Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

How to Be a Man of Courage
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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When you look at what makes a man a man in our modern society today, it can be pretty discouraging. Men are judged by their physic, their physical form. Men are judged by their looks. Men are judged by their money, their possessions, their success, their job. But when it comes to the Word of God, really one thing defines manliness there is a basic fundamental virtue of manliness. There is a trait that I think distinguishes a man most distinctively, the solitary foundation of manhood. And I want to sum it up in one word, it's the word fortitude.

Now I know that's not an often used word today and that's why I picked it. It's not one that has a lot of baggage. It's one that may come to you sort of from out of left field and you're wondering what it means. Let me tell you what it means. Webster's dictionary says, "Fortitude is that strength or firmness of mind, courage of soul which enables a person to encounter danger with coolness, to bear pain or adversity without murmuring, depression or despondency." And then we could sum that up by saying, "Fortitude is courage built on strength of soul." Fortitude is a good word because it combines courage with strength but it also has a third component and that is conviction. Fortitude is the combination of those three things: conviction, courage and strength.

Because a man is basically a man when he stands on principle and has the courage to uphold that principle, and the strength to sustain and attack against that principle, he has fortitude. It is the willingness, even the desire to face challenges, to attack difficulties, to bear adversity and to do it triumphantly. Women, on the other hand, seek to be protected. They seek to be nourished and cherished, to borrow biblical words. They seek to be made secure. That's natural for women. Men, on the other hand, are designed by God to be the protectors, to be the saviors, if you will, of their wives and families, to provide the security, to accomplish everything necessary to the well-being of the wife and children, all that is needed to provide the haven for the woman and the children. Manliness is really summed up with that notion of fortitude.

And if I can stretch it a little bit further, just remember these things. It is conviction, it is courage and it is strength, but there's one other thing that has to be added in the Christian environment and that is truth. The convictions, the principles that form the convictions for us rise out of the Bible. For a Christian man, he is a man of the Word who knows the truth, who has convictions about the truth and that is they are non-negotiable and non-compromising convictions. And because of those convictions he is courageous to confront anything that assaults those truths and he has the strength to withstand that confrontation. That's manliness. Just in general, men were designed by God to be the

protectors and the providers and the saviors and the deliverers and the securers of their wives and their children. True manliness is summed up in words like conviction, courage and strength.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 16 there is an interesting verse. You might want to look at it for a moment. First Corinthians 16:13 and in that verse we have this same definition given us by the Apostle Paul. He says, first of all in verse 13, "Be on the alert." Another element of being a man is knowing that you are the protector and so you have to be alert. "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." Now this is a fascinating verse, it is one of those brief verses that embraces a wealth of truth. You will notice the faith is mentioned there, that's THE faith, definite article, the faith being the revelation of God in Scripture. So we start with the faith, that's the truth. We stand firm in the faith, that's conviction. Conviction means that I take my stand on the faith and I do not waver, I do not vacillate.

Then he follows that up with, "Act like men," the New King James translates it, "Be brave." Literally the verb means to conduct oneself in a courageous way. So you have the truth, then you have conviction, here you have courage, and finally be strong. There are all the components...truth, conviction, courage and strength. And that's how men act. That's why the translators said, "Act like men." Men are courageous. Men have convictions on which they unwaveringly stand. And men are strong. How do men act then? That's how they act, with conviction, with courage, and with strength.

Then verse 14 adds a wonderful balance. "Let all that you do be done in love." Now there's a man. Not weak, not vacillating, not fearful, and not unloving, but a man with fortitude in an environment of love. Real men are watchful of the dangers around them. They're very, very sensitive to the dangers that come against their wives and the dangers that come against their children. And they know how to protect their wives and their children. They know that they must have the truth, they must have unwavering conviction about the truth, they must have the courage to stand for those convictions and the strength to withstand the assault. That's what defines a man. A man is known by his character, by his fortitude.

Just to show you replete the Scripture is with this matter, turn in your Bible back to the last book of the Pentateuch, the writings of Moses, Deuteronomy chapter 31. And in Deuteronomy 31 Moses is speaking to Joshua. Moses says, you remember, was not allowed to enter the promised land. Joshua became the commander in chief of the nation Israel as they entered into the land of promise, the land of Canaan. And they knew they were going to run into formidable foes and enemies and they did, and they had many battles. And so in verse 6 Moses says to Joshua, "Be strong and courageous," exactly the same things that we just read in 1 Corinthians 16, "Be strong and courageous." This is how a man acts. This is how a man engaged in an absolutely unthinkable leadership responsibility with a generation of people, a whole nation of people going into a foreign land to conquer that land and establish itself, this is absolutely essential for the man who is the leader...be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, that is the enemies, for the

Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all people, first privately then publicly, "Be strong and courageous for you shall go with these people into the land which the Lord has sword to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance and the Lord is the one who goes ahead of you, He will be with you, He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." Then again in verse 23 He commissioned Joshua, the son of Nun, and said, "Be strong and courageous for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them and I will be with you." A formidable task, a formidable enemy and God instructs Joshua through His servant Moses that it demands all that a man is, it demands strength, it demands courage. Those defining virtues that are manly.

