

Blessed is the one who
perseveres under trial
because, having stood the
test, that person will receive
the crown of life that the
Lord has promised to
those who love him.

James 1:12



Chapter Six

REFINER'S FIRE

Read: Daniel 3 & 6



One of the best verses in scripture (although there are many) that sum up the definition of courage is found in Daniel Chapter 3:

*If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.
(Daniel 3:17-18)*

These were the words of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, friends of Daniel, who courageously risked their lives for the sake of their faith.

After the conquest of Judah by King Nebuchadnezzar certain young men from among the Israelites were chosen to serve in the king's palace. Among those men were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Each were giving new names as they were brought into

the service of the Babylonian court, as such, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah became Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

After some time, they were promoted as administrators over the province of Babylon, but with that promotion came a time of testing. Since idol worship was a vital part of Babylonian culture, King Nebuchadnezzar naturally expected everyone including these men to worship the golden image he had constructed and placed in the province of Babylon. Anyone refusing to worship the statue would be facing immediate execution.

DID YOU KNOW

SINCE RESIDENTIAL TYPE FURNACES WEREN'T REALLY A THING AT THIS TIME IN HISTORY, IT'S LIKELY THAT THIS FURNACE WE READ ABOUT WAS KNOWN AS A SMELTER. SMELTING IS A WAY OF PURIFYING AND EXTRACTING METAL BY THE PROCESS OF APPLYING HEAT.

REFINED BY THE FIRE

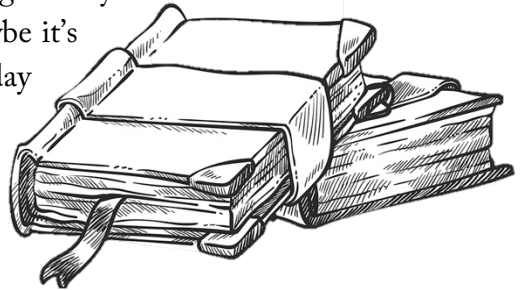
Despite the cruel and torturous persecution, they faced, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, courageously stood up for their faith and remained faithful to God. As such, they were sentenced to death by fire. The Bible tells us that Nebuchadnezzar was so angry with them that he ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than it would normally be.

Notice the significance here as the Bible often compares spiritual refinement with the refining of precious metal by fire.

These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.
(1 Peter 1:7)

Looking to the previous verse, we see that Peter is talking about the grief we experience through the suffering of trials. Like the three men in this story, we're going to have good days.

Maybe it's a promotion at work, maybe it's a growing family, or maybe it's just a day when everything is going your way... But, like them, we are going to need courage when we're tested and tried.



Again, Peter writes,

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.
(1 Peter 4:12&13)

When talking about the refining process, Pastor Jon Courson once said, "The metal worker would know that he was successful in taking out all the impurities when he could look down into that liquid gold and see the reflection of his own face. That's when he knew that the gold was purified."

In other words, the purification process transforms us into the likeness of Christ, the One who chose the way of the cross.

As we look at Verse 25 where we see Nebuchadnezzar looking into the furnace, let's discuss two things that he saw.

First, he saw *four* men in the fire, not three. So, who was the fourth? Nebuchadnezzar described the form of the fourth man as “like the Son of God”. It wasn’t the son of some god, I firmly believe that it was Jesus, The Son of God.

IMMANUEL, GOD IS WITH US

When the angel appeared to Mary in Matthew 1:23, he said that her son would be named Immanuel. It’s a wonderful name because it means that God is with us. We’re never alone. Jesus was with the three men in the fire in the same way that He’s with you and I when we’re walking through the fiery trials of life.

We all have mountain-top days, but I’ve come to find that the more time I spend in the valley, the more I’m reminded just how close He is. For it’s in those dark times of weakness that I learn to rely on His wisdom and strength.

Think of it this way, what if that one thing you fear turns out to be a pivotal point in your life? What if it’s designed to draw you closer to God?

Remember the thief on the cross? His weakest moment was the very thing that led him to Christ. That tells us a lot about the power of weakness, doesn’t it?

But look at what Jesus said,

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. Luke 23:43, KJV

You know what I love most about that verse? Those two little words, “with me.” We are not in the fire alone. God was with David when he was running from Saul. He was with Moses when he crossed the Red Sea. He was with Joseph in prison. He was with Esther in The

Palace of Shushan. He was with these three men in the fire, and He's with you and me.

David said,

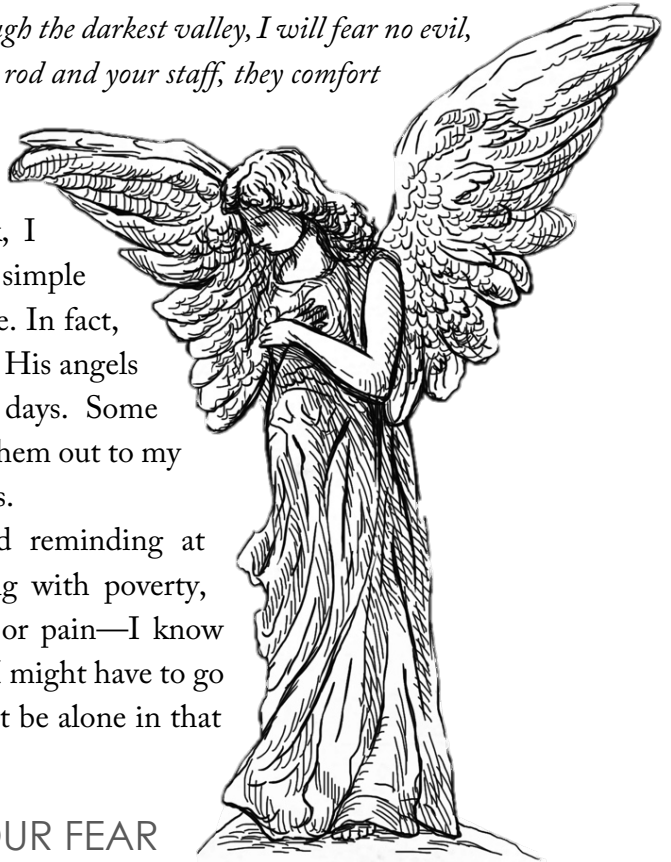
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

