

WHEN THINGS HEAT UP

Thrive

Daniel 3 // Craig Smith

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Craig // Good morning. Welcome to Mission Hills. So glad you are here for week number three for our “Thrive” series, as we work our way through Daniel, kind of asking the question, what does it take to thrive as God’s people in a culture that thinks people of faith are irrelevant and extreme? We have a lot to cover today.

We are going to dive straight into God’s Word. If you want to grab a Bible, I would love to have you turn with me to Daniel 3. If you are using a physical Bible and you are not sure where to find Daniel, it’s about here-ish. About three quarters of the way through. Daniel 3 begins this way. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, 60 cubits high and 6 cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. So King Nebuchadnezzar has made this big gold thing. Now, when you picture the statue, some of you are probably picturing something like this, right? Perfectly natural assumption, but he said it’s 60 cubits high by 6 cubits wide. That’s basically 90’ by 9’. That statue at that aspect ratio would basically look like this. It’s probably not a statue of a human figure. It’s probably something more along these lines. This is the kind of thing. It’s this thing covered in gold.

The important thing is not what it looked like. I just put that up for you visual people. There might be some engineers in the room. You are like, wait a minute, the aspect ratio is super weird for a human -- helping you set that aside. The important thing is not what it looked like. The important thing is that he made it at all, okay? The reason I say that is because if you were here last week, you may remember this king, this Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, he received a vision in which he saw a human statue, human-shaped statue made of different materials, and he was told that the statue represented the different parts of the statue represented different kingdom, and so his kingdom was represented by the head of gold, and then there were other kingdoms that were to come after him, and part of the point of the vision was to say, hey, as good as your kingdom might look, it’s going to pass away. There’s going to be other kingdoms, and as powerful as all these other human kingdoms might look, eventually God is going to destroy them and set up his own everlasting kingdom, so don’t get too full of yourself.

As great as your kingdom might look, it’s not that big of a deal. King Nebuchadnezzar seems to have missed that point. He’s kind of fixated on the -- “my part of the statue is made of gold, and so he’s now made it a statue all made of gold reinforcing his view of his view of his greatness. What we are really being told here is that Nebuchadnezzar thinks, as we used to say back in the ‘80s, that he is all that and a bag of chips. Anybody remember -- anyone from the ‘80s remember that? Like I don’t know why we added chips into that. I don’t really have any idea what chips -- like add to the phrase, but the point is he thought he was something impressive, he thought he was something special. He thought he was all that. That’s important because one of the ongoing themes throughout the book of Daniel is that God’s not crazy about arrogant people. God’s not crazy about arrogance. In fact, one of the things we’ll see consistently is that God rebukes arrogance. On the other hand, he rewards humility.

There’s a principle. One of the things we realize that it means to thrive as God’s people is to take hold of that reality and say we thrive as God’s people when we remember that God rebukes arrogance and rewards humility. This is not a truth -- it’s not a principle that Nebuchadnezzar understands. The statue being set up is a tribute to his arrogance. It’s not just building the statue that’s arrogant. Check this out. He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. And so the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all of the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before him. Then the herald loudly proclaimed, nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do. As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace. Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all of the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Anybody catch a certain amount of repetition in that? Yeah, there’s so much repetition in the names of the government officials, and the names of the musical instruments, it’s actually hard to read without feeling sing songy, without sounding kind of robotic, almost. I actually think that’s the point. What Daniel’s doing, is he’s using repetition to paint a picture of a group of people who are acting like robots. Or since robots hadn’t been invented, we might say puppets. It’s a group of people who have developed unthinking responses to certain cues. In their case it was bell, bow. Bell, bow. You hear the sound, you bow down. It’s an unthinking response to the cue that Nebuchadnezzar set up. That’s the kind of people

we are dealing with here. I think the way that he uses this repetition is intended to make us laugh at it a little bit because in some ways what he's describing is something that years and years -- centuries and centuries later, a psychologist by the name of Pavlov would talk about. You may have heard of the Pavlovian response? Pavlov did a psychology study that realized if you ring a bell every time you give a dog food, eventually, he will start to drool as soon as you ring the bell.