In 2 Samuel chapter 10, Joab speaks to the Israelites about going to battle. Verse 12, 2 Samuel 10:12, "Be strong and let us show ourselves courageous for the sake of our people and for the cities of our God and may the Lord do what is good in His sight. And so Joab and the people were with him drew near to the battle." That's what men need to be, strong and courageous.

In 1 Kings David speaks to Solomon, 1 Kings 2, verse 1, David's time to die drew near. He charged Solomon, his son, saying, "I'm going the way of all the earth," everybody dies. He says to Solomon, "Be strong therefore and show yourself a man." Literally, be strong and become a man, a man is synonymous with strong and courageous. And verse 3 he says, "And keep the charge of the Lord your God to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances and His testimonies according to what is written in the law of Moses that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn." You want to be a man? Obey the Word of God. You want to be a man? Don't waver. You want to be a man? Be strong...strong being attached to being faithful to the Word of God and unwavering in your convictions.

Again David spoke in 1 Chronicles 22, again to Solomon, verse 11. "Now, my son, the Lord be with you that you may be successful and build the house of the Lord your God just as He has spoken concerning you. Only the Lord give you discretion and understanding and give you charge over Israel so that you may keep the law of the Lord your God, then you shall prosper if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord commanded Moses concerning Israel...then this...be strong and courageous, do not fear nor be dismayed." There again is the same direction to Solomon, be strong, be courageous, be a man.

Second Chronicles 32, Hezekiah, the king, is speaking to his officials, his officers as he begins in verse 1 talking about the invasion of Judah, and down in verse 7 to the military officers mentioned in verse 6, he says, "Be strong and courageous, do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria, nor because of all the multitude which is with him for the One with us is greater than the one with him."

Well whether it's Moses to Joshua, whether it's Joab to the Israelite soldiers, whether it's David to Solomon, whether it's Hezekiah to the military officers, whether it's Psalm 27, "Be strong and let your heart take courage," whatever it is the idea of manliness is associated with fortitude, with courage, and strength. Men don't give into fear. Men don't give into pressure. Men don't give into intimidation. They don't cave in to temptation. They don't seek the easy way, the secure place. They fight the war, they fight the battle. They live on principle. They live on conviction. And they have the courage of those convictions and they stand strong against the opposition and they bravely face the challenges that those convictions bring and they have the strength to withstand those challenges. When we talk about being a man, as David talked to his son Solomon on being a man, we're talking about fortitude, contending with difficulty, facing the challenge, meeting the enemy, bearing the pain, maintaining self-discipline, upholding truth and pressing to the goal...that is what distinguishes a man.

Then one other Old Testament passage must be addressed, Joshua chapter 1. This is a magnificent sort of summation of the passages I read earlier. Joshua 1, the chapter begins as God says to Joshua, "Moses is now dead and you are the leader, you are now the man and I'm going to give you the land...verse 4...from the wilderness in this Lebanon, even as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites as far as the great sea for the setting of the sun will be your territory." Everything from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates and north and south, the great fulfillment of the promise that God had made to Abraham, it's all going to be your land, "And nobody is going to be able to stand before you all the days of your life, just as I have been with Moses I'll be with you, I'll not fail you or forsake you." And then comes this in verse 6, "Be strong and courageous for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them," repeats it, "only be strong and very courageous, be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you, do not turn from it to the right or to the left so that you may have success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth but you shall meditate on it day and night so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it for then you will make your way prosperous, then you will have success. Have I not commanded you, be strong and courageous? Do not tremble or be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." What a great passage.

Joshua, you are the man, be strong, be courageous, don't be afraid and don't be dismayed. Stand firm. He says in verse 7, "Obey the Word of God." In verse 8, "Meditate on it and do everything written in it, then you will gave prosperity, then you will have success." You have the promise in verse 5 of the presence of God. You have the instruction in verse 6 of the right cause, the land that I promised to give you. You have the pledge of the sovereign providence of God in verses 7 and 8, I'll be there and I'll give you success. But through it all you have the duty of obedience, obey My Word, meditate on My Word, do everything that is written in it and you'll succeed. Now there is a formula for a man, a Christian man. He believes the Word of God because the Word of God is true he builds his

convictions on the Word of God. He has the courage to live those convictions no matter how difficult and the strength to withstand the assault against them. That is a man. And let me tell you something. It takes a father like that to raise a son like that. Spiritual men are uncompromising. They are bold. They are strong. They are principled. They are courageous. Man like that is a haven for his wife, she feels secure, she feels protected, she feels nourished, and cherished. And the children of a man like that grow up to be courageous men and secure women.

