

The Daniel Dilemma

STUDY GUIDE | SIX SESSIONS



How to
Stand Firm & Love Well
in a Culture
of Compromise

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New York Times Bestselling Author



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The Daniel Dilemma Study Guide

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SESSION 1



In the World but Not of It

Truth without grace is mean. Grace without truth is meaningless.
Truth and grace together are good medicine.

CHRIS HODGES

Getting Started

“Does it really matter what this movie is rated?”

“How should I vote on issues that contradict my beliefs?”

“When is it appropriate for me to bring up my faith with my coworkers of different faiths?”

Sound familiar? More and more Christians today are asking questions like these as they grapple with how to live out their faith in that world that seems to change at dizzying speed. We all feel the struggle between standing firm in our faith while loving others. Or, as Jesus described it, being in the world but not of it (see John 17:16).

It can be difficult to navigate. But as followers of Jesus, we have an important message to share. Jesus commanded us to go into the world and “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), and his sacrifice on the cross makes it possible for *all* people—no matter how different they might seem from us—to find hope in a relationship with the living God. When those around us experience his forgiveness, they can begin living in the freedom of his grace.

The challenge, of course, occurs when our beliefs, convictions, practices, and lifestyles collide with those of the people we are trying to reach. God’s Word instructs us to go one way, but they insist on going their own way. In such situations, we are faced with the responsibility to stand firm in our faith while continuing to love others like Jesus loves them.

Finding balance while living in this tension is what *The Daniel Dilemma* is all about. While the book focuses on the prophet Daniel’s example of living faithfully within the secular culture of Babylon, in this study we will focus on the issues Daniel faced—issues we still face today—with Jesus as our model and guide. As challenging and frustrating as it may feel sometimes, there is a way to stand strong and love well.

So let’s get started!

First Impressions

For this first session, go around the group and introduce yourselves to one another, and then answer the following questions:

What one word would you choose to describe your feelings about starting this study? How does this word reflect your expectations?

How have you experienced the tension between loving others where they are in life and standing firm to God's principles in the Bible?

Video Teaching

Play the video segment for session 1. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts, questions, or points that stand out to you.

Notes

Being in the world but not of it

Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane

Three things to help us navigate the tension:

Lord, sanctify me

Lord, solidify me

Lord, send me

We're all called to make a difference

Group Discussion

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. In the video, Chris shares about making changes in his life after becoming a Christian. What changes did you make after inviting Jesus into your life?
2. How did others, especially your family and friends, respond when they saw the changes you made after becoming a follower of Jesus?

3. Read John 17:13–19. What surprises you most about Jesus' prayer, considering that he was about to die the next day?
4. Why do you think Jesus asks God *not* to take his followers out of the world?
5. What comes to mind when you hear the word *sanctified* at the end of this passage? What does sanctified mean to you?

6. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world” (Matthew 5:14). What does it mean for you to let your light shine where others can see it?

Individual Activity

Close out today’s session by completing this short activity on your own.

1. Briefly review the video outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant point you took away from this session—from the teaching, activities, or discussions.

What I want to remember from this session is . . .

Closing Prayer

Go around the room and share any personal prayer requests you'd like the group to pray about. Conclude your session by praying for these requests together. Ask God to work in each of your hearts throughout the week as you reflect on all you've covered during this first meeting.



BETWEEN-SESSIONS PERSONAL STUDY

You're invited to begin reading Chris's exploration of Daniel as a model for how to stand strong and love well in *The Daniel Dilemma*. This week, read the introduction and, in preparation for session 2, read section 1, chapters 1–3, on “Culture’s Greatest Impact—Confused Identities.” The questions and exercises provided in this section are not intended to burden you with homework between group sessions but simply to help you receive the greatest benefit from reading the book and applying its principles to your own life. Write your responses and reflections here or in a journal or notebook dedicated to this study. There will be time for you to share your thoughts at the beginning of the next session.

Reflection

In the video this week, Chris shared about the early struggles he experienced with his girlfriend and his buddies after he committed his life to Jesus. Although he was terrified of their responses, he discovered God had uniquely prepared the way for him to tell others about his faith. Spend a few minutes today reflecting on your faith journey since you first made the decision to accept God's gift of salvation in Jesus.

What have been the high points—times when you felt especially close to God and reflected this to others?

What have been the low points—times when you’ve drifted away from God or become swept up in worldly pursuits?

How have these highs and lows influenced your present ability to find the balance between standing firm and loving well?

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When culture shifts—and it always has and always will—we tend toward the extremes, in part because they seem easier and require less of us. We may feel so angry, threatened, and frustrated that we want to withdraw from culture, attacking and condemning people who don't agree with us. Or we may become so battle weary that we're tempted to issue a blanket acceptance that avoids any cultural conflicts. But the good news of the gospel means we don't have to become paralyzed by extremes. We can be the calm in the midst of the cultural storm.

THE DANIEL DILEMMA, PAGES XVIII-XIX

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Application

In the introduction, Chris cites the story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8 as one of his favorite examples of Jesus balancing truth and love. The religious leaders tried to trap Jesus into saying something they could use against him, but he turned the tables on them while still caring for the poor woman they had humiliated:

As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

“Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?” . . .

They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to

the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

“No, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more” (John 8:7–11, NLT).

Who do you identify with most in this scene—the woman or the religious legalists? Why?

Chris explains, “[Jesus] doesn’t condemn the woman like the religious legalists; instead, he shows her grace. But he doesn’t let her off the hook either; he tells her to ‘go and sin no more.’ Jesus avoids the extremes of either-or by displaying both love *and* righteousness.” Do you agree with Chris’s explanation? Why or why not?

How have you faced a confrontational situation like this? What role did you play? Did you end up experiencing more grace or more judgment?

Thinking back over your life, when has someone demonstrated the same balance Jesus displays here, showing you both love and righteousness?

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Knowing what we believe and why we believe it is foundational to our ability to be people of positive influence. Having God's truth as our point of reference not only allows us to withstand the swirling currents of cultural change, but it also allows us to extend a lifeline of grace to others around us.

THE DANIEL DILEMMA, PAGE 25

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Action

Finding spiritual balance involves engaging with the world without allowing it to pull you away from God. Would you describe yourself as someone who is currently too immersed in the world? Or someone who is too detached from the world? Explain your answer.

Engaging with the world in ways that demonstrate both strength and compassion requires constant reliance on God, his Word, and the Holy Spirit. Choose a place where you presently engage with the world around you on a regular basis. It might be your workplace, the local shopping mall, your school, your health club, or a city park. If possible, visit that place today and spend a few minutes walking through it and around it. Pray silently for God to use you there as someone like Daniel—a person who influenced those around him. Ask God to show you how you can demonstrate the love of Christ to others there.

Reflect on your experience after completing this exercise, and ask God to show you areas where you may be too engaged with the world and its influence. Ask him to search you and help you

identify anything (shows, movies, websites, social media, music, places, people) that is pulling you away from your relationship with him. Take the necessary steps to remove these influences from your life.

This week, read the introduction and, in preparation for session 2, read part 1, “Culture’s Greatest Impact” (chapters 1–3), in *The Daniel Dilemma*. Use the space below to note any key points or questions you want to share at the beginning of your next group meeting.