There doesn't have to be any food involved in it. It becomes an unthinking, conditioned response to a particular cue. And what Daniel, centuries before is doing here, he's painting a picture of a whole group of people that kind of learned, bell, bow, bell, bow. It's an unthinking, conditioned response to a cue. I think part of the reason he wants us to laugh at them, is not just to think at these people, these rest of these Babylonian officials as being conditioned to respond that way, but he wants us to wrestle with the reality that we all have a tendency to slip into that same pattern of behavior, that the world gives us cues, and the world has taught us to respond in certain ways, kind of unthinkingly. Because of that, we often end up doing things that are compromised.

Sometimes we sin automatically. We hear a certain thing, and sin is our response. Sometimes it's not sin. Sometimes it's patterns of response that honestly, they are not that healthy. None of it's good. Whether it's sin or not, none of it's good, none of these conditioned patterns of response are good. Let's try this. Spring's coming, so this is a pretty normal conditioned pattern. Spring's coming. It's time to update your -- your wardrobe, closet. People don't want to say it, right? There's a conditioned response, I have to go shopping, right? Maybe the guys are like, not a chance. All right, guys, how about this? New iPhone just came out. Conditioned response? This thing I'm carrying around is stupid. It's useless. It's slow. Everything about it -- I have to get a new one, right? That's a conditioned response.

Or I mean advertising world uses all the time, here's the thing. I don't know, it's a car, it's a watch -- whatever it is, you deserve this. Our conditioned response is, yes, I do. I absolutely do. We are like robots, like? I have to go do that thing. We have all of these kinds of conditioned responses, and like I said, sometimes they are unhealthy responses, and sometimes they are actual sin. I was talking to a good friend of mine this week who has a long standing sort of history of addiction to pornography, and struggling through that, and trying to honor God through that, and realizing he continues to struggle with it. He shared something with me I thought was interesting. He said one of the things I have realized lately, sometimes my temptation to do that is an automatic response to certain things that happen. I had a really hard day at work, pornography is like this natural, unthinking response to that cue.

My wife and I have a fight. Pornography. Of course, we don't think about that, but what he's saying, I'm coming to realize that sometimes I'm drawn to it, it's a sin that I'm attracted to it, and I have to deal with it. But sometimes the problem isn't even that I'm drawn to it. Sometimes I find myself engaging with the sinful thing without even knowing why I'm doing it. And he's beginning to realize it's because there are cues the world has given me. It's the kind of thing that Daniel is talking about. Sometimes it's the kind of thing, somebody had a good thing happen to them. They got a promotion. They received some kind of blessing, and our natural sinful response is to cut them down. They didn't really deserve it. Here's why -- there's just something ugly in us sometimes that's the natural response when we see good things happen to people. You understand what I'm saying. In lots of different ways the world has conditioned us to have these automatic responses, and one of the things we have to begin to recognize is that thriving as God's people requires us to identify those conditioned patterns of responses, to find those ways that we are responding in very natural, unthinking, conditioned patterns that cause us to do things that I'm like, I wish I had done that. That's not what I wanted. That doesn't honor God. That's not the kind of person I am and yet why am I doing it?

It's because we have conditioned patterns. We have to begin by identifying them. Obviously, we have to break their power too, but that requires identifying them so we understand why it's happening. So I think Daniel draws our attention to these conditioned patterns because we recognize that we all struggle with similar kinds of things. What you have to understand, though, once you begin to recognize these conditioned patterns, and you say, okay, I'm going to find new ways to respond, new healthier ways to respond to these cues, what you need to understand is that the world is not going to be happy with you. Refusing to get in line, refusing to respond in the expected ways is going to draw attention and not in a good way. Verse 13 -- sorry, verse 8. At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, may the king live forever! Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon -- Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego -- who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.

