

Where Do You Draw the Line?

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Strangers in a Strange Land

Daniel 3

I want to begin with two stories: one personal and another involving a couple here at the Vineyard. Many of you know that I used to teach at Ohio State way back in the 1980's. While I was teaching I had the opportunity to publish several articles in some leading law journals and I won a national award for Article of the Year written by Business Law Professors. My name got out there as a young professor on the rise and I got this sweet offer from a Washington, D.C., public relations firm. They asked if I would write guest editorials that they would then place in major newspapers – the New York Times and the Washington Post and so on. They said that they would supply all the background research. They estimated that my writing time would take no more than two hours for each editorial. And they guaranteed that they would have me write at least 10 editorials per year and I would make \$1,500 for each one.

Now, this was back in the 1980's and back then \$1,500 was a lot of money for two hours of work. Some people like me still think that's a big chunk of change. So I thought: What a sweet gig! An extra \$15,000-20,000 per year for a young family. I could bank all of that money and pay for my kids' college. Thank you, God! Sign me up!

Well, a month later they sent me the topic for my first editorial. They wanted me to advocate for the commercial-free speech rights of cigarette companies like Philip Morris who was employing this PR firm who would hire people like me to advocate for Philip Morris to market cigarettes on TV as a matter of Philip Morris' First Amendment rights.

Theoretically, I support a pretty broad understanding of the First Amendment. I like free speech. But did I really want to sell my name to cigarette companies so that they could more easily sell their poison? Did I really want to use my talent to promote cigarettes? Did I really want to use my talents in order to convince more people to kill themselves? But the money was really good. I could send my kids to college with what this PR firm was offering.

So, what did I do? Well, I decided to seek counsel. I talked with an older professor who I respected from my days in law school. He was absolutely of no help. He said, "Well, if I was your age" (I was in my late 20's at the time) "it would be hard to turn down this offer. You have a young family. You could really use the money. I don't know, that's hard to turn down."

I walked out of his office more confused than ever. I thought to myself, “What am I doing? I need to pray.” So, I took a walk around the OSU Oval and I prayed. I said, “Lord, you have a perfect will in this. I’m willing to do whatever you want me to do.” By the time I got back to my office, I knew exactly what I needed to do. So, I wrote the PR firm a simple letter saying, “Please take my name off your writing list. I’m unable to write for you.”

Once I wrote that letter and sent it off, I had no sense of loss. I never thought: my goodness, I gave up all this money. Instead, I had a sense of relief and a deep sense of peace. I knew that I’d done God’s will and maintained my integrity.

Have you ever had to draw a line where it really cost you? Professionally? Financially? Romantically? Relationally?

There’s a couple in our congregation who some years ago discovered that they were going to have a baby who because of a genetic abnormality was going to die shortly after birth. The doctors recommended that this woman abort the baby. Not because there was some risk to the mom if she carried the baby to term. Rather, their reasoning was why go through nine months of pregnancy only to have your baby die after birth. Why not abort the baby now?

She came to talk with me. At the time, her views regarding abortion were not real well defined. “Why not abort?” she asked. Why carry this baby to term? I said there’s a few reasons why you’d carry the baby to term. First, God is the Author of Life. We don’t want to usurp God’s role regarding whether a baby that God has given us should live or whether that baby should die. That’s up to God. Second, you never know if God will choose to intervene to heal your baby in the womb. We’ve had a number of babies born in this church who were supposed to be born dead and who were either miraculously healed in the womb or who thrived after birth contrary to medical predictions. We don’t know what God will do if we give him an opportunity to work. So, we talked on a few occasions and this couple resolved to keep the baby. The baby did die following birth as the doctors predicted. We grieved the loss of the baby. Held a memorial service.

Do you know what happened? That decision by this couple caused this couple to draw a line. To say: Even though this is going to cost me, I’m going to do what I believe is right. I’m going to do God’s will. Even though it’s scary. That simple decision to draw a line propelled them forward spiritually. They’ve been leaders in our church for the last 15 or 20 years.

