

# Watching Our Consumption

Devotional Reading: Titus 1:5–9

Background Scripture: Daniel 1:8–20; 1 Corinthians 9:19–27;

1 Timothy 4:7–12

Today's Scripture: Daniel 1:8–17; 1 Timothy 4:7–8

## I. Firm Resolve

### Daniel 1:8–10

**8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.**

**9 Now God had brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs.**

**10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Daniel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your meat and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse liking than the children which are of your sort? then shall ye make me endanger my head to the king.**

8. *Daniel* and his companions are forcibly removed from their families and brought to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar. The intention behind bringing them to the palace was to “reprogram” them, so to speak. At the palace of King Nebuchadnezzar, they are trained to serve in the royal court, a process meant to thoroughly assimilate them into the culture of their conquerors. To begin this process, *the prince of the eunuchs* gives Daniel and his friends new names. Daniel's refusal of the food prescribed to him an attempt to push back against his con-

queror and hold on to his identity as a servant of God.

It is not clear, however, what it is about the king's royal food that may *defile* Daniel. The Law of Moses forbids eating certain kinds of *meat*, but other kinds are perfectly acceptable. *Wine* is not forbidden, though it is spoken of in negative terms when excess is involved.

Daniel's decision is less about maintaining ritual purity through diet and more about maintaining a sense of identity by refusing to be completely assimilated into the empire that conquered his people. Daniel chooses to use his body and the food he eats as a way of honoring God.

9. For the first time in the book of Daniel, *God* is credited as the active force. Daniel's situation echoes the relationship between Joseph and the prison warden (Genesis 39:20–23). In both cases, the person who obeys and follows God finds favor and approval from others.

The sentiment expressed by the *prince of the eunuchs* is more than a feeling of sympathy toward Daniel. The Hebrew word translated *tender love* is also translated as “mercies” (Daniel 9:9), and that is the sense here. The phrase evokes faithfulness and loyalty. Moreover, the two Hebrew words translated as *favour* and *tender love* describe God's commitment to His people throughout Scripture (Isaiah 63:7).

10. The *prince of the eunuchs* does not give Daniel an immediately desirable answer. It's not a flat refusal, but it points out that if things go wrong, more people than Daniel will suffer the consequences. What Daniel is requesting—to reject a visible and substantial sign of allegiance and assimilation—could be dangerous. The desires of kings are not to be taken lightly. The death penalty is a very real possibility. What we might think to be hyperbole on the part of the official seems to be a genuine fear.

The main concern seems to be that by refusing the food and *drink* appointed by the king, Daniel and his companions will be eating inferior food. The prince of the eunuchs anticipates this will render them visibly less healthy than *the children which are of your sort*.

In the end, by not giving a flat refusal, the prince of the eunuchs gives Daniel tacit permission to continue pursuing his request. As a loyal servant, he cannot promote Daniel's request. Nevertheless, the favor and tender love that God kindled in him causes the prince of the eunuchs to allow Daniel to pursue it without interference.

## II. Agreeable Arrangement

### Daniel 1:11–14

**11 Then said Daniel to Melzar, whom the prince of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah,**

**12 Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink.**

**13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the children that eat of the portion of the king's meat: and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.**

**14 So he consented to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.**

11–12. The translators of the *King James Version* determined that the word *Melzar* is a proper name; later studies propose that the meaning of the word *Melzar* is “overseer,” “steward,” or “guard.” So it is possible that the word is used as a common noun to refer to a guard in service to *the prince of the eunuchs*.

Although Daniel is now speaking with a different person, he is continuing the same request. The addition of *Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah* underscores the fact that Daniel is making this dietary request for his community. Unless individuals only eat what they grow, kill, or forage entirely, food is always sourced in the context of connections between people or groups. Daniel chooses to use diet as a means of maintaining his identity, including his connection to his people and God.