And when you look at a family and you see insecure women running around trying to find their security by associating themselves with a peer group in the world, or when you see young men with no convictions playing on the edge of the sinful indulgences of the society, you have to ask yourself if the father had fortitude. Fortitude produces courageous men and secure women, men who don't need to run on the edges of worldliness and iniquity because they've been trained to be strong and have convictions based on the truth. And women who don't need to find their security in the affirmation of a peer group or the affirmation of some worldly person because they're so secure in the truth and in the home. And I'm like you, I hear, I read, I see so much nonsense about how to be an effective father. I mean, there are books, Christian books, Christian tapes and you've heard it on the radio and seen it on television, all this silly, shallow advice about how to be a good father, it's all about, you know, working in the yard together, playing catch, developing self-esteem in your children, etc., etc., etc., etc. What makes strong, secure children is fortitude in the man, fortitude balanced with love, as we saw in 1 Corinthians 16. What makes a strong courageous secure loving child is a father of fortitude.

In another evidence of how far our society has sunk into the morass of stupidity, there was a survey done recently at great expense, the results of which came out in the last couple of days and the result of this national study was that children raised in families with fathers do far better in life. Really! And God can overcome the lack of a father with fortitude, but it is a benediction of all benedictions of all benedictions to sons and daughters to have such a father. It matters little what the financial capability of what that father is, it matters little where his social status lies, it matters little what he looks like, how popular he may be, or how esteemed by the community. What really matters is does he have fortitude? Is he a man of truth? Does he have convictions? Does he have the courage of those convictions? And does he have the strength to stand when those convictions are assaulted? That is a man of fortitude, that's the legacy that man leaves to his family that produces a haven for his wife, courageous sons and secure daughters.

And perhaps getting a little bit deeper into the detail of that, this is a man who has learned to resist temptation to sin personally. This is a man who isn't a hypocrite. This is a man whose wife and children see consistency, a resolute strength no matter how much the society, how much the world and the flesh and the devil get cranked up to a fever pitch, he doesn't waver, he doesn't fall. He has the strength, he has the fortitude to resist the temptation to sin personally because he has built his life on a belief that the Word of God is true, that's where his convictions come from and on those

convictions he stands with courage and by the grace of God and the strength of the Spirit he stands against all assaults against that.

I don't believe there's any reason to assume that a man necessarily needs to fall into sin that destroys his testimony, destroys his life. I think the grace of God and the truth of Scripture and the power of the Holy Spirit is given to us with the promise of God that if we appropriate those things, it doesn't have to happen. But a man with fortitude is seen by the people closest to him as having the strength to stand personally against temptation.

Secondly, a man with fortitude is seen by the people closest to him as a man who never compromises his convictions. If something is a conviction, if something is a non-negotiable, he never vacillates at that point. Whether the appeal to him is for money or for more power, or for prestige, or whatever, to waylay some level of conflict, a man with fortitude does not compromise his convictions.

And a third thing you would say about a man of fortitude, he not only stands against assaults on him personally, he not only holds to his convictions courageously, but thirdly, he is able to resist the temptation to tolerate sin around him. That is to say it negatively. Positively he has the strength not to tolerate sin around him. Once he has affirmed something is wrong, it's not only wrong for him, it's wrong for everybody in his family and it's wrong for everybody around him. And so he holds the standard high at every front. He isn't a man who says this is right, and I will do it, this is wrong and I will not, and then says to his family, this is right and I will do it, this is wrong and I will not and I want you to follow me in that, and then goes to his office or goes into his relationships and tolerates the wrong in others. He's not that kind of man. He has fortitude and he is intolerant of what violates the Word of God and what dishonors God whether it's himself, his family, or his friends.

See, being a good father is not related to some gimmick. I mean, you really just can't sort of do it with smoke and mirrors, you know. It's a matter of character. It's the product of fortitude and that, I have to say, is an alien concept in our world. I don't think our society, for the most part, even knows what a man of conviction is like. We don't have any of them, or many of them in the public view, do we? A man of conviction would be branded in most cases in our society a bigot. He would be silenced, sued and pushed out of the public discourse. I mean, you don't get to a prominent place in our society if you're a man of conviction. You're gone long before we ever know about you. Certainly that's true politically, since politics is the art of compromise, you start compromising at the very beginning and by the time you get where anybody knows you, you aren't a man of conviction. There are few cases where that is different but those people never seem to be able to achieve the offices they desire. We're not used to people with conviction. We redefine those people as scandalously bigoted. And we don't know about men of courage. We have a whole generation of men growing up free from war, free from the conflicts of war and therefore they don't know what it means to be in a battle for life and death, to be following a leader who has courage. We live in a world of compromise. It seems like in our world everybody has a price, everybody adjusts their morality according to the latest survey.

Now compromise is the point at which you sell your conviction. Compromise is the point at which you sell out your ideal or the point which you stop obeying God. Fortitude is connected also to integrity. Integrity is a great word. The dictionary defines it as the quality of being undivided. That's good, a quality of being undivided. In other words, you're just absolutely whole, you are one. It's from the mathematic term integer, one, a whole. Integrity means everything is whole. There's not two things about you, speaking out of both sides of your mouth, we often say, or having duplicity or being double-minded, or being hypocritical. I think personally that is an absolute disaster for a father to tell your children there is a standard according to the Word of God but not to live it. This not only destroys your credibility, but it destroys the credibility of the Scriptures because if you're not even serious about the Word of God, why would you expect your child to be? The legacy of hypocrisy for a child is devastating, absolutely devastating as well as for a wife. If a wife can't trust her husband to be the protector not only physically but to be protector of the spiritual life of the family, the moral purity of the family, then she can't find a haven there for her and her children.

To have integrity is to have honesty, simplicity, incorruptibility, the absence of hypocrisy. The opposite of integrity is compromise. Compromise is the abandonment of principle to gain some end...the abandonment of principle to gain some end. That's how most people live their lives. When Solomon finished building the temple, according to 1 Kings 9, the house of the Lord, the Lord appeared to him and said this, "I have heard your prayer and your supplication which you have made before Me. I have consecrated this house which you have built by putting My name there forever and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually. And as for you, if you will walk before Me as your father David walked in integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all that I have commanded you, and will keep My statutes and My ordinances, then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever, just as I promised to your father David, saying, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel."

Now we all know that in David's early life he had his problems, didn't he? But he got his act together and he was a man of integrity. And here is the Word of God, 1 Kings 9, right out of heaven and God says you need to walk in integrity like your father did. Now let me take you back to when David was speaking to Solomon and said, "Be strong and of good courage and do everything that is written in the law of God and obey it all." David was saying that to his son and it was being spoken out of a life of integrity so that Solomon could hear what his father said against the backdrop of the way his father lived. And God says if you'll live the way your father lived and walk in integrity, that is in singularity and wholeness in honesty without duplicity and without hypocrisy, if you'll be a man of fortitude, be strong and courageous and you will keep my statutes and my ordinances, then I will bless you. Those who are uncompromising have the promise of divine blessing. You make the choice in life. Oh you're worried about what the boss thinks, you're worried about what somebody else thinks, you cave in at some particular point, you put yourself, you think, in their better graces and you've just taken yourself out of the place of the blessing of God. Take your choice. "O Lord," says Psalm 15,

"who may abide in Your tent? Who can dwell on Your holy hill? Who can live with You? He who walks with integrity and works righteousness and speaks truth in his heart." People of integrity are the ones who please God.

And I'm telling you, it's such a sad day in which we live. We not only have the absence of fortitude and courage and manliness among men in the public eye but even in the church. I'm continually amazed at even those in church leadership, even pastors, I would like to be able to say to you, "Well if you want to see a man of integrity, if you want to see a man of fortitude, if you want to see a man of courage, a man of conviction, a man of principle, a man whose life is built on truth, a man who lives that and has the strength to fight against the onslaught, if you want to see that kind of man, go to a church and find a pastor," but I can't say that.

Men say they believe the Bible, yet they don't teach it. Men agree that sin must be punished, they say it from the pulpit but if those are the sins of their children, it's a different story. Men oppose dishonesty and corruption until they confront their bosses and risk losing their jobs. If confronting the dishonesty of your company might bring the loss of your job, would you say something? A man with fortitude would. Men maintain high moral standards until their own lusts are kindled by some illicit desire and then all of a sudden there's another standard for them. Men are honest until a little dishonesty would save them some money. Men have a conviction until it's challenged by someone they admire, or someone they fear.

Even Scripture is full of people who compromise. Adam compromised by disobeying God's law following his wife's sin, lost paradise. Abraham compromised the truth, lied about his wife Sarah and nearly lost her. Moses compromised God's command, lost the privilege of entering the promised land. Samson compromised his vow to God and lost his strength, lost his eyesight and lost his life. Israel compromised the commands of the Lord, lived in sin, and, as you'll remember when fighting the Philistines, lost the ark of God...eventually lost the homeland. Saul compromised God's divine word by not slaying the animals of the enemy, you remember, and lost his kingdom. David compromised early with his terrible sin with Bathsheba and lost his infant son. Solomon compromised his convictions by marrying foreign wives and lost the united kingdom. And so it goes. Judas compromised his supposed devotion for Christ for 30 pieces of silver and lost his soul forever in hell. Peter compromised his conviction and his devotion to Christ, denied Him, lost his joy, and so it goes. There are always those who will compromise.

But manliness, even in a human realm, is defined as courageous, strong conviction, certainly for Christians because all of that is built on the truth of the Word of God. We should define manliness. People...it's a strange thing, you know, in some ways, but people will ask me, "Does it worry you when you say something that's very strong? Do you worry about people's response?" I can honestly say to you that I don't worry about anybody's response, personally I don't even think about it because I am bound by my conscience to the truth of God. You understand that, don't you? It isn't a question

of...am I trying to say something that will achieve a certain end? All I'm trying to say is what is true, the end of which is in the hands of God, and I leave it there. Now there are people who don't like that, that's why I have all these security guys around the front here and growing every week. But that doesn't change anything. And you don't have to do that in an unloving way. You don't have to do that without grace and kindness, but you have to do it.

Lack of fortitude is the failure of fathers. Lack of fortitude is the failure of men not having the spiritual discipline, the love for God, the conviction of the truth, the strength of purpose, the dependence on grace, the loyalty to Jesus Christ, to be alert, to stand firm in the faith, to act like men, to be strong. That manliness will always be tested. The pressure will always come to ignore error, to ignore sin because it may cause conflict in the church, to ignore error and sin or dishonesty or whatever might be in your work. I mean, it could come in any way. It's another way in which the world squeezes you into its mold.

So if I could have a word for you fathers today on Father's Day, be courageous, know the truth, build convictions on the truth, have the courage to take your stand on those convictions and the strength to win the battle. I said to our staff a couple of weeks ago, the reason we don't have any courage, we've seen the feminazation of the church. It's as if the church has become feminized, rather than being courageous, the church today is not courageous at all. And the reason it has no courage, the reason church leaders have no courage is because they have no convictions. They reason they have no convictions is because they don't know the truth. As soon as you abandon doctrine, the whole thing falls down because you can't have convictions if you don't know the truth of God, therefore there's nothing to be courageous about and strong to defend.

Let me give you just a closing illustration. Turn to Daniel chapter 1. Let's put some flesh on this little talk this morning and the flesh is in the form of Daniel. I know you know the story of Daniel but if you wanted to find in the Bible the illustration of a man with fortitude, this would be the man. Now what makes this really wonderful is that by the time Daniel enters the scene in this wonderful book, it is the third year, according to chapter 1 verse 1, of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah. The year is 604, 605 B.C. The northern kingdom of Israel, the kingdom was split because of Solomon's sin, the northern kingdom Israel, southern kingdom Judah. The northern kingdom has gone into captivity about 120 years before this. Now Judah is going to go into captivity and the Babylonians have come. They came in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, about 604, 605. They came back in 597, they came back for their final trip in 586, totally destroyed Jerusalem, totally destroyed the temple and took the last group of Jewish captives into Babylon. But in the first deportation we read this, "In the year...the third year in the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, besieged it, the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand along with some of his vessels of the house of god, brought them to the land of Shinar to the house of his God and brought the vessels into the treasury of his god."

I'll just tell you what that is all about. When the pagan comes to conquer the Jews, he wasn't able on that first time to destroy Jerusalem totally, to destroy the temple. But what he did do was sack the temple and take some of the implements of worship out of there and he drags them back and takes them back to Babylon and puts...Babylon, and puts them in the temple of their false gods. The reason they do that was that it assured the people that the gods of Babylon were stronger than the God of Israel because the God of Israel was not able to protect His own temple from being sacked and so that's a confirmation that there's nothing to fear because our gods are more powerful than the God of Israel. So that's what they did.

In the first deportation, the king ordered Ashpenaz, it may be a title or it may be a proper name, but this is was the chief of his officials, this was a man in the court of Nebuchadnezzar who has great responsibility in the king's court, the king's house. And he orders Ashpenaz to bring in some of the sons of Israel. In the first deportation they wanted to take some of the young men of Israel, some of the nobles, including some of the royal family, as well as the nobles. Daniel came from noble family. They needed to be young, it says in verse 4...I'll just stop right here long enough to say Daniel was probably about 15 years old. We know that because he was in Babylon for 70 years, so that would make him 85 at the end, so we assume that he was a young man at this point, 15 years old. He was one of those young nobles, one of the upper class Jewish young men, about 15. And he said, did the king to Ashpenaz, "I want you to pick these young men from the royal family and the nobles, youths in whom there was no defect, no disability, good looking, showing intelligence in every branch of wisdom, endowed with understanding and discerning knowledge, had the ability for serving in the king's court." So they had a great strategy. If you're going to bring a people captive, if you're going to bring hundreds of thousands of Jews in over to Babylon, you've got a problem, right? Because we have to rule over these Jews. A way to make that as easy as possible is to take some young bright Jewish men who have all the necessary intellectual skills and social skills and leadership skills and we'll put them over the Jewish people so that we'll mediate our rule over the Jews through these men after...look at the end of verse 4...we have taught them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. Once we brainwash them and once we turn them into Chaldeans, we can use them to lead and rule over the Jews because they know them and they know their tendencies and their religion. That was the plan.

So Ashpenaz did that. Young man is the word *yelladeem(???)*, means teenagers, teenagers. And one of them was Daniel. Now these were very choice young men. Physically they had no defect and they were good looking. They realized that leadership does have something to do with appearance on the human level. They had mental abilities, intellect. They were intelligent, wise, understanding. They were able to think critically. That's what it means to discern knowledge. They were problem solvers, that is still a premium in the world today. I mean if you have no defect, you're good looking, you're intelligent, you are wise, you have understanding and you can solve problems and you have the social graces and the sense of poise and manners and refinement and grace to serve in a king;'s

court, you're a valuable commodity, always have been, always will be. It's the cream of the crop. The plot was brainwash them, brainwash them. This is pretty sophisticated stuff. This is high-powered pressure coming down from the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, who, by the way, was the ruler of the world at that time.

Now the literature and language of the Chaldeans, the general culture of the Babylonian elite is what is in view here. They had a complex theology of men and gods, involving magic and sorcery and enchantments and demons and myths and legends, as well as astrology which is a sort of...sort of a mystical spin on astronomy. They also were involved in mathematics and other things. It was very much like Moses who when he went to Egypt learned all the arts and sciences and wisdom of the Egyptians, according to Acts 7:22. So brainwash them essentially is what they wanted to do. Wash out...brainwash means you wash out all the past, you wash out their Judaism, you wash out all of their Hebrew idiosyncracies, and we'll give them an education. We'll try to do to them what modern education and modern media tries to do to our whole society so that they think and act and talk like Babylonians.

The plot thickens in verse 5. The first thing you need to do is suck then into our life style. They have to become enamored with this life style. Typically the Hebrews lived a pretty simple, straightforward life. They had food prescribed in the Word of God what they could eat and couldn't eat and people ask me why. In fact, I was talking to my little grandson Johnny a couple of days ago about this very issue, why did they have these special dietary laws for Israel? Is it because other foods are sinful to eat? No, God restricted them to a very unique diet and even very unique combinations of foods as well as cooking manner in order to make it almost impossible for them to have easy relationships with the pagan nations around them. They were so restricted in a dietary way that they just couldn't easily socialize because socializing in ancient times essentially meant sitting down and...what?...and eating, and the Jews couldn't do that. And that was God's...one of God's hedges around them to protect them. But it was the law of God for them, and so the king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food. Well that wouldn't be kosher...that wouldn't be what was prescribed by God. And also a daily ration from the wine which he drank and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they should enter the king's personal services. This is a long time, three years of education, choice food, choice wine.

First suck them into the life style. I mean, this is the palace, folks. This is Babylon where one of the Seven Wonders of the Word was, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. You've seen the picture of that in some encyclopedia somewhere, or some ancient history book. This is the first attempt at air conditioning. They had terraces and over those terraces were hanging vines that were dripping with water and when the wind blew through it, air conditioned everything inside. This is quite a place, this is the great palace of the world. And this would have been some kind of food, some kind of delicacies and some levels of comfort, and they wanted to draw them into the life style. This is only fifteen-year-old boys and they could be easily enamored by this who had lived rather humbly, even though they

were from nobility.

The next thing they want to do is change their names. Their names were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. All of those names include the name of God. All of those names include some form of the name of God, the Old Testament true and living God. They were named after their God as an honor to God. But they said we have to change their names. So verse 7, the commander assigned new names to them. Daniel he assigned the name Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach, and to Azariah Abednego. Changed their names immediately. And by the way, all of those names have the names of Babylonian gods. The name Bel, a form of Baal, and the name Aku(?) or Marduk, those are in all of the forms of those names in the original language. So get Yahweh, Jehovah out of their names and let's rename them after our gods. It's very much like...I remember when I was in college watching Lou Alcindor play basketball and then all of a sudden he was Karim Abdul Jabar(??), that was a religious change of names. That was a name disconnecting himself from a Christian background and associating himself with Allah and Islam. That isn't anything new, that is a very ancient way to program somebody into a new paradigm of religion. And that's exactly what they were doing. The Japanese when they conquered North Korea in the Second World War changed all the people they met to Japanese names to try to absorbed them into a new identity. That is a very common thing to do. Joseph when he went down into Egypt was given an Egyptian name. Esther's actual real name was Hadassah, you remember that, and it was changed in a pagan environment. So let's...let's change their life style and let's change their sense of identity, as well at the same time as we educate them in all of our arts and all of our sciences and our religion.

So all the inducements are there. Now remember, you're talking about 15-year-old boys. This would be...this would be a very hard thing to resist, they're barely men. They would have been sons of the law at the age of 13, so they're just barely into their manhood and now, talk about a test, this is a test. I mean, this is a real test. The king has the power of death over them, as they later found out as they were thrown into a fiery furnace and Daniel was thrown into a den of lions. They were away from home and who would know, so they didn't have any parental pressure or any peer pressure, any pressure from the social environment around them. And if they did disobey, they...they knew that they would be forfeiting an entree into the very best life style available in the world at that time and they might even have thought, "After all, if God hadn't let us down we wouldn't be here anyway. Why should we trust Him? If he was really the God of Israel, how could He let the Babylonians haul us over here and do this to us?" So they could have sort of turned on God a little bit.

Well you know the story, verse 8, this is it. Daniel made up his mind he wouldn't defile himself, that's it. How does a 15-year-old make up his mind he won't do that? I'll tell you how. He knows the truth. He has convictions about the truth. He has the courage of those convictions. And he has the strength to take it when it comes. And that's this young man . I'll tell you, he puts a lot of older men to shame, doesn't he? How many of you could say I have made up my mind I will not defile myself, and stand resolutely a lifelong faithful adherent to that 15-year-old commitment? Daniel did for 70

years. He made up his mind he wouldn't defile himself.

He saw it as a spiritual issue, Agaal(????), he saw it as a...aal means a polluting or a staining and he just wasn't going to submit to that. He becomes really an absolutely remarkable model of courage, fortitude. He has no price. I mean, this is the highest price, there is no higher price. You can be in the king's service, you can be in the king's court, eat the king's food, you can rise as high...higher than you could ever imagine and believe me, I know one thing about a teenager, he was hungry, that's for sure, he was motivated, he had ambition, and he liked nice things, but he wouldn't waver. Took his stand for the Lord. Boy, you think about that compared to teenagers today. I don't think he was into baggy pants and rap music, do you? We have a generation of teenagers today progressing faster than ever physically and slower than ever mentally. It's true. Daniel took his stand, he wouldn't defile himself. He had an unashamed boldness.

I'll give you a few little points like that and we'll finish. He had an unashamed boldness. So he says, does Daniel, he wrote this prophecy, Daniel made up his mind that he wouldn't defile himself with the king's choice food, with the wine which he drank. By the way, there was nothing in the Old Testament law that said he couldn't drink wine. Wine was a part of the normal routine of Jewish law. But he did something else. He set an uncommon standard. He raised the bar. He said not only will I not take the food because it might not be kosher, but beyond that I won't take the food and I won't take the wine because I don't want any part of this life style. Wow. He raised the bar. This is what Jeremiah called being valiant for the truth and what Ezekiel called setting the face like flint, what 1 Chronicles called setting the face like a lion. He just resolutely took his stand and said I'm not going to succumb to this life style. And he set an uncommon standard, he raised the bar. He could have consumed the wine, the Bible doesn't forbid that, but he just wanted to raise the bar higher. So down in verse 12 it indicates that all he did was eat vegetables and drink water and drinking water in that time and that place could be dangerous. Wine was generally diluted with water to disinfect the water, as well as to dilute the wine. But he was going to take his stand, and he did.

And then verse 9, he not only had an unashamed boldness to take his stand and an uncommon standard, he raised the standard, but he had an unearthly protection. It's really amazing, verse 9, God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials. The commander...the commander, theAshpenaz, could have said, "Look, either you eat this stuff or off with your head." But not by any normal human emotion but by the work of God, the man's heart was turned and he showed compassion toward Daniel, and favor. Verse 10, "The commander of the official said to Daniel, I'm afraid of my lord, the king," and he's getting real honest with him, "who's appointed your food and your drink, why should he see your face looking more haggard than a youth of your age, then you would make me forfeit my head to the king?" You know what's going to happen, I'm in charge of you guys, he comes back and looks at you and all you've had is vegetables and water, you guys haven't been eating the choice food and drinking the choice wine, he's going to come back, he's going to see it and then I'm going to lose my head because it's my job to produce out

of you in three years what he wants.

But even with that, even with the fact that he could lose his own head, he was compassionate toward Daniel. And he had favor with Daniel, that's the work of God. And I'll tell you something, folks, this is a pattern. If you have unashamed boldness and you live at an uncommon standard, believe me you can trust God to give you an unearthly protection. You might think, "Well, if I live that way, if I hold the standard high I'll never make it in my job, I'll never make it in this social group, I'll never make in this area of influence if I hold that standard." Just know this, if you don't then you're not going to have the assistance of the blessing of God. If you do, He promises that you will. Take your choice.

And Daniel was persistent about this. When Daniel was in this discussion with the Ashpenaz, he decided to appeal to another court. So in verse 11 he said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, so here's somebody who is under Ashpenaz, this is somebody who actually daily probably watched these young men and tried to get them to conform, so he goes to him. And he says, "Can I just offer you a test? Just...verse 12...test your servants for 10 days. Let's try this. You give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. And then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths eating the king's choice food and deal with your servants according to what you see."

That's a fair test, isn't it? Let's see how well we do with the vegetables and the water. After all, it's the end product the king wants, right? He wants young men strong, young men who are going to serve well in the king's court, why don't you just give us 10 days to see what's going to happen now.

Listen, folks, please, ten days of vegetables and water isn't necessarily going to make you more healthy. This is a special test within the purview of a sovereign God who is achieving a certain purpose in the life of Daniel and his friends, okay? So don't use this to justify a vegetarian diet, drinking water. It's simply that this was a test which God could demonstrate His faithfulness. You observe us. Daniel was a man of unashamed boldness, uncommon standard, unearthly protection and he provided an unusual test...an unusual test.

Well, verse 14, this man listened and tested them for ten days. At the end of the ten days their appearance seemed better, they were fatter. Now please, folks, that isn't like we think of fatter. They were healthier, is the term. They were healthier than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food. So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and wine they were to drink and kept giving them vegetables for three years...for three years. An unusual test.

They won the battle by being faithful. God sustained them. They passed the test. They won the favor of the man. That led to unmeasured blessing. As for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature, wisdom. Daniel even understood all kinds of visions and dreams. Notice, God is doing all of this, God gave them all this. At the end of the days,

the three years which the king had specified for presenting them, the commander of the officials presented them before Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuchadnezzar hasn't known what's been going on down there and what's probably been happening is maybe the Ashpenaz didn't know everything that was going on down there, but the guy who was over them, the man mentioned there in verse 11 as the overseer, he's probably been taking the king's food regularly and taken it home and just feeding them vegetables and water. He's having a great time with this and it doesn't seem to have been an issue. All Nebuchadnezzar wants is the end product, and he knows he can deliver the end product because of the work of God in the lives of these yong men. So in they come, verse 18, they're presented before Nebuchadnezzar. Imagine, this is the man who is the king of the world, the Babylonian Empire, and the king talked with them and out of them all, not one was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, so they entered the king's personal service. And listen to this, they are 18-years-old by now, or so, and as for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm.

Wow, they not only knew all of the wisdom and literature of the Chaldeans, they knew the wisdom of God, didn't they? They must have been remarkable young men. What an intense time. Through all of that Daniel never compromised. And when they told him don't pray, he prayed anyway. They threw them in a fiery furnace, they threw him in a den of lions, it never caused him to compromise. And so it ended the little outline, an unashamed boldness, an uncommon standard, an unusual test, and unmeasured blessing, and finally comes in unlimited influence. Verse 21, "Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus the king," that's 70 years. Three years of training and for 67 years he was in the service of the king, little Jewish teenage boy who had fortitude. He was a man, wasn't he? He was a man. He was a man like men are to be. May God give us such men. Let's pray.

Father, how thankful we are for the example of Daniel, the instruction of Paul, the words that You gave to Joshua, words that David spoke to Solomon, that Joab spoke to his people and Hezekiah to his soldiers and the reminder of Psalm 27 which we read earlier in the service, be strong and of good courage and wait on the Lord. Father, how we pray that You would raise up men, real men, men of truth and conviction and courage and strength who will raise sons of fortitude and secure daughters who are devoted to the truth, to carry the righteous Word to the next generation. Bless the men, bless the fathers in this congregation, make them men of fortitude, men of courage and men of strength. All this for Your glory we ask, with thanksgiving in Christ's name. Amen.

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