

LIVING ON MISSION WTH GOD
2 Excellent Examples for Us
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It wasn't all that long ago—those of us over 50 probably remember it—when our Christian faith was shared by people around us and the culture supported our values. Being a follower of Jesus wasn't always easy, but our stance was understood and respected by many. But those days have passed—increasing numbers of people have little if any understanding of the basic tenets of our faith and our culture seems intent on communicating anti-Christian messages and at times even ridiculing followers of Jesus. During this series I've been preaching about living on mission with God and I've made the point that partnering with God can bring great fulfillment and meaning to our lives. A goal I have is for each of us to ask, "*What does living on mission with God look like for me?*" 2 weeks ago we watched a video highlighting 15 McBIC'ers seeking to live out God's purposes in their lives. And last week I interviewed 5 people who are partnering with God in difficult situations. Today I want us to consider 2 examples from Scripture of people who embraced faithfulness to God in very challenging circumstances.



The first person I want to introduce today is a young man I referred to in a sermon 4 weeks

ago—Daniel. Daniel was an amazing guy. We read the beginning of his story in the Old Testament book named after him. I'll read verses 1-7 of Daniel chapter 1.

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service. Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Daniel 1:1-7

Shortly after arriving in Babylon Daniel and his 3 friends took a difficult stand, refusing to compromise their faith in God by eating the king's food and drinking his wine—both of which would have been sacrificed to Babylonian idols. That decision could have cost them their lives. After all, who were they as teenage captives of war to make any requests of the king— especially when none of the other captives seemed to object? But God honored Daniel's faithfulness. The king's attendant agreed to give Daniel and his friends vegetables and water and at the end of the 10-day trial period they appeared better nourished and healthier than any of the other captives. In verse 17 we read God's response to Daniel's faithfulness...

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. Daniel 1:17

As Daniel's life in Babylon unfolded we're told of three occasions where his God-given gift of interpretation served him well. On one occasion he was able to interpret strange writing on a wall that appeared during King Belshazzar's drunken party honoring Babylonian gods and goddesses. And on another occasion Daniel was able to interpret a troubling dream the king had. But what many of us remember are the circumstances surrounding the dream King Nebuchadnezzar when he decided he didn't just want an interpretation from his wise men— after all, who's to say they wouldn't just make something up? He wanted his wise men to recount what his dream was. When the magicians, astrologers, sorcerers and enchanters heard this, they were greatly distraught and said, "*No one can possibly do that.*" But the king persisted

and said that if one of them wasn't able to tell him what his dream was, they'd all be killed. When news of the king's crazy demand reached Daniel he called his friends to pray and they asked God to give them the dream and the interpretation and God answered their pleas. Daniel humbly went before the king with the dream and its interpretation and gave all the glory to God. I love Daniel's response when the king asked if he could tell the king the dream and the interpretation, *"No wise man can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come."* Daniel 2:27 & 28

In response to Daniel's recounting of the dream and supplying the interpretation, the king bowed down before Daniel and praised Daniel and his God. Daniel was given expensive gifts and he was appointed head over all the wise men and Daniel's 3 friends were also given positions of power. For over 4 decades Daniel's influence in Babylon and later Persia (after Persia overthrew Babylon) continued to grow. Listen to the description of Daniel's influence and power in chapter 6 verses 3-5 of Daniel.

Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. Finally these men said, *"We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God."* Daniel 6:3-5

Isn't that awesome? Daniel's colleagues knew they'd never find anything bad. The only vulnerable spot they saw was his faithfulness to his God. So, in the midst of telling King Darius how wonderful he was, Daniel's colleagues conned the king into issuing a decree that no one could bow to any god but him for 30 days. Daniel could easily have dodged this ridiculous decree by lowering the blinds on the windows in his room or by praying somewhere else, but he refused to compromise his practice. In verse 10 of chapter 6 we read these words,

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Daniel 6:10

The men who were jealous of Daniel waited for him to pray, they reported him to the king and the king reluctantly (because he loved and respected Daniel) had him thrown into the lions den, where we read God sent angels to shut the mouths of the lions. I love that Daniel

faithfully served God in a position of leadership for decades. We see from Daniel's life that whether you're young or old, you can still faithfully serve God. And Daniel's life stands in contrast to the troubling pattern we see of middle-aged/older men who experience success, and allow fame and pride to trip them up as they compromise their values. Daniel walked in faithfulness and integrity his entire life.



