to defile himself.”

BIG IDEAS

- Jesus followers trust God’s purposes even when life brings difficulty and loss.
- Jesus followers resolve that obedience is better than compromise.
- Jesus followers stand out from the world around them.

BIBLE PASSAGE: DANIEL 1**SERIES AIMS****[KNOW] Every student should know that...**

- Jesus is the One True King
- Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen
- There is a cost to following Jesus

[DO] Every student should strive to...

- Examine their own heart and repent of how they have followed false saviors
- Pray regularly asking the Lord to grow their faith in Him
- Endure through discouragement and difficult circumstances

[FEEL] Every student should feel...

- Confident in the steadfastness of the Lord
- Grateful for the cloud of witnesses that we have as a model for faithfully following Christ
- Grounded in Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith

[WANT] Every student should desire to...

- Devote themselves to pursuing holiness
- Suffer well for the glory of God
- Use their lives to point others to a better Savior, King, and treasure

STUDENT WORKOUT OVERVIEW:

Jesus followers resolve to pursue holiness. This week we will ponder what it means to be holy. We will pray for a heart that seeks holiness and we will practice seeking to be holy.

FAMILY WORKOUT OVERVIEW:

Followers of Jesus live a life of pursuit of holiness. This week we will consider how to discuss with our son or daughter what it means to be holy. We will pray for them to pursue holiness and we will lead them to practice a pursuit of holiness this week.

BIBLE VERSE: DANIEL 1:8

“But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuch to allow him not to defile himself.”

Believers are called to be holy.

“But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself...”

- After the Israelites were taken captive by the Babylonians, the king ordered that the young Israelite men should serve him in his palace. Daniel was one of the young men chosen to serve. Daniel faced a choice when he went into the king’s service: he could follow the king’s rules or he could seek to honor God in his circumstances. Daniel chose to honor God by resolving not to defile himself with any of the king’s food.
- Daniel’s choice revealed his heart’s desire to please God above man. As believers we are commanded to be holy because God is holy. Daniel exemplified a life that sought to honor God even when it meant he risked his life. God is a holy God and we are commanded to seek His holiness.

Believers must resolve to be holy.

“But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank.”

- We are all born with sin natures that entice us to please our fleshly desires rather than pleasing God. Daniel faced the temptation to eat food that had been offered to idols and was therefore unclean. He chose to not eat the king’s food. He determined in his heart and mind that he would not do anything that would make him unclean in the eyes of the Lord.
- As believers we must resolve to pursue holiness. It’s not enough to desire to be holy, we must actively and resolutely determine we will put on holiness. When we do this, we will resist the temptation to sin. We will have our heart and eyes focused on Jesus and our pursuit of holiness will be more successful.

To be holy, believers must live differently.

“Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuch to allow him not to defile himself.”

- When we resolve to be holy, we will make choices and decisions that lead us toward God’s holiness, not away from it. Daniel not only resolved to be holy, he chose a different way of living in the king’s service. He did not eat the food that the other servants ate. Instead, he chose to set himself apart. He was willing to stand out and to live differently for the glory of God.
- All believers are called to live differently. We are all set apart and declared righteous by God; therefore, we should live differently and pursue holiness at all costs. Nothing else matters but putting on Christ and living for Him.

BIG IDEA #1: JESUS FOLLOWERS TRUST GOD'S PURPOSES EVEN WHEN LIFE BRINGS DIFFICULTY AND LOSS.¹

[THIS]

Daniel's life was very different before the Jewish people were taken captive by the Babylonians. Daniel wasn't responsible for the Jewish captivity, yet he was taken from his parents and entered into the king's service when he was a young man. Daniel follow God and sought to honor God. Though Daniel was only a young man when he was taken into the king's service, he determined to live set apart from the other young men in the king's service. Daniel trusted God's purposes in his situation even if he didn't understand them. Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego all decided to keep themselves holy before the Lord rather than joining in with the other king's servants. Daniel didn't allow his circumstances to lead him to distrust God. Instead, he trusted God's plans and chose to seek holiness in his difficult time.

[THEREFORE]

How does Daniel's story encourage you to trust God in difficult times?

Daniel's situation wasn't something he would have chosen for himself, yet he didn't let his circumstances lead him to doubt and fear. Instead, he chose to trust God and believe that God's purposes were best. Hebrews 13:8 and Psalm 91:1-2 help us understand that God is trustworthy and faithful. His faithfulness does not rest on our circumstances because He does not change.

[THIS]

If we are going to follow Jesus, we will have to trust God no matter what comes our way. Trusting God in difficulty and loss doesn't mean ignoring the hard times or pretending that loss hasn't occurred. Jesus followers see their circumstances for what they are and they choose to say that God is faithful and true and good. Daniel didn't know he'd be taken into the king's service, yet his faith was strong when his life changed drastically. We must be like Daniel if we are going to follow Jesus. No matter our circumstances, we must press ahead, trusting God's plan. When difficulty comes, our only response is trust and forward movement. When our lives are full of loss, we must press ahead, knowing, like Daniel, that God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. If He is good in the good times, He is good in the bad times.

[THEREFORE]

What circumstances or situations cause you to waver in your faith?

Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that without faith we cannot please God. We must intentionally place our faith in God no matter our situation. Matthew 6:25 reminds us that often our daily needs can lead us to waiver in faith. When we turn our eyes to Christ and pursue a knowledge of Him, we can be like Daniel and trust God in every circumstance.

How can you help yourself respond faithfully to seasons of difficulty and loss?

Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us to not let our foundation be our own understanding of life. Instead, we should turn to God and trust Him. When we turn to God, we will study His Word and grow in our knowledge of Him. John 14:1 reminds us of the importance of actively seeking to trust in God instead of relying upon our own power until we are overwhelmed. We should daily turn to God and trust in His power to get us through every single circumstance we face.

1. Psalm 28:7: *God is steadfast and sure. He is trustworthy and can be trusted no matter our situation.*

BIG IDEA #2: JESUS FOLLOWERS RESOLVE THAT OBEDIENCE IS BETTER THAN COMPROMISE.²

[THIS]

In Daniel 1:8, Daniel makes a decision. Scripture says, “[he] resolved...” To resolve means to make a firm decision about something. Daniel resolved to not defile himself with the king’s food or wine. The king’s food was most likely offered to idols as a form of idol worship. Eating this type of food would have been forbidden by Mosaic law. Daniel’s decision was about more than food. He decided to keep himself pure before the Lord no matter the consequences. His time in the palace was not going to end quickly, yet he determined to set his course towards holiness and not towards the king’s favor. In order to obey God, Daniel had to resist the temptation to compromise in the king’s palace. In choosing obedience over compromise, he revealed his trust in God and His purposes.

[THEREFORE]

What does it look like to be resolved to live an obedient life?

Daniel’s resolve to live obediently to the Lord didn’t happen in the chaos of the Israelites’ exile to Babylon. His resolve to obey happened before he faced difficulty. Our resolve to obey isn’t something that happens when we’re in the midst of struggle or faced with the choice of obeying. It’s a decision we make in our hearts and live out daily so that we are prepared for the struggle when it comes.

What are some situations in which you find it easy to compromise?

When our priorities are not in order or we are not daily pursuing Christ, we can be tempted to compromise. Often, when we care more what our friends or other people think than what God thinks, we will compromise. When our life doesn’t go the way we want it to go, we can compromise. Matthew 6:21 and Proverbs 1:7 remind us that it is better to turn our hearts to Jesus and then we will desire to obey over pleasing ourselves or others.

[THIS]

If we want to follow Jesus, we’ll need to resist compromise. In order to fully obey God, we’ll have to resolve not to defile ourselves with the things of the world. This means we’ll say no to cultural ideas, activities, behaviors, and even relationships that might lead us to disobey God. Our first response to anything should be to ask ourselves if it glorifies God. When we enter difficulty, our hearts should arrive at a place of seeking God’s glory over even relief from our circumstances. Jesus followers make choices that are obedient to God over pleasing the world. They choose to please God and to be holy rather than partaking in the things of the world. Daniel did all of these things and he honored God even in his time of trouble.

[THEREFORE]

Do you desire holiness over earthly pleasures? How can you adjust your heart to desire holiness over being like the world?

To fulfill God’s command to His people to be holy, we must put to death what is earthly in us as Colossians 3:5 tells us. To do this, we must understand who God is and who we are as sinners. When we make being like Christ our main priority, we will pursue holiness over fitting in. 1 John 5:21 reminds us of the danger of making idols and when we tear these idols from our hearts, we will choose obedience over compromise.

2. Daniel 1:8: Daniel chose obedience to God’s law over following what normally happened in the king’s palace.

BIG IDEA #3: JESUS FOLLOWERS STAND OUT FROM THE WORLD AROUND THEM.³

[THIS]

Being different in the world can be hard. Often being different brings ridicule and judgment. A lot of people spend their entire lives just trying to fit in with the crowd. Daniel chose to stand out. He was one of several young men chosen to serve in the palace. It would have been easy to just fit in with the others, but he chose to be different. Daniel valued pleasing God over being like the rest of the group. He and his three friends didn't compromise and stood out from the other young men serving. They were given different food and water to drink. They would have been seen as different and many would have been watching them to see the result of their special diet. They didn't let this derail them from keeping holiness as their goal. Instead, they willingly stood out and counted living in obedience to God as more valuable than being a part of the group.

[THEREFORE]

What is tempting to you about “fitting in”?

Proverbs 11:2 and 29:23 show us that our hearts are prideful, and this pride can lead us to choose the things of the world over God. Pride can keep us from standing out and lead us to fit in. It can be hard being different, but as 1 Peter 2:11-12 teaches us, believers are strangers in this land. As we live for Christ, we can't help but stand out. The world hated Christ and it will hate us.

How can you stand out without being completely isolated from the world?

We can stand out from the world and still be a part of the world by remaining holy and being a witness to the world. Romans 12:2 helps us understand how we can seek to reach the world by standing out, yet not being like the world. When we grow in our understanding of God and fill our heads and hearts with His Word, we can be around lost people and secular things without compromising obedience to Him.

[THIS]

We are called to be holy because God is holy. Being holy means being different because the world around us is sinful and broken. We cannot look like the world and be holy. It's impossible. In order to really put on the character of Christ, we must stand out from the world around us. Our attitudes and responses must be different than the world's. Our actions must look different and our goals in life will not be the same as the world's. We cannot pursue the “American Dream” and seek to be holy as the Lord is holy. We must die to ourselves and seek the Kingdom of God first in order to really be holy and set apart. As we grow more and more like Christ, we will stand out more and more. Jesus was different than anyone else on earth. We can expect to be unlike other people, too. Daniel didn't shy away from this. Instead, he forged ahead, trusting that the God of the universe would guide Him.

[THEREFORE]

How is being holy seen as a negative thing in our culture?

1 Corinthians 1:18 shows us that the gospel is seen as foolish to those who don't believe it. They see it as a story that is incredulous or unbelievable. Because of this, choosing to live according to God's Word can seem like a negative thing in our culture. When we choose to deny ourselves and put others first, we are seen as countercultural. When we willingly choose to obey God's Word over the current cultural trends, we are seen as naïve or ignorant. Obedience is not naïve or ignorant. It is the only way a Jesus follower can truly follow Christ.

3. Daniel 1:15: Daniel's obedience produced favor with God and he stood out from the rest of the group.