And you understand what's happening, right? There is an expected response. There is a cue and there is an expected response, and these Jewish people are refusing to do it. They are refusing to get in line. They are refusing to go with the flow, and it's attracted attention. It's never the kind of attention that says, I wish I was more like them. I wish I had their spine. I wish I had their convictions. No, no, no. It's never that. It's always like, we have to get them in line, right? You have to make them do what everybody else is doing, so they come to the king with this complaint, and the way they come to the king is brilliant, really. Did you catch it? They came to the king and they said, there's some people over here that pay no attention to you. That's brilliant because Nebuchadnezzar is an arrogant man. You know the best way to get under an arrogant person's skin? Pay no attention to them. They cannot handle it. They go, they are paying no attention to you. The reality is this, how we respond when someone doesn't listen to us, how we respond when people don't listen to us is like a humility dipstick.

Now when I say the word dipstick, I know some of you are thinking of people, okay? We use the word that way. That's not the way I'm using the

word. I'll use it in the literal sense. It's a stick that we dip into the engine and we pull out and it tells us the level of oil in the engine, okay? See the way we respond when people don't listen to us is a pretty good indicator of how much humility we have going under the hood, and I wish, I desperately wish that's just my observation from watching other people, but the truth is, I see this in my own soul constantly. In fact I have learned over the years, that when I say something or I share an idea and it doesn't get paid attention to, to the degree that I would like it to, my response tells me a lot about where my humility level is running. My response is I get tensed up. You are not listening to me! Okay. That's a pretty good indicator that I need to get some more humility developed in my life.

In Nebuchadnezzar's case, the stick doesn't come up low, it comes up empty. There's no humility in there. Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold that I have set up? Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand? Pay attention to that last bit.

Do you see the arrogance of it? Here's the cue. Here's what I expect. If you don't do it, you're going to die. I'm going to throw you into this furnace, and then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand? You see the arrogance of that? Now, understand, Nebuchadnezzar has good reason to feel like he's stronger than their God. He recognizes their refusal to bow, their refusal to do the conditioned response to the cue he's given them. He understands the reason for that is because they worship God, that they believe is greater than him, but from his perspective, that's stupid. He knows he's greater than their God because he's already defeated Israel. He roared into the battle against what was left of the nation of Israel, and he wiped them out. He destroyed Jerusalem. He captured them, so from his perspective, their God doesn't have his level of power, so when he asked them, what God -- he's basically saying, your God can't do a thing for you, because in his perspective, he's greater than their God. But we know something he doesn't, right? Some of you were here a few weeks ago, Daniel 1 verse 2, yes, he won that battle. Yes, he defeated Israel, but verse 2 of chapter 1, and The Lord delivered Jehoiakim, King of Judah into his hand. We know that. We know that Nebuchadnezzar didn't win that battle because he was great and mighty and powerful. He won that battle because God allowed him to win. We know that. Nebuchadnezzar doesn't know that. And because of that, what's happening is that Nebuchadnezzar's success is feeding his arrogance. It's the fuel that's allowing that particular fire to grow, which is an easy thing to allow to happen, right? We look around at success we have, maybe in our job or family or some way of life, we look at the success, and it's really easy to let that success feed our arrogance, to feed our belief that we really are all that and a bag of chips too -- possibly ruffles, cheddar cheese and sour cream chips, because those are the best chips, and that's how great we are. But the reality is that we have to do the opposite of what Nebuchadnezzar is doing here.

Rather than allowing success to feed our belief that we are somehow great, what we have to do is, we have to grow humility, and we do it this way. You see humility grows when we remember that our success is not a sign of our greatness. You hear me? Humility grows when we remember that our success is not a sign of our greatness, that any success we have is because God has allowed it. Because God in his grace and mercy and for his reasons which we don't always understand, but it's all ultimately under his control. Any success we have is only because God has allowed it. Humility grows when we remember that our success is not a sign of our greatness. Nebuchadnezzar does not understand that lesson, so his arrogance is towering. It's brought Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into conflict with him because they won't bow, so he's giving them one last chance. I'm going to give you the cue one more time. I expect the conditioned response. I'm going to ring the bell, and I want you to bow. Here's what they say. I want you to pay very close attention to what they say because I believe that what they say here is the center of the story.

It's the heart of what it is that God wants us to take away from the story. Part of the way I know that is because it's in the center of the story. That's very common in the ancient near east to put the key thing right in the middle. The other reason I say that is because these are the only words that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego speak in this story. In fact, they are the only words that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego speak in the whole Book of Daniel, the only direct quote, so you need to pay very careful attention to what they say. This is what they say: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, replied to him, King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 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.

I want to push into what they say here. Because again, I believe that understanding what they say here is necessary to understand what it is that God wants us to take away from the story. The other reason I want to push into what they say here is because if you are not careful, what they say here actually can be pretty confusing. I don't know if you caught that, but there are basically three parts to what they say here. The first part is they say, God is able to deliver us from the blazing furnace, right? He's able to. Done deal. We know that for sure. No question about that. He's able to deliver us from the fiery furnace. Then the second part they say God will deliver us from your hand. Again, no question about it, no uncertainty. We know he will deliver us from your hand, and then they say, but even if he does not, we will not bow. Wait a minute, which is it? What happens is we naturally put the second and third part together because we think linearly. That's the way you do things. Second and third part go together, so they said God will deliver us, and then they go but even if he does not, and you are like, wait a minute, which one is it? Do you think for sure, are you absolutely confident he will deliver you, or do you think he might not deliver you? Which one is it? The problem is, we are not actually supposed to put two and three together. We are actually supposed to put one and three together, which might seem very, very strange to us, but it was very common in the ancient near east. It's a thing called a chiasm. Totally geeking out here for a second.

The chiasm is where you break first and last piece go together. Now, that's very strange to us, very common in the ancient near east. I can talk a lot about it. I spent nine years writing a doctoral dissertation on it. Seriously, I can talk about it a lot. I would not recommend asking me anymore about it, but I would be happy to tell you anything you want to know. The important thing you need to understand, strange as that might seem to us, very, very common in the ancient world. They would have naturally understood it. Here's what happens, though, when you put one and three together, here's the statement. God is able to deliver us from the furnace, but even if he chooses not to, we'll not worship your gods. God is able to deliver us from the furnace, but even if he chooses not to, we'll not worship your gods.

What you need to understand what is happening, there are two statements of faith going on here. The first one is a statement of faith in God's power. God has the ability to rescue us from the furnace. He has the ability to keep your furnace from having any impact on us. He has that power. He has that capacity. There is no question about it. We know He is able, but we don't know if that's how He's going to exercise His power. We don't know if He's going to choose to rescue us from the furnace, we just don't know, but even if He chooses not to rescue us from the furnace, we are not going to bow, which is really a statement of faith in His wisdom. What they are saying is, we trust that even if He chooses not to rescue us from the furnace, He has a good reason for it. He has an ultimate purpose for it. We are going to trust His wisdom. We are going to trust His goodness even if He doesn't exercise His power in the way that we would like for Him to. Does that make sense?

He's able to rescue us from the furnace, but even if He doesn't, we are going to trust Him and not your gods. Now in between the two parts of that statement is another statement, and because it's framed in the way that it is by the other two parts, the center statement has a little bit more weight, a little more emphasis, and that center statement is this, God will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. No uncertainty. No hesitation. It's a done deal. He will deliver us from your hand, and remember, Nebuchadnezzar set this up, right. He said, hey, if I throw you into the furnace, what god can rescue you from my hand? They are like what God can rescue us from your hand? My God. Our God can rescue us from your hand. No, no, no, our God will rescue us from your hand. No question about it, that's a done deal. He will. You go, wait a minute. They have already said -- they already recognize, they could die in the furnace.