Have you ever had to draw a line where it really cost you? Professionally. Financially. Romantically. Relationally. Or to put it differently, do you have any non-negotiables in your life on which you will not compromise.

I started a series a few weeks ago from the book of Daniel. For those of you who weren't here for the first two messages, when Daniel was a teenager his country, the nation of Judah (modern day Israel) was invaded by the nation of Babylon. Many of the Jewish people living in Judah and its capital city, Jerusalem, were taken captive and exiled back to Babylon, which was ruled by a king named Nebuchadnezzar.

So, Daniel and three of his friends who were teenagers at the time became part of this Jewish band of exiles in Babylon. They were Strangers in a Strange Land. They found that so much of what they experienced in Babylon hostile to the most deeply held values that they had as Jews. For those of us who are followers of Christ, I realize not everyone who is listening to me today is a follower of Christ, but for those of us who are followers of Christ, we often find ourselves in situations where what is proposed is at odds with something that we deeply believe or a value that we deeply hold. Now, we don't want to fight with everyone over everything. We understand that our culture doesn't pretend to hold on to biblical values.

Here's the question I want to tackle today: Where do you draw the line? That's the title of today's message.

Let's pray.

Daniel 3:1-7

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide,[a] and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace."

7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Nebuchadnezzar is just part of a long line of people who believe themselves to be god and demand that the world bow down to them.

The Demand to Bow Down

One classic definition of

Sin = Life Curved in on Itself

Sin is the self-centered view of life. Whereas, its opposite, love, is an other-centered view of life.

Love = Other-Centered View of Life

Sin causes us to weigh everything in terms of its effect on us. How was I treated? What do people think of me? What am I going to get out of this? How do I advance my interests? When this self-centered attitude is not suppressed in us, it's not fought against but is rather given full-reign in a person's life, it becomes pathological.

Psychiatrists these days talk about Narcissistic Personality Disorder, a disorder in which a person has a grossly inflated view of self-importance. Narcissists are people who have an excessive need for admiration. They have to put their name on everything. Like Nebuchadnezzar, they build gigantic monuments to themselves. They have no regard for other people's feelings they lack empathy. They can crush someone else without giving it a moment's thought.

Narcissists have an inflated sense of entitlement. Everyone owes me. Of course, I should get the lion share of everything. If we're dividing up our parents' estate, of course I should get 90%. We're dividing up credit on a project that a team worked on, of course I should get all the credit.

One place that you really see narcissism play out is that narcissists are incredibly thin-skinned. They can't handle any opposition or any criticism at all without flying into a rage. Have you ever met anyone who constantly needs to be praised? Who steps on people's feelings without any sense of regret? Have you ever met someone who will never apologize under any circumstance? Never back down? Who believes themselves entitled to more money than anyone else? More credit than anyone else? More women or men than anyone else? Their name has to be attached to everything. Someone who can't handle criticism without rage. That was Nebuchadnezzar.

Read verse 12

Daniel 3:12

But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Three Jews won’t bow down to Nebuchadnezzar and his statue. Does he brush it off? Does he say: “Who cares about this minor slight from these inconsequential foreigners? I’m king of an empire. I’m more powerful than anyone in the world! Who cares about these three little gnats and what they do?”

The narcissist can brook no opposition. Everyone must bow down. So, what is Nebuchadnezzar’s reaction?

Daniel 3:13-16

13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, 14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? 15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?” 16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.

You say, “Who would demand that people bow down to a statue that they’ve erected and pain of death?”

Consider the recently deceased president of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov.

He renamed himself Turkmenbashi and until his death a decade ago, he was labeled one of the world’s most authoritarian and repressive dictators. And if you think Nebuchadnezzar was fond of himself, you are not familiar with Turkmenbashi. There was a poster or statue of him in nearly every single public space in the entire country. There was a gold-plated statue of him on top of the capitol’s largest building.

This statue rotated so that it always faced into the sun and shined light on Turkmenbashi’s face. The government has given him the Hero of Turkmenistan Award five times. Turkmenbashi said that he really didn’t like having his picture and statue everywhere, but that was what the people wanted.

Turkmenbashi shut down every rural library in the country so that the only books that could be read in rural regions were books that he personally wrote, offering his own spiritual guidance and philosophy about life. He renamed the month of January “Turkmenbashi” and he renamed April after his mother.

Now, there is nothing unique in all of this. During WWII a man named David Tsutada, a Japanese Christian, was thrown into jail in 1942. What was his crime? He was accused of treason by the Japanese government and held in solitary confinement for 1½ years in a tiny, dingy, damp basement cell. How did he commit treason against the Japanese government? He referred to Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He would not say that the Emperor Hirohito was greater than Jesus Christ.

It was in that prison cell that God began speaking to David Tsutada about a church planting ministry throughout Japan. God used solitary confinement to birth in David's heart a vision for the Immanuel General Mission that planted hundreds of churches in seven different countries around the world.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, like David Tsutada, refused to bow down.

The Refusal to Bow Down

Daniel 3:16-18

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

What is it that enables some people to draw a line and to refuse to succumb to the pressure of a dysfunctional family, to continue living with secrets and lies? What enables some people to draw a line and to confront generations of abuse or generations of alcoholism? When everyone else in the family just goes along with the program. What enables one person to stand up and say, "I'm not going with the program"? What enables some people to draw a line at work and say, "I'm not going to go along with this plan at work, I'm going to blow the whistle"? "I refuse to cook the books or hide illegal activity or lie about what the company did."

What enabled Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to resist the king, what enabled David Tsutada to draw line and not bow down to the Emperor Hirohito, what enables any follower of Christ to not simply be an echo of group-think is faith.

Faith is a commitment to the truth

So many people misunderstand the nature of faith. We pray for someone or for something to happen and we don't feel full of faith. We struggle with our feelings. So we say that we have very little faith. Faith is not a feeling where I gear myself up to believe something. Faith is a commitment, a choice. A stance towards the truth. I'm

choosing to trust in the God that Jesus Christ revealed to the world. I'm choosing to trust that God is just like Jesus. Jesus really was God come in the flesh. I'm choosing to trust that when God makes a promise, he doesn't lie. Faith is a commitment to the truth.

Or, to put it slightly differently, faith is a commitment to as much reality as you can possibly stand. The person with the most faith lives the most truthful life. They don't have to lie about themselves. They don't have to lie about the world and pretend the world is other than it is. They don't have to lie about God and pretend that God is other than God is. Faith grows as we commit ourselves to as much reality, as much truth as we can bear. That was something that Nebuchadnezzar was unwilling to do.

To remind you of what we read last week in Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar had a dream. In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a giant statue of a man. The statue had a head of gold, its chest and arms were silver, its torso was made of bronze, its legs of iron and its feet were made of clay. Its feet were very brittle. In Daniel 2, God reveals to the Prophet Daniel not only the content of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, what he dreamed, but also the interpretation. The interpretation was that this statue was representative of four successive kingdoms. If you laid the statue down on the ground, it was like a timeline.

Beginning with the head of gold, that was the kingdom of Babylon. Then interpreters say, "Well, the next three kingdoms are Media-Persia, Greece and Rome or the Medes, the Persians and Greece, but eventually the kingdoms going to break up."

At the end of Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar bows down before Daniel and acknowledges the Lord to be God. Here's what we read:

Daniel 2:46-47

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. ⁴⁷ The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery."

Then Nebuchadnezzar got to thinking and he said to himself, "You know, the future doesn't have to unfold the way that Daniel's God says it will unfold. I can bend the future to my will. There doesn't have to be a statue made of gold, silver, bronze, iron and clay. There doesn't have to be a succession of kingdoms. I can make my kingdom last forever. After all, I am the head of gold. So, I'm going to make a gigantic statue entirely out of gold that will last forever."

Let me drop this down. You don't lack faith when you feel flat as you pray. I just don't have a lot of feelings of excitement or anticipation as I pray for someone's healing or I pray for someone's salvation or I pray for a certain outcome. We don't even lack faith

when we can't imagine how a certain outcome can come about. I often ask God to fulfill my prayers beyond my capacity to imagine. A lack of faith is not a lack of feeling, it's not a lack of imagination. Despite bowing down to acknowledge the Lord, Nebuchadnezzar demonstrated a lack of faith when he chose to try to conform God's will to his desires rather than to conform his desires to God's will.

Let me say that again.

A lack of faith is the attempt to conform God's will to our desires, rather than our desires to God's will.

Whatever his verbal confession, Nebuchadnezzar demonstrates a lack of true faith. He said, "I really don't care what God said about the future and what God revealed about the temporariness of every human kingdom. I want my kingdom to last forever. So, I'm going to conform God's will, the truth of God's world and God's word, I'm going to conform God's will to my desires." God says what we sow we will reap. But we say, "No, we won't. We can sow without reaping."

God says that there are certain things that he hates. But we say – I can still enjoy God's blessing on my life even if I go ahead and do what God hates. I can ignore God and ignore God's will and my life will still go well.

There was a 17th Century theologian named Pierre Nicole who argued that human beings, "Not being willing to render their actions to conform to Law of God have endeavored to render Laws of God to conform to their actions."

We come to God's Word, to ultimate reality, we see what the Lord demands of us and instead of humbling ourselves and saying "Lord, I fall so far short of what you're asking of me. Do you forgive me? Have mercy on me. Help me to obey you." We say, "Surely, God doesn't really ask us to love him with our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind and our whole strength. Surely it's good enough if I go to church every once in a while. I'm not going to conform my actions to his word. I'm going to conform his word to my actions. Yes, I see that God's word demands that my yes be yes and when I make a commitment, I don't go back on it. You see, that commitment has now become quite costly, it's inconvenient for me to fulfill that promise. Nobody else is keeping their word so why should I?"

So, we conform truth to our actions rather than our actions to the truth. What is faith? Faith is a commitment to the truth. As much as possible, I'm going to bend my thoughts and my feelings and my actions and my beliefs to the truth that I find in Jesus Christ and to the truth that I find in the scriptures. How did Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego find the strength to stand up to the narcissist, Nebuchadnezzar in spite of his threats? In spite of the potential cost to their own lives? Faith.

Faith is a commitment to a set of non-negotiables.

Faith is a commitment to a set of non-negotiables

Do you have any non-negotiables in your life? Anything that no matter how much pressure is brought to bear you're not going to give in on these things? Do you have any place that you know that you've drawn a line and you refuse to cross that line even when it's costly? For many people, everything is up for sale. There's no non-negotiables. Every line is dotted.

This year, I decided to change the Bible that I use in my devotions. I would recommend to you that every so often you change the translation of the Bible you use in your devotions in order to get a fresh look at the scripture again. A fresh translation can pop you out of some ruts that you've fallen into. So, this past year I've been using the New Living Translation in my devotions. And I came upon this in Psalm 119 the other day.

Psalm 119:1-3 (NLT)

Joyful are people of integrity,
who follow the instructions of the LORD.

² Joyful are those who obey his laws
and search for him with all their hearts.

³ They do not compromise with evil,
and they walk only in his paths.

Is there anything in your life, friends, where you say, "I have refused to compromise here because of my commitment to Christ. This is where I've drawn a line and I'm not crossing it."

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had thought through a set of non-negotiables. You can go along with a lot in the larger society. We don't make everything an issue. Here's someone swearing in a grocery store. We don't necessarily confront them unless maybe we have a small child with us, we might say "hey, can you tone it down a little". There are lots of hills that we choose not to die on, but there are some places where we need to plant our flag. There are some places we need to draw a line. Like where?

Let me suggest a couple of things for you. You need a set of non-negotiables in marriage

Non-negotiables in dating and marriage

Single people do you have any list of non-negotiables at all regarding dating and marriage? Now, I know that there are some of you that don't just have a list, you've got

a book. You've got a thousand things that you require before you'd ever consider dating or especially marrying someone. They've got to look a certain way. They've got to have so much money. A woman told me once that one thing that was on her list was that any man she would date would have to have nice, polished shoes. If a man didn't polish his shoes, that meant he didn't care about how he presented himself to the world.

There are lots of areas in dating and marriage that we need to compromise. No one can meet every single expectation. Some singles have utterly unrealistic expectations of what an ideal mate should be like. But I would encourage you, single people, those of you who are thinking about dating or you are thinking about marriage, you ought to write a brief list of non-negotiables. Not a book, but a brief list: five, six, seven items – that's all – a brief list of where you draw the line and say, "I don't care how lonely I feel, how attractive this other person is, how they make me feel – I'm drawing a line here and I won't cross it."

How do you come up with your list of non-negotiables? Today, ask the Lord where you should draw the line regarding who you date and who you marry. Search out God's word. "Lord, what does your word say about who I should marry." Talk with a really mature Christian friend, an older Christian brother or sister, say, "If you were going to draw a line in dating or marriage, where would you draw it? What do you think should be on my list?"

Let me suggest a few things that would be on my list. The person that I date or marry must be a practicing Christian believer.

The Apostle Paul says in

2 Corinthians 6:14

Do not be yoked together to an unbeliever... for what agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?

There are all kinds of conflicts that arise in any close relationship. There are all kinds of issues that come up whenever you bring two people together in close relationship. It is absolutely essential that there be a common foundation for us to deal with our issues. The last thing that you need to be fighting about is your faith. Whether or not you are going to pray together. Whether or not you are going to attend church together. Whether or not you are going to tithe. Whether you are going to obey God's word. There are so many things that couples fight about, the last thing you want to fight about is your faith. You want your faith to bring you together, not to separate you.

I'd have on my list that the person that I date or marry has to be not just a believer, but a practicing believer. Christ needs to be in the center of their lives, not on the periphery. Years ago, I was in a wedding for a dear friend of mine. On the day of his

wedding, we took a walk around the park and I said to my friend, “So, tell me what you love about your fiancé.” I didn’t know her because my friend lived in another city. What do you love about her? He started this way, “Well, I think that she’s a Christian.” I nearly spit. My friend was a devoted follower of Christ. You think on the day of your wedding that she’s a Christian? You hope she is? You don’t know that?

What else would be on my list?

A person that I date or marry must have great integrity.

I want to have confidence that this is somebody who tells the truth. They are who they say they are. They do what they say they’re going to do. They handle money with complete integrity. If I’m going to connect my life with another person, I want to know that I’m building on a solid foundation of truthfulness and integrity.

A person that I am going to date or marry has to be free from addiction.

I’m not saying that if you’ve ever had an addiction in your life, you should never marry or date. I’m saying that I would want the person that I was going to date or marry to be free from any addiction for an extended period of time. Free from alcoholism. Free from drug addiction. Free from pornography addiction. Because it is the nature of addiction to put that particular idol above God and above anyone else including their spouse.

So, single people, what’s on your list of non-negotiables? Do you have a list?

Non-negotiables in sex

I know that one of the perennial topics for Christian singles is how far is too far? Where do you draw the line with someone you aren’t married to? You know, how far is too far is almost certainly the wrong question to ask. Because it starts us off in the wrong direction. How far can I go sexually is really another version of “how far can I go before God will get upset with me?” How close to the line of sinning can I go before I’m actually sinning? How close to the edge of the cliff can I stand before I fall off? Jesus, what will you let me get away with? How about asking different questions? Instead of how far can I go or how far can I convince this other person to go with me?

How about asking Jesus-type questions concerning love? Lord, what would it look like in this relationship for me to love you with all my heart and soul and mind and strength? What would it look like in this relationship for me to really love this other person? To not just love myself or want to meet my own needs, what would it look like for me to love this other person and want what’s best for them?

Do you have any non-negotiables regarding sex? Do you have any non-negotiables in business?

Non-negotiables in business

Virtually every human being has to work at some point in our lives. Where do you draw the line in the workplace? Again, I would encourage you to take time to pray, to search out God's word, to talk with and receive counsel from mature Christian friends, an older devoted Christian brother or sister, and construct a set of non-negotiables ahead of time. The reason Daniel and his friends were able to remain faithful to God even while they were climbing the ladder of success in Babylon is that they did not wait for the pressure to come and then create their set of non-negotiables in the moment. They put together their list before the pressure comes. They decided ahead of time where their lines were.

Here's what we read:

Daniel 1:8

⁸ 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.

So, I ask you again, friends, where do you draw the line? What is on your list of non-negotiables in your workplace? How about: I will not lie. I won't fudge data. I won't lie to a client. I won't lie to an employee. I won't lie to a supervisor. I won't lie on a report. I won't lie on my resume. How about just that; that your yes is yes and your no is no and you will not lie. You need a list.

One of the things as senior pastor of this church that's on my list is that I will not cover up. I will not cover up sin to protect the organization. I will not just sweep things under the rug or prevent people from discovering the truth about a serious mistake by whitewashing or concealing it. Every organization, every church, makes mistakes. On my list of non-negotiables is that I will not cover-up.

Faith is a commitment to the truth. Faith is a commitment to a set of non-negotiables.

Finally,

Faith is a commitment to do God's will regardless

Slide Daniel 3:16-18

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your

Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Faith is a commitment to do God's will regardless. Daniel and his friends were men who were willing to stick their necks out. They were men of integrity. They had a short list of non-negotiables. I will go this far and no farther. They weren't brash. They weren't braggadocious. They considered the cost. They weighed the risks. They understood that if God didn't miraculously intervene, they could lose their lives. But the costs and the risks and the outcomes did not move them. Once they were convinced of what was right, once they knew the will of God, then in Oswald Chambers' famous words, "They smilingly washed their hands of the consequences."

You see, when we don't know what God wants, what would be the right thing for us to do, when we don't know where to draw the line, we struggle, we wrestle, we pray, we seek counsel. But once we know what is right, once we know what the will of God is, game over. Check mate. Then in faith we can say, "Whatever happens happens." We smilingly wash our hands of the consequences. We don't need to worry that other Christians may see the matter differently than us. We embrace the will of God boldly and without hesitation.

Sometimes God does deliver

I want you to hear a story from a young nurse in our congregation.

I'm a new nurse that started my job in the operating room about 3 months ago. In a staff meeting about a month ago, one of the managers brought up that the hospital that I work at does abortions and that the nurses don't get to pick and choose the procedures that they will do when they are on-call or if we would be short staffed.

I felt very conflicted about this because I knew in my heart that abortion is not what I agree with and it's not what God intends. I didn't say anything in that meeting or go talk with the managers because I was dealing with other anxieties about my job and being a new nurse. When it came time to do the gynecology rotation in my training, I was faced with this dilemma. Do I participate in these procedures to keep my job or go and talk with my managers?

On the day that I went to talk with my managers, the last case of the day that I would be on was an abortion. I felt like I was scrambling to read the patient's history to determine if this was one that was for convenience or because of a medical reason (miscarriage, stillbirth, etc.). It was not one for convenience but I knew that day that I couldn't go on another minute without talking with my managers about how I was feeling.

As I began sharing with them about my feelings, they listened to me and let me speak my mind. They communicated to me again that if I wanted to work in this department that I couldn't pick and choose the patients that I would be taking care of. They told me to take a few days to think this over because if I couldn't do the abortions, I would need to find a new job. Leaving the office, I felt conflicted and asked for support from my husband and my sister-in-law about what to do. I wanted to keep my job in the operating room. They both told me that the best thing for me to do was to pray to God about it. As I began praying about it, I felt peace and reassurance that the decision for me to make was to leave this job. This peace was unexpected because my husband had decided earlier this month that he was going to leave his job and I would be the one that would be making the biggest chunk of money for us to be living off of.

So I asked my manager if we could talk and we went to his office. I told him that my mind was not changed about the abortions and I knew that this meant that I couldn't work here anymore. He listened with compassion, he never raised his voice, or told me to leave. He asked me to write my resignation letter and we decided on an official end date. He also asked if I had interest in any other departments. I told him that I was interested in endoscopy. He said he would reach out to the manager to see if they could transition me over to that department. Within an hour of this conversation, I was shadowing in the new department. I interviewed the next day and I am now into my second week of training.

Not one minute of work was missed in this whole process! It's like God knew that this was going to happen all along and laid the groundwork for me to have this new job. I'm so thankful for how God has been faithful to me and provided a new job for me to be able to take care of me and my husband.

And in the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, God delivered them from the fiery furnace. He literally fulfilled the promise in Isaiah, "that when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned." But we ought not reach the false conclusion that everyone who obeys God and does the right thing will always be delivered.

Sometimes God does not deliver

Sometimes we do everything right and we still suffer. There's a place right by Oxford University in England on Broad Street where a stone cross is erected surrounded by a small disc of cobblestones.

The cross on Broad Street, Oxford, England, marks the place where the Oxford martyrs: Bishop Ridley and Bishop Latimer and the Archbishop Cranmer were burned alive for their faith in the 1550's. And some are even martyred today in Pakistan, in North Korea. Here in the US and much of the world, we Christians don't face martyrdom. That doesn't mean that there isn't a price to pay for us to remain faithful to God.

Years ago, when I first graduated from law school, I went to work for a law firm that had as one of their clients a man by the name of Larry Flynt, the publisher of Hustler magazine. I had compromised in taking this job. I didn't like the firm when I first began to interview, but it was the only one that had given me a really good offer so I thought I could do this. Lacking faith in God's provision, I tried to bend reality to fit my desires. I took the job. I was a month or two into the job when one of the partners told me that Larry Flynt, this client of theirs, was being sued by the publisher of another pornographic magazine, Penthouse. Two pornographers battling in court. And they wanted me to go through a stack of Penthouse magazines and dig up dirt about this rival publisher. There was an empty office and a stack of pornography that they wanted me to go through it.

Where do you draw the line? I was fresh out of law school. We had just bought a house. Marlene was six months pregnant. She had just quit her job. We were living on my income alone. I looked at that stack of magazines and I thought to myself, "Lord, I should not be here in the first place, but this far is too far. I can't go through those magazines." So, I told one of the other attorneys that I couldn't do that. I tried to offer a compromise – I'd help out in other aspects of the case. The next day I was called in to the managing partner's office and fired on the spot.

He said, "We can't have someone working here with your kind of moral reservations."

And I was out of work for six months. Sometimes, God does deliver and sometimes God does not deliver. I have no doubt that God laid a foundation in my life during those six months of unemployment. A foundation upon which I was able to do ministry with integrity – to stop trying to bend God's will to fit my desires but instead to bend my desires to fit God's will. Faith is a commitment to do God's will regardless.

So, let me ask you again, in your life where do you draw the line?

Let's pray.

Where Do You Draw the Line?

Rich Nathan

June 25 & 26, 2016

Strangers in a Strange Land

Daniel 3

- I. The demand to bow down
- II. The refusal to bow down
 - A. Faith is a commitment to the truth
 - B. Faith is a commitment to a set of non-negotiables
 - 1. Non-negotiables in dating and marriage
 - 2. Non-negotiables in sex
 - 3. Non-negotiables in business
 - C. Faith is a commitment to do God's will regardless
 - 1. Sometimes God does deliver
 - 2. Sometimes God does not deliver