BUILT DIFFERENT
Week 1: Dare to Be Different
Holiness Begins with a Decision

Main Scripture: Daniel 1:1–21
Key Verse: Daniel 1:8

INTRODUCTION: WE WERE NEVER CALLED TO FIT IN

Have you ever noticed how much pressure there is in our world to fit in?
Think about it. We buy clothes because they're popular. We watch television shows because everyone is talking about them. We buy things we don't need, with money we don't have, to impress people we don't particularly like!

We live in a culture that constantly tells us what we should look like, how we should think, what we should believe, and how we should behave. And that pressure doesn't stop when we become Christians. The world tells us that biblical convictions are outdated. It tells us that holiness is unrealistic, that truth is relative, and that following Jesus is acceptable if it doesn't interfere with how we want to live.

The message is simple: You can be a Christian, just don't be too different.
You can believe in Jesus, just don't let it affect your lifestyle.
You can attend church, just don't allow Scripture to challenge the culture around you.
But here's the problem: Jesus never called us to blend in. He called us to belong to Him.

Romans 12:2 reminds us not to conform to the pattern of this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

The Christian life isn't about fitting Jesus into the life we already have. It's about allowing Jesus to transform every part of who we are. That brings us to Daniel, a young man who found himself surrounded by a culture that wanted to change everything about him.
Daniel was living in Babylon. Babylon had a plan for his life. But God had something different in mind.

Today, we're going to discover four truths from Daniel chapter 1 about what it means to be BUILT DIFFERENT.

1. THE WORLD WILL TRY TO REDEFINE WHO YOU ARE

Daniel 1:1–7

To appreciate Daniel's story, we need to understand what was happening.
Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Jerusalem and took selected young men into captivity.
Daniel and his friends were chosen for a training program designed to prepare them for service in the king's palace.

They would learn Babylonian literature and language, receive food from the king's table, and eventually serve the Babylonian government.
But Babylon wasn't simply interested in educating these young men. Babylon wanted to assimilate them.

It wanted to take young men raised to worship the God of Israel and reshape their thinking around Babylonian culture.
Consider what happened to them.

A. Their environment was changed.

They were removed from Jerusalem and brought into Babylon. Everything familiar was gone: their homeland, their temple, their families, and their normal patterns of worship.
Sometimes our greatest spiritual challenges begin when our environment changes.
It's easy to demonstrate Christian convictions when we're surrounded by people who share them.
But what happens when we're the only Christian in the room? What happens when our workplace operates according to values that contradict Scripture?
Daniel teaches us that our faith cannot depend entirely upon our surroundings.
If your faith only works when you're surrounded by Christians, your faith isn't prepared for Babylon.

B. Their education was changed.

Daniel 1:4 tells us that these young men were taught the language and literature of the Babylonians.
For three years, they would be immersed in a worldview different from the one in which they had been raised.
Babylon understood something important: If you can influence the way someone thinks, you can eventually influence the way they live.
Isn't that still true today?
Our minds are constantly being shaped by social media, entertainment, news, conversations, and relationships.
We cannot continually fill our minds with the values of the world and expect our lives to consistently reflect the character of Christ.
What we allow into our minds eventually influences what comes out of our lives.

C. Their names were changed.

Their Hebrew names reflected their relationship with the God of Israel. Their Babylonian names connected them with Babylonian religious culture. Babylon was attempting to reshape their identity.

But here's what I love about Daniel:
Babylon could change his address. Babylon could change his education. Babylon could even change his name. But Babylon could not change who Daniel belonged to.
And the same needs to be true of us.
Our culture may attempt to define us by our possessions, accomplishments, failures, relationships, or social status.
But when we surrender our lives to Jesus Christ, our identity is established in Him.

Romans 12:2 — Resist the world's pattern

Paul writes:
"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Paul describes two different ways of living: conforming to the world or being transformed by God. The word conform captures the idea of taking on an outward pattern. Paul calls believers to something deeper than changing their appearance. He calls for the renewal of their minds.
The world wants to shape you into its image, but God wants to transform you into the likeness of Christ.

We need to ask ourselves: Are we allowing Scripture to shape our worldview, or are we allowing the culture around us to determine what we believe?

1 Peter 2:9 — Remember who you belong to

Peter describes believers as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God's special possession.

Our identity is not ultimately determined by our surroundings. It is determined by the God who has called us out of darkness into His wonderful light.
We belong to Him.

If we're going to be built different, we must first know who we belong to. Then we must decide whether we're willing to live according to that identity.

2. HOLINESS MUST BE DECIDED BEFORE COMPROMISE IS OFFERED

Daniel 1:8

"But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine..." (NIV)

I want you to notice that word resolved. Daniel didn't wait until he had spent several years in Babylon before deciding whether he would remain faithful to God. He made a decision at the beginning.
The Hebrew expression communicates a deliberate decision of the heart. Daniel settled the matter.
He established a boundary. He determined that there were certain things he would not compromise, regardless of the pressure surrounding him.