Yeah, but that doesn't keep them from being delivered from Nebuchadnezzar's hand. I mean even if they die in the furnace, where do they go? They go into heaven. They go into God's presence, and they are out of whose hand? They are out of Nebuchadnezzar's hand, and by the way, I believe that Nebuchadnezzar understands this. He understands that their death is not ideal for demonstrating his greatness, because you notice, he's given a command, anyone that doesn't do what I say, anyone that doesn't bow any time they hear the bell, they are going into the furnace. It's a done deal. Well, the bell rang. They didn't bow. He gave them another chance. Why? I think it's in part because he understands that killing them doesn't really demonstrate how great he is, because he couldn't break them. Killing them doesn't demonstrate his greatness in the way that their obedience does, in the way that their submission does, so he's giving them another chance.

Because he understands what they understand that even if I die in that furnace, all that we have really shown is that your power isn't as great as you think it is. Now this is a little bit hard for us to grasp because we are so oriented toward comfort and things being good and pleasant, but here's what you have to understand. I'm going to say it in kind of a shocking way, but I think it's the truth. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were okay with either option. Meaning they were okay with being rescued out of the furnace, or they were okay with dying in the furnace. They understood either way they were delivered out of his hands. Let me say it this way. They were okay with being miracled out of the furnace or murdered into heaven. Put that on a plaque somewhere.

You understand that's what they were saying. They were okay with being miracled. That would be great. They would love that, but they were also okay with being murdered into heaven, but they are not going to bow because they understand that either way they are in God's hands, and that's where they intend to stay because it's the best place to be. And we have to push into that a little bit because I think in this is the core that we are supposed to understand from the story, so we have to ask the question, how did that do that? How did they have that kind of faith? That's an incredible faith statement, right? God, whether you miracle me out of this difficult thing or whether this difficult thing murders me into your hands, I'm good. How do you get to that place? I think that this is the principle. We thrive when our trust in God's greatness overshadows our fear of the furnace. Does that make sense?

We thrive when our trust in God's greatness over shadows our fear of the furnace, and that's where they were. They had a trust in God's greatness that honestly, it completely over shadowed their fear of the furnace, and don't think for a second that they weren't afraid of that furnace. We have a tendency to read these things and maybe you picture them as they don't have an ounce of fear. I don't believe that for a second. What they were facing was painful. It was horrifying. Being thrown into a fire, can you imagine a worse way to die? If they didn't have a moment of fear in that, they are not human. They had a fear, but their trust in God's greatness was greater. Their trust in God's greatness over shadowed their fear of the furnace, and it allowed them to respond in this way, and that's what we are to understand from the story. This is what God is intending us to walk out of here understanding and beginning to put into practice in our lives, is that when our trust in God's greatness overshadows the fear of the furnace, then and only then can we thrive as God's people.

Let me explain a couple of words there to make sure we understand what's going. When I'm talking about God's greatness, understand that I'm not just talking about His power. Okay, that's part of it, but power alone does not make someone great. Hitler had great power. He was a very powerful man. He was not a great man, was he? No. Greatness is power coupled with character. They understood that God was able, but they also understood that God was good, and they understood that God was wise, and so they trusted the goodness and the wisdom of God to exercise

His power in whatever way was best, whether they understood that at that point or not. That's what I mean by greatness. It's power coupled with character, with trustworthy character. That's what I mean when we talk about our trust in God's greatness. Understand too, when I talk about furnace, I'm talking about the things the world uses to keep us in line, the threats the world uses to keep us in line.

For Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, it was a furnace, right? Most of us will not face a literal furnace, but the world will continually use things as threats to keep us in line, to keep us following the conditioned patterns, to keep us living lives of compromise. What God is telling us is that we thrive when our trust in God's greatness over shadows that furnace whatever it happens to be. And you should be asking this point, okay, but how do we get that? How do we get that kind of trust? How do we grow our trust in God's greatness. Let me give you four ingredients, most of which I see in the Book of Daniel. Four key ingredients to growing a furnace defying trust. The first ingredient is relationship. It's not just knowing about God. It's knowing God. It's being in a relationship with God. Understand that's the essence of the Christian message. It's not just that God loves us from afar, that we worship God from afar, but that God loved us enough that He sent His own Son. He came. He took our sins upon himself. He died on the cross to pay for the penalty to get rid of the separation between us and God.

