

# 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

**<sup>8</sup> But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. <sup>9</sup> Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, <sup>10</sup> but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.”**

8. *Daniel* and his companions are forcibly removed from their families and brought to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar. The king intended to bring them to the palace and “reprogram” them, so to speak—to thoroughly assimilate them into the culture of their conquerors. To begin this process, *the chief official* gives Daniel and his friends new names. Daniel’s refusal of the food prescribed to him is an attempt to push back against his conqueror and hold on to his identity as a servant of God.

It is not clear 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 (Leviticus 11:1–46; Deuteronomy 14:1–21). *Wine* is not forbidden

(Numbers 6:20; 18:12; 1 Samuel 1:24; Psalm 104:14–15; etc.), though it is spoken of in negative terms when excess is involved (Isaiah 28:7; 5:11, 22; Proverbs 20:1). Daniel may be avoiding food and drink associated with pagan temple offerings and thus idolatry. But under this theory, the vegetarian alternative he proposes in verse 12 would be equally suspect since flour is also offered to pagan idols.

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). For both Daniel and Joseph, obedience to God results in favor and approval from others.

The sentiment expressed by *the official* is more than a feeling of sympathy toward Daniel. The Hebrew word translated *compassion* is also translated as “merciful” in Daniel 9:9, and that is the sense here. The phrase evokes ideas of faithfulness and loyalty. Moreover, the two Hebrew words translated as *favor* and *compassion* appear together throughout Scripture to describe

God's commitment to his people (Psalm 25:6; Isaiah 63:7; Hosea 2:19; etc.).

10. *The official* does not give Daniel an immediately desirable answer. It's not a flat refusal, but he 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 official's main concern is that by refusing the *food and drink* appointed by the king, Daniel and his companions will be eating inferior food. The official anticipates this will render them visibly less healthy *than the other young men*.

In the end, by not giving a flat refusal, the official 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 official to allow Daniel to try it.

## II. Agreeable Arrangement Daniel 1:11–14

**<sup>11</sup> Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” <sup>14</sup> So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.**

11–12. The underlying Hebrew word translated *guard* appears only here and in Daniel 1:16. Older English translations,

such as the *King James Version*, translate the word as the proper name “Melzar.” However, more recent studies suggest that the word means “overseer,” “steward,” or “guard,” as reflected in the *New International Version*. This individual is likely a guard serving the chief official.

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 official has given. Daniel also offers an alternative to the king's food: *vegetables*. The Hebrew word used here is rare, occurring only here and in Daniel 1:16, where it appears with a slightly different spelling. It could refer to a diet of seeds, meaning legumes and grains. 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 “royal food” and vegetables 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 places the outcome of his request in the guard's hands. This keeps the experiment behind the scenes while also ensuring that the guard will feel confident in the outcome.

14. The guard gives his permission. *Ten days* is a very short amount of time for such an experiment. It is unlikely that the guard expects a significant change in their appearances—especially a negative one.

### III. Clear Results Daniel 1:15–17

**15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.**

**17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.**

15. Despite expectations, Daniel and his companions all appear much healthier than *any of the young men who ate the royal food*. The *ten days* should not have made that big of a difference. Although God is not explicitly stated to be active in the situation, this is clearly divine intervention.

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

17. *God* is once again explicitly active, granting Daniel and his fellows *knowledge and understanding* beyond what they were brought to court to learn. This is particularly true regarding Daniel's understanding of *visions and dreams of all kinds*. 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 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life 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 *godless myths and old wives' tales* here employs an imperative verb, which means it is an order, not a suggestion. This is the first imperative in a paired exhortation; the other appears in the second half of the verse.

The second half of the paired imperative instructs Timothy to *train* 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. Paul begins by acknowledging that there is *some value* in *physical training*. It is not worthless. The Greek word used here indicates that something is small in comparison to something else. The physical body is a gift from God. Jesus cared for his physical body (Mark 6:31; 11:12–13), and so should we.

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. And unlike physical health, spiritual health lasts forever. Death cannot conquer it.

# 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

Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life 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.