

*New York Times* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

MAX  
LUCADO

LIFE LESSONS *from*

DANIEL  
& ESTHER



# MAX LUCADO

---

LIFE LESSONS *from*  
DANIEL &  
ESTHER  
*Faith Under Pressure*

---

PREPARED BY THE LIVINGSTONE CORPORATION



THOMAS NELSON  
*Since 1798*

*Life Lessons from Daniel & Esther*

© 2019 by Max Lucado

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson. Thomas Nelson is a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc.

Produced with the assistance of the Livingstone Corporation ([www.livingstonecorp.com](http://www.livingstonecorp.com)).

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NCV are taken from the New Century Version®. Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Material for the “Inspiration” sections taken from the following books:

*Anxious for Nothing*. Copyright © 2017 by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson, a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.

*Come Thirsty*. Copyright © 2004 by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson, a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.

*Facing Your Giants*. Copyright © 2006 by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson, a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.

*Fearless*. Copyright © 2009 by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson, a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.

*God Came Near*. Copyright © 2004 by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson, a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.

*The Great House of God*. Copyright © 1997 by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson, a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.

*He Still Moves Stones*. Copyright © 1993 by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson, a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.

*My Utmost for His Highest*. Copyright © 1935 by Oswald Chambers. Dodd Mead and Company, renewed 1963 by the Oswald Chambers Publications Association, Ltd. Used by permission of Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan. All rights reserved.

*Unshakable Hope*. Copyright © 2018 by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson, a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.

*You'll Get Through This*. Copyright © 2013 by Max Lucado. Thomas Nelson, a registered trademark of HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., Nashville, Tennessee.

Thomas Nelson titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising, or sales promotional use. For information, please e-mail [SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com](mailto:SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com).

ISBN 978-0-310-08670-3

**First Printing February 2019 / Printed in the United States of America**

# CONTENTS

<i>How to Study the Bible</i>		v
<i>Introduction to the Books of Daniel and Esther</i>		ix
<b>Lesson 1</b>	Obedience to God ( <i>Daniel 1:3–20</i> )	1
<b>Lesson 2</b>	Facing Fiery Ordeals ( <i>Daniel 3:8–27</i> )	11
<b>Lesson 3</b>	Humility Before God ( <i>Daniel 4:19–34</i> )	23
<b>Lesson 4</b>	Consequences of Sin ( <i>Daniