



If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Daniel 3:17-18

“But, even if He does NOT”
Teens Serving God in a Hostile Environment!
Dr. Randy Smith

Three Hebrew captives stood before the king of arguably the most powerful empire in the then known world (Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, approximately 606-610 BC), facing death by fire! It is a familiar Bible story found in the Book of Daniel. But who were these guys? When Nebuchadnezzar's armies invaded and defeated the Jewish kingdom of Judah, along with Jerusalem in 606 B.C. they took back to Babylon many captives to be slaves. Among these captives were several youth who were to be trained to be special servants for Nebuchadnezzar's court. Four of these young men (teenagers, according to scholars), were mentioned in Daniel chapter one. Their Hebrew names were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, but most of us know them as Daniel (who was given the Babylonian name Belteshazzar), and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the “fiery furnace trio!” What many people do not know about these four is that they were teenagers (early to mid teens), born of Jewish nobility, hand picked for their high education, physical condition and appearance, and intellectual aptitude, (Daniel 1:3-7). All four were trained and educated the King's court for 3 years where they even learned the Babylonian language!

What great role models these four teenagers should be to Christian youth today. What courage and faith. Rather than cave in to the pagan idolatrous demands of Nebuchadnezzar to worship the Babylonian gods and idols Daniel was thrown into a Lion's den to be eaten alive, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into a fiery furnace to be burned alive! We all probably remember these Bible stories of old, whether told to us as children in Sunday School, either with Flannel graph (does anyone remember flannelgraph lessons?), creative story-telling, or even modern video movies. Certainly, the faith and courage, as demonstrated by these young teenage followers of the Lord God of the Bible are sufficiently inspiring lessons for us all, but is there something more to be gleaned from this story?

As I was re-reading the Book of Daniel, I was again inspired by this story of the three Jewish teenagers (late teens by now) when threatened that if they did not bow down to the Babylonian idols, they would be thrown alive into a huge fiery furnace to face certain death. Of course, my mind immediately jumped to the incredible story ending of how the three were joined in the furnace by an angelic being (many scholars believed to have been Jesus himself) and gloriously rescued without even one hair on their

heads being singed (even their shoes and coats were not damaged)! The story reminds me of the statement by God's faithful servant Job, when he said, speaking of God's decision to save him from Satan's threats, "Though He [God] slay me, yet will I trust Him" (Job 13:15). But, as I read the story in Daniel on this occasion a particular phrase jumped out at me from the middle of the story in Daniel chapter 3 verse 18, **"But even if He does NOT!"**

Of course, I was again struck by the three teenager's level of consecration as demonstrated by their statements of confidence in God's ability and even likelihood of deliverance from death... how admirable! But then the story took a very personal trajectory for me. I had of course read and admired the faith exhibited by a small phrase that is found in the three young men's statement of faith and defiance... **"But even if He does NOT deliver us from the fiery furnace we will not serve your gods."** (Daniel 3:18). But this time (after reading the story dozens of times) when I read that phrase "But even if He does NOT..." I was struck by the Holy Spirit... right between the eyes! I paused and thought.... do I have that sort of faith? I remember thinking.... "I hope so."

But then, in reality, I doubt that many of us (though in these days of modern persecution many do) will ever face the choice of choosing between death/martyrdom and denying our faith as did these three young men. But the Holy Spirit did not allow me to just move on from martyrdom vs recanting my faith in God...rather I began to ponder the question... How would I really fill in the blank if I were faced with the much more likely scenario of asking myself, "What circumstances in my own life would I be willing to lay down on the altar of faith and respond that no matter what the outcome... **"Even if He does NOT _____"** I will obey, trust, worship, serve, and love God ... anyway? Here are a few examples that went through my mind... can you relate to any of these?

- What if He (God) does NOT... cure me or one of my family members of Cancer... will I love and serve him anyway?
- What if He does NOT.... Heal a sick child or friend ...?
- What if HE does NOT.... keep my child from being born with a disability...?
- What if HE does NOT.... bring my child or mom or dad to faith in Christ...?
- What if HE does NOT.... take away my current pain, physical or mental...?
- What if HE does NOT.... protect my child from death in a foreign war...?
- What if He does NOT.... Get me that job I need or want...?
- What if He does NOT.... give me the raise I deserve and need...?
- What if HE does NOT.... give me the boyfriend or girlfriend I want...?
- What if HE does NOT.... _____? Fill in the blank.

I was struck by the many different items I could put in that blank line, that in all honesty have in the past, at some degree challenged my faith and commitment to Christ. Then I took a deep sigh... and thanked God that He has "so far" always given me the strength to "keep on" trusting him, not in the unlikelihood of facing death, but even in everyday real challenges, challenges that can vex our very souls and accumulate to reach a point of frustration, despair, and even anger toward our Lord and God. Satan would love for us to begin questioning God's power and judgment. Perhaps we should all think about this question "What if He will Not.." more often, and not wait until tragedy, misfortune or heartache strikes. Pray every day that we learn how to lean on His strength and power to not waiver in the face of trials and tribulations. If we are honest, it will likely not take facing a hungry lion or fiery furnace to shake our faith at its foundation. No matter what your circumstances, and no matter what your frustrations... please don't give up on God. Let us learn from these Godly teenagers of old, that compromising our faith in God should never be an option, even in the "small" challenges that we face in life. May we all reflect on this statement and remain faithful, even when our hearts hurt, and when doubts smack us in the face! Keep on "keeping on" for Christ. May we all someday be quoted, as were these young men in the Book of Daniel, **"Even if He does NOT, I will obey, trust, worship, serve, and love God... ANYWAY!"**

Dr. Randy Smith
President/Founder
Great Commission Youth Ministry