When I was a little girl, afraid to sleep in the dark, I found comfort in the simple reminder that I wasn't alone. In fact, I used to visualize Jesus and His angels standing beside me some days. Some nights, I would even point them out to my mom before closing my eyes.

Even now, I still need reminding at times. Whether I'm dealing with poverty, loss, sickness, persecution, or pain—I know that I am never alone. Yes, I might have to go through the fire, but I won't be alone in that fire, I know that for sure.

RELEASED FROM OUR FEAR

Now, let's look at the second thing the king noticed: they were unbound and unharmed. The Bible specifically tells us that they were firmly tied up when they went in, in fact it is mentioned three times in Daniel Chapter 3. I think the reason its stated so clearly is because this part of the story is significant.



It teaches us that although affliction is tough, it can also be freeing, as we are loosed from the things that once bound us. When we stand firm in faith we overcome the enemy, we rise above tribulation, and we conquer our fear.

I touched on this in Chapter 1. I asked you to consider the words of Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:9,

"If he is able to fight and kill me," he said, "we will become your subjects. But if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us."

Instead of being enslaved by the enemy, David conquered the enemy which in turn enslaved them.

THE ENEMY DEFINES US BY OUR
STRUGGLES, BUT GOD REFINES US
THROUGH OUR STRUGGLES.

– JENNIFER ROTHSCHILD

In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes,

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15)

We have the power to overcome the enemy. That power is a roaring lion within us waiting for the moment we open the door. It is the attunement to God's power and the freedom to release that power that allows us to overcome fear.

Jumping ahead a few chapters, we find a similar story as Daniel was also sentenced to death when he defied the king's order.

It is not a coincidence that these men were selected by God. They were chosen because they were faithful. They were used by Him because they were ready and willing to stand by their faith regardless of what it might cost.

DID YOU KNOW

ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF THE MEDES AND
PERSIANS NO DECREE OR EDICT THAT THE
KING ISSUED COULD BE CHANGED.
(COMPARE DANIEL 6:15 WITH ESTHER 8:8)

When Daniel heard about the decree, he didn't step back from his faith or cower in fear. He went home, and with the windows wide open, he continued to pray three times a day in the same way he had been praying for years. He knew there may be a cost for his actions, but that didn't deter Him from serving the Lord. Daniel had an intimate relationship with God peppered with powerful prayer, laced with obedience, and grounded in faith.

TRIALS ATTEST TO OUR CHARACTER

The faithful aren't always blessed in the way we expect God to bless us. Some days our faithfulness leads us straight to the lion's den where we are further tested and tried. It's in those moments of darkness and fear we need to remember that He rewards those who faithfully seek Him.

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)



It's easy to say that we trust God, but will we trust Him when we are tested and tried? We can say that we love God, but will we still love Him when things don't go our way? Trials have a way of proving our faith. The Bible says that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance character. What it's really saying there is that perseverance proves the *validity* of our character.

Daniel Chapter 6 begins by outlining Daniel's goodness and his exceptional character. As we read further on in the chapter, we see how his actions testify to that character.

CHARACTER CANNOT BE DEVELOPED
IN EASE AND QUIET. ONLY THROUGH
EXPERIENCE OF TRIAL AND
SUFFERING CAN THE SOUL BE
STRENGTHENED, AMBITION INSPIRED,
AND SUCCESS ACHIEVED.

– NICK VUJICIC, UNSTOPPABLE

Throughout scripture we see men like Daniel and his three friends, who chose to put fear aside doing all that they could to hold fast to their faith. Instead of evading their trials, they trusted God enough to walk through them.

And what was the secret to their unwavering faith? Elizabeth Elliot said it best when she wrote, *“The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances.”*

Have you ever considered the fact that maybe instead of changing the world around you, God wants to transform the heart within you? Maybe that one thing you fear is designed to keep you grounded and focused on Christ. It’s there to show you the life-changing power of faith, and to strengthen the spirit within you.

PAUSE REFLECT

What can Daniel 3:17-18 teach us about our attitude during times of testing?

According to 1 Peter 1:7, what do trials prove?

What two things did Nebuchadnezzar see when he peered into the furnace?

Why was the fourth man in the fire significant? What comfort can we personally glean from that?

Why couldn't the administrators and satraps find anything to charge Daniel with?

Fill in the spaces:

Not only so, but we also glory in our
_____, because we know that suffering
produces _____; perseverance,
_____; and character, _____.

(Romans 5:3-4)

How does perseverance prove character?

The Bible tells us that the three men in the fire were unbound. What can we learn from this?