I want to introduce us now to Esther. Esther was a contemporary of Daniel's. She, along with her older cousin and guardian, Mordecai, were also carried from Jerusalem as exiles after King Nebuchadnezzar sacked their city. They settled in the citadel of Susa. Mordecai and Esther would probably have lived a non-descript life in this out of the way place, but the king of Susa—

a man named Xerxes had a problem with his wife, Queen Vashti. In the midst of a drunken party, Xerxes called his wife to parade (probably with few or any clothes) before all of his guests to show off her beauty. When Vashti declined the king's request. He and his brain trust decided to fire the queen. Their rationale was that if their wives and women all over the province learned what Vashti had done, no woman would listen to her husband again. So Vashti was fired and a beauty contest was staged to enable the king to select his next queen. Here's what we read in Esther chapter 2 verses 5-9:

Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah. Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.

When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem. She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem. Esther 2:5-9

We need to understand that being selected for this beauty contest wasn't a great honor for Esther. She didn't register for this believing it would be her ticket to fame and fortune. She was forcibly placed in the king's harem where she was one of dozens of women who would undergo beauty treatments and then spend a night with the king so he might determine who his next queen would be. This didn't appear to be an ideal spot for a young, Jewish woman to live out her faith in God, but as God said through his prophet Isaiah, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,*" declares the LORD. Isaiah 55:8

There are a lot of details surrounding Esther's story we don't have time to look into, but I encourage you to read the 10 chapters that make up this book—it's a wonderful story of human courage and God's deliverance. Even though she was now the queen, Esther maintained her connection to her cousin, Mordecai. One day Mordecai learned that King Xerxes had approved what basically amounted to genocide of the Jewish people in the Province of Susa. Mordecai reported this news to Esther and asked her to intervene. Through a messenger, Esther told Mordecai that she had little influence as the queen. If she went to the king and he

didn't want to see her, he could demand that she be executed instantly. After receiving Esther's reply Mordecai sent her these powerful words that persuaded Esther to act. He wrote,

"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. **And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?**" Esther 4:12 & 13

"Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Mordecai's words were framed as a question, but his message was clear. *"Esther, you can't turn your back on your people. God has placed you in your role as queen for just this moment."*

Esther responded by asking Mordecai to call their people to pray and fast and she committed herself and her attendants to do the same. At the end of the 3 days Esther approached the king and he was pleased to receive her. After inviting the king to two banquets (those Babylonian kings loved to party) Esther revealed that she was a Jew and that the genocide the king had decreed would mean the death of her and her family. The king reversed the edict and the Jewish people were saved. To this day Jews celebrate the festival of Purim in honor of Esther's bravery and God's faithfulness in delivering his people.

Daniel and Esther are excellent examples for us—of people seeking to partner with God in doing his work in our world. I'll quickly summarize their situations and their response.

- Through no choice of their own, Esther and Daniel found themselves in pagan cultures where their faith wasn't shared by most of the people around them. Many of us can identify with being in environments at work or school or in our recreation where the faith and beliefs we have aren't shared by those around us.
- Esther and Daniel made courageous choices to stand firm in their faith in God. They translated their beliefs into action...even when it endangered their lives. What does it look like for us to live differently based on our faith in God and the values we hold?
- God blessed Daniel and Esther with his favor and they were able to see God move in amazing ways. What does God want to do in your life and my life as we make courageous choices to stand firm in our faith, rather than being swept along in the current and making decisions that conflict with our God-given values? What will God do through us as we embrace the understanding that He has placed us where we are for *"such a time as this?"*

Worship Song of Response

I want to thank Diane Baltaeff for an idea she shared with me regarding “sending us out on mission.” Each week I typically close the service with what’s known as a benediction—that’s a fancy name for words spoken over you as you leave, but I think it’s important for us to take that a step further as we close this series, “Living on Mission with God.” I’d like to send you out this morning with the understanding that when you leave the doors of our church you’re entering your mission field. I’ve seen churches that have signs at the exit as people leave that say something like, “*Now entering the mission field.*”



I’d like to end our service a bit differently this morning. I’d like to ask you to turn and face the exit as I walk back the center aisle. When I get to back I’ll send you out with words I read from Romans chapter 15 verse 13: “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*” Be blessed as you leave here and walk through your week. Understand that God has placed you in the circumstances you find yourselves in and with the people you cross paths with for such a time as this. May God’s favor rest on you as you leave. Have an awesome week!