Then he rose from the dead to prove he could invite us into a new life lived in relationship with God. That's the first key to have relationship with God because God's greatness is experienced most profoundly in a relationship. I mean it's one thing to look at the stars and go, wow, He's powerful, but it's only in a relationship that we understand that He is also trustworthy. So listen if you are here today, and you don't have a relationship with God, if your worship, your thinking about God is always at a distance, you know I don't have that personal relationship -- that's your first step to grow in a furnace defying faith is to get that relationship. Come talk to me after the service. There will be other people down here praying with people. We would love to talk with you. Say I don't have that relationship, but I want it. You can have that before you leave today. That's the first key. The second ingredient to a furnace-defying faith is prayer. When you have a relationship with God, you can talk to Him. You can pray to Him. One of the things you need to be praying is God, would you give me a greater trust in You. Would You grow my trust in Your greatness?

It's a prayer that God always answers. That's a prayer that God in His wisdom isn't going to look and say no, I don't think I'm going to let that happen. Oh, you want to trust Me more? I think you trust me enough. That's never going to be His response. His response is always going to be, okay. This is a prayer you need to be praying on a regular basis. If you have been coming here a while, you have probably heard me on several occasions talk about my daily prayer list. You might, over time, you might end up with a pretty long list there, right? I do. Whenever I talk to somebody and they say, hey, would you pray for me? I always pray for them right then, and then I always add them to my daily prayer list. By the end of the year, my prayer list is unwieldy; let's call it that. It's really big. So January 1st, I reset it. Like I get rid of most of it, and then we start over, and start building again throughout that year, but there are a few things that don't get reset. There are a few things that are on the prayer list every single day for the rest of my life, and one of those things after studying this passage this week that I have just added in that will never go away is God, will You grow my trust in Your greatness.

That's my new every day prayer. That won't reset at the beginning of the year. You need to be praying that because God will, now understand the way He grows His trust -- your trust in Him, He puts you situations where you need to trust Him. A bunch of you are like, I knew there was a catch. There is a catch. We can't grow our trust in God without actually trusting Him, so He's going to provide you opportunities to trust Him, and you have to take Him. That leads me to the third ingredient to a furnace-defying trust, and that is history. This was not Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's first experience with trusting God in a scary situation. We have already seen other experiences in the Book of Daniel. They had other moments where they trusted God in small ways, and it built their faith, they built their trust, grew their trust in ways that allowed them to deal with, you have to have that experience. That's why you have to take those opportunities to trust God that He provides, those little steps of faith that grow your trust in His greatness.

You need history. Start building it right now by acting in faith in whatever way God leads you to, and then there's the fourth thing, and that's community. Community. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego speak as one person. We don't have any breakdowns of who said what to the king. They are speaking as one voice. They are speaking as a band of brothers. They are speaking as a community. One of the things we talk a lot about here at Mission Hills is the importance of having the community around you to remind you of who God is and what it looks like to be faithful to your trust in Him, so we talk a lot about Life Groups here. Listen, if you don't have a Life Group, on the way out stop by the Welcome Center and say, I think I need to get into one of those Life Group, and they'll make it happen. You can do it home through the website as well, but that's that fourth ingredient, the community that gets built.

All of those things came together for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego so they faced the furnace and they went, yeah, my trust in God's greatness completely over shadows my fear of this thing. So what happened? Well, then, Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. That's going to happen. His attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, and he commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire? They replied, certainly, Your Majesty. He said, look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.

Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here! So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent His angel and rescued His servants! They trusted in Him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

I would love to tell you that if your trust in God's greatness over shadows your fear of the furnace, the furnace will never touch you. I would love to tell you that. I can't. It's not always the way it works out. Sometimes God exercises His power in this way, and sometimes He doesn't. He has good reasons. We sometimes know them. Sometimes we don't. The reality is I can't promise you will always escape the furnace. The reality is this, the story is not a blueprint for how to escape the furnace. The story is a blueprint on how to face it. Not instruction on how to escape the furnace. It's instruction on how to face it. What does it matter? Who cares how we face the furnace, how we face the threats that the world uses to keep us in line? Listen, how we face the furnace matters more than you can imagine, because when we have a trust in God's greatness that over shadows our fear of the furnace, we face the furnace in a way that calls attention to God's greatness.

It causes people to go, wait a minute, why wouldn't you? Why are they? Why has she? Why won't he? And what happens, we put God's greatness on display. In modern terms, let me say it this way, using very modern term, when our trust in God's greatness overshadows our fear of the furnace, God's greatness goes viral. Does that make sense? God's greatness takes center stage, and when God's greatness goes viral, it sets the stage for remarkable things, it sets the stage for God to do remarkable things. Not always the same kind of things we see here, but always remarkable things. Sometimes God changes the circumstances. That's awesome. Sometimes God uses the way we face the furnace to encourage other people and to make a difference in their lives. In this case, Nebuchadnezzar made Judaism an official accepted religion which made the lives of the Jews throughout the Babylonian Empire dramatically better, so sometimes the way we face the furnace has an impact on other people. Sometimes the impact is that it encourages them, increases their own faith, it gives them a shot in the spine to not fear the furnace.

Sometimes it changes the hearts of our enemies. I think it's interesting of Nebuchadnezzar. There's a pretty big shift in his thinking about this God, right? Now, don't make the mistake of thinking he became a Christian. He did not. Notice his response? Anybody who talks smack about their God dies. Not the most Christian response. He's not all the way there, but something's happening. They have made God's greatness go viral, and it's beginning to have an impact. See, when we make God's greatness go viral, it sets the stage for God to do remarkable things, so, question number one. What's your furnace right now? Remember as we said a few weeks ago, our Babylon is the big scary thing we face. This is a little bit more specific. What's the threat that the world is using to keep you in line? Honestly, you might be able to think of something immediately, or you might not. You maybe go I don't know that the world is threatening me right now to keep in line. I would argue at that point to be very careful because it may be that you are just dealing with conditioned patterns of response and compromise without even realizing it.

But honestly, maybe you are not facing a furnace right now, but it's going to happen. It's the reality of the world that we live in on this side of heaven. Whether you are facing a furnace now or knowing one is coming, you have to get ready. That leads me to the second question which is just this, what concrete step will you take this week to grow your trust in God's greatness? Remember we said there are four ingredients? Relationship, maybe that's your step. Come talk to me after the service. Talk to one of the other people down here and say, I need that relationship. Maybe it's you begin praying everyday as I suggested. God, would you give me a greater trust in your greatness? Grow my trust in your greatness. Maybe you began praying. Maybe the concrete step is that you begin taking these small steps of faith that you know God is calling you to, and you begin building a history, or maybe it's that you build a community. You go out and say, I need to be part of one of these Life Groups, and get that community around you. What's your concrete step?

Finally, this question, I think it needs to be pushed into, and it's this: What are some conditioned patterns of response that you are struggling with? We need to identify them so we can begin to break their power over us. Would you pray with me? God, we know that You are great. We see the stars cast across the sky. We see the beauty of the sunrises and sunsets and we recognize that You are great and that You are powerful, but it goes beyond that Lord, You are also good to us. You sent Your Son to die for us. You offer us new life by faith in Your Son. You bring mercies, and grace new into our lives everyday, so we know that You are not just powerful, but You are also trustworthy. We trust that You are great. Lord, we ask that you would grow our trust in your greatness so that we would not fear any furnace. In Jesus name, amen.