A. Compromise rarely begins with something enormous.

Most Christians don't wake up one morning and decide to abandon their relationship with God.
Usually, it happens gradually. We begin making small allowances. We justify something we once recognized as wrong. We become comfortable with attitudes that once convicted us.

Our prayer lives weaken. We stop spending meaningful time in God's Word. Eventually, things that once bothered our conscience no longer seem particularly troubling.

Imagine driving down the highway with a vehicle whose alignment is slightly off.
At first, it's barely noticeable. But if the problem continues without correction, the vehicle gradually drifts from the lane. Spiritual compromise often works the same way.

It begins with a little drift. If we aren't paying attention, we can end up spiritually distant from God without ever making one dramatic decision to walk away.
You don't have to deliberately reject God to gradually drift away from Him.
That's why Daniel resolved beforehand.

B. Daniel knew where to draw the line.

Daniel didn't reject everything associated with Babylon. He learned the language, received the education, and eventually served in its government. But when he encountered something that threatened his faithfulness to God, he refused to compromise.
The text doesn't explicitly identify every reason the royal provisions would have defiled Daniel.
Possible concerns include Israel's dietary laws and the religious associations of the royal food.
What Scripture makes clear is that Daniel recognized a boundary he could not cross in good conscience before God.
There are boundaries we need to establish in our lives.
There are conversations we should not entertain, behaviors we cannot justify, and decisions we cannot make simply because everyone else is doing them.

C. Holiness is more than avoiding bad behavior.

Sometimes people misunderstand holiness as a long list of things Christians aren't allowed to do. Don't do this. Don't watch that. Don't go there. But biblical holiness is much deeper than external behavior. Holiness begins with belonging completely to God.

Joshua 24:15 — Decide whom you will serve

Joshua declared: "But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD." (NIV)

Joshua challenged Israel to make a decision about whom they would serve. Daniel's resolve reflects that same determination. Both men understood that faithfulness begins with a settled commitment to God.

We must decide whom we will serve before our convictions are tested. What will we allow into our minds? How will we conduct ourselves at work? Will we compromise our integrity for advancement? Will we obey Scripture when it contradicts popular opinion?

If we wait until temptation arrives to decide what we believe, we may find ourselves negotiating convictions we should have already settled.

1 Peter 1:15–16 — God's call to holiness

Peter writes that just as the One who called us is holy, we are to be holy in all we do, because God is holy.

God isn't merely interested in changing our habits. He desires to transform our hearts.
Holiness tradition, we believe that God calls believers beyond forgiveness into a deeper work of grace.
Entire sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit, cleansing the heart from original sin and empowering the believer for wholehearted love and obedience to God.
This isn't something we accomplish through greater personal discipline alone. We surrender ourselves completely to Him and trust His sanctifying grace.
Our obedience becomes an expression of love for God rather than an attempt to earn His acceptance.
Preaching Statement: Holiness isn't about proving how good you are. It's about demonstrating how completely you belong to God.
Congregational Challenge: Have you resolved in your heart that Jesus has authority over every area of your life?
Not just Sunday mornings. Your marriage, finances, relationships, entertainment, thought life, and private decisions.
Being built different begins with a surrendered heart.

3. YOU CAN STAND FOR TRUTH WITHOUT LOSING YOUR TESTIMONY

I love how Daniel handles this situation.
He has strong convictions. He knows what he believes. He has determined that he will not defile himself. But notice how he approaches the official responsible for him.

He doesn't become arrogant. He doesn't insult the Babylonians. He doesn't create an unnecessary confrontation. Instead, Daniel respectfully requests permission not to eat the royal provisions. When the official expresses concern about the potential consequences, Daniel proposes a ten-day test involving vegetables and water. Daniel demonstrates something the modern church desperately needs to understand: You can be uncompromising in your convictions without becoming unkind in your conduct.

A. Conviction and compassion are not enemies.

Some Christians seem to believe that standing for biblical truth requires being angry with everyone who disagrees. But that's not what Jesus modeled. Jesus never compromised truth, yet He demonstrated extraordinary compassion toward people who were spiritually lost, broken, and struggling. He could confront sin while extending grace to sinners.

Church, our world does not need Christians who are simply louder. It needs Christians who are genuinely more like Jesus.

1 Peter 3:15–16 — Speak with gentleness and respect

Peter instructs believers to be prepared to explain their hope, doing so with gentleness, respect, and a clear conscience.

Daniel maintained his convictions while approaching the Babylonian official respectfully.
We can stand firmly for biblical truth without becoming hostile or disrespectful.
Before posting that comment, sharing that response, or entering that argument, ask yourself: Does this reflect the character of Christ? Am I trying to demonstrate God's truth, or am I simply trying to win an argument?

B. How we stand matters as much as where we stand.

Suppose you're at work and someone begins a conversation that moves in a direction you know is inconsistent with your Christian convictions. You have several choices. You can participate because you don't want to feel uncomfortable. You can respond with anger and embarrass everyone involved. Or you can graciously establish a boundary without compromising your witness.
Daniel chose a response that honored God and demonstrated respect toward the official.
He didn't surrender his convictions. But he also didn't surrender his character.

Matthew 5:16 — Let your light shine

Jesus teaches that our light should shine before others so that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven. Notice the purpose. We don't live differently so people will be impressed with us. We live differently so people can see Him.

Our integrity should point people toward Jesus. Our kindness should point people toward Jesus. Our conduct should demonstrate the transforming grace of Jesus. Imagine what could happen if every person in our congregation made that commitment.

What if 250 people decided that wherever God placed them, they would represent Christ faithfully? In their neighborhoods. In their workplaces. In their schools. In their homes.
Our community would begin encountering the character of Christ through the ordinary lives of His people.

4. GOD CAN USE A LIFE THAT REFUSES TO COMPROMISE

Daniel 1:15–21

At the end of the ten-day testing period, Daniel and his friends appeared healthier than the young men who had eaten the royal food. Later in the chapter, Scripture tells us that God gave these four young men knowledge and understanding. Daniel also received the ability to understand visions and dreams. When the king examined them, he found them superior in wisdom and understanding to the others who had been trained.

But don't miss the most important detail. Their faithfulness was rooted in God, and their abilities were gifts from God. Daniel didn't become successful because he discovered a secret formula for advancement. God was working through his life.

A. God can position faithful people in unexpected places.

Think about Daniel's circumstances. He was a captive living in a foreign nation. He had been removed from his homeland. His future was uncertain. Yet God was preparing to use him in the highest levels of government.

Daniel would serve through multiple administrations and witness the rise and fall of kingdoms.
His circumstances were far from ideal, but God was still at work. Sometimes we make the mistake of believing that God can only use us when everything in our lives is going well.
We think we need a better job, a different environment, more money, or more influence.
But Daniel reminds us that God can use faithful people in difficult circumstances.
You may not have chosen the environment you're currently living or working in. But you can choose to honor God while you're there.

Proverbs 3:5–6 — Trust God's direction

Solomon teaches us to trust in the Lord with all our hearts, not lean on our own understanding, and acknowledge Him in all our ways.
Daniel's circumstances were beyond his control, but he remained faithful to God.
Our responsibility is to trust and submit to God even when we cannot see the entire path ahead.
You may not control where God has placed you, but you can choose to trust Him while you're there.

B. Faithfulness is more important than popularity.

Daniel's decision could have cost him his opportunity to serve in the palace.
He could have been rejected from the training program. But Daniel valued his relationship with God more than the approval of Babylon. Sometimes we become so concerned about whether the world accepts Christianity that we begin adjusting Christianity to make it more acceptable to the world.
We soften biblical truth. We avoid difficult subjects. We redefine holiness. We measure spiritual success by popularity rather than faithfulness.
But God has never called His church to become a reflection of the culture. He has called His church to become a reflection of Christ.

Galatians 6:9 — Don't grow weary in doing good

Paul reminds believers not to become weary in doing good, because at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.
Daniel's faithfulness continued over many years. His story reminds us that obedience is not merely a one-time decision. It is a lifelong commitment.
Sometimes faithfulness produces visible fruit immediately. Other times, we must continue trusting God when the results are unseen.
And we must remember that God's faithfulness does not guarantee an easy life. Daniel would later face threats to his life, and his friends would face a blazing furnace.
Faithfulness does not exempt us from hardship. But hardship does not place us beyond God's care.
Preaching Statement: Keep doing what is right, even when doing what is right isn't immediately rewarded.

CONCLUSION: WHAT HAVE YOU RESOLVED IN YOUR HEART?

Daniel 1:8

"But Daniel resolved..."
Before Daniel interpreted dreams, he resolved.
Before he became influential, he resolved.
Before he faced the lions' den, he resolved.
Before the world recognized his faith, he had already determined whom he would serve.
And church, I believe God is calling us to make that same kind of decision today.
We live in a world that desperately needs to see authentic Christianity.
Not merely people who attend church. Not merely people who identify themselves as religious.
But men and women whose hearts have been transformed by the grace of God.

People who love differently. People who forgive differently. People who respond to adversity differently. People who demonstrate integrity when nobody is watching.
People who are not ashamed to stand upon the truth of God's Word.
We weren't created to blend into the darkness. We were called to reflect the light of Jesus Christ.
But have we allowed Babylon to influence us more than we've allowed God to transform us?
Have we become comfortable with things that once troubled our conscience?
Have we compromised our convictions because standing firm became inconvenient?
Have we settled for being Sunday Christians rather than fully surrendered followers of Jesus?
The good news is that God's grace is available today.
He doesn't simply point out the areas of our lives that need to change. He offers us the power to be transformed.

Through Jesus Christ, we can experience forgiveness, cleansing, renewal, and the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit.
We don't have to remain who we used to be.
We can be BUILT DIFFERENT