By asking for *ten days* to test his dietary request, Daniel acknowledges the warning the prince of the eunuchs has given. Daniel also offers an alternative to the king's food: *pulse*. The Hebrew word used here is rare, occurring only here and in Daniel 1:16 (below), where it appears with a slightly different spelling. It is related to the Hebrew word for *seed*. It could refer to a diet of seeds, meaning legumes and grains. It could also indicate things that grow from seeds, including fruits and vegetables. This diet resembles what God gave humans to eat in the garden of Eden.

We do not assume that Daniel requests an entirely vegetarian diet. In Daniel 10:3, he temporarily stops eating meat, so it must be concluded that he consumes meat more or less regularly.

No matter what we assume the “king's meat” and “pulse” to be, there remains a strong contrast between what Daniel is ordered to eat and what he is requesting to eat. The portion of the royal food and wine are symbols of power and privilege. Even if it is just a fancy loaf of bread,

it is something that can presumably be obtained only by the king's permission. It is, therefore, a tangible way in which the king demonstrates his power.

13. Daniel essentially places the outcome of his request in Melzar's hands. This keeps the experiment behind the scenes while also ensuring that Melzar will feel confident in the outcome.

14. Melzar gives his permission. *Ten days* is a very short amount of time. It is unlikely that Melzar expects a significant change in their appearances—especially a negative one.

### III. Clear Results Daniel 1:15–17

**15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.**

**16 Thus Melzar took away the portion of their meat, and the wine that they should drink; and gave them pulse.**

**17 As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.**

15. Despite expectations, Daniel and his companions all appear much healthier than those who *did eat the portion of the king's meat*. The *ten days* should not have made that big of a difference. Although God's activity is not explicitly stated, this is clearly divine intervention.

16. Having passed the test, Daniel and his companions are granted a dietary exemption on an ongoing basis.

17. This verse sets the stage for the narratives to follow. *God* is once again explicitly active, granting Daniel and his fellows *knowledge and skill* beyond what they were brought to court to learn. This is particularly true regarding Daniel's *understanding in all visions and dreams*. The text makes it

clear that Daniel will succeed in the Babylonian court, not because he earned it, but because God wills it.

### IV. Preferred Path 1 Timothy 4:7–8

**7 But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.**

**8 For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.**

7. This verse begins an expansion of the discussion in 1 Timothy 1:3–7, where Paul warns Timothy about false teachings and teachers that have their origin in legends and myths. Paul's caution against *profane and old wives' fables* here employs an imperative verb, which means it is an order, not a suggestion. This is the first imperative in a paired exhortation.

The second half of the paired imperative instructs Timothy to *exercise* himself. Paul uses athletic imagery, but the training he has in mind is not that of the athlete in pursuit of peak physical performance. Instead, Paul instructs Timothy to take the same drive and passion that an athlete devotes to his body and apply it to pursuing *godliness*. It's not enough to merely avoid evil; one must pursue holiness.

8. The phrase *profiteth little* is sometimes wrongly interpreted to mean that there is nothing to be gained from taking care of the body. The Greek word used here indicates that something is small in comparison to something else. In other words, it is “not nothing.” There is something to be gained from *bodily exercise*.

On the other hand, genuine *godliness* is beneficial both in the present and in eternity. The godly life yields peace, harmony, and contentment that cannot be found by any other means.

# Involvement Learning

## Watching Our Consumption

### Into the Lesson

Write down foods that fall into either category.

*Healthy:*

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*Unhealthy:*

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### Into the Word

Read Daniel 1:8–17. Describe the cultural and social pressures that Daniel and his friends faced.

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How would you have responded to the pressures they faced?

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What would help you act as boldly as Daniel acted?

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Why do you think Daniel and his friends wanted to avoid the king's food and drink?

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Do you think Daniel and his friends knew God would reward their decision? Why or why not?

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Read 1 Timothy 4:7–8. In what ways are physical fitness and spiritual fitness similar and dissimilar?

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What do we need to live spiritually healthy and godly lives?

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### Key Text

Exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little; but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.  
—1 Timothy 4:7b–8

### Into Life

On a blank sheet of paper, write down an hour-by-hour inventory of an average day. What changes would you like to make in the upcoming week so that you will honor God with your time, diet, and attention?

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### Thought to Remember

Honor God by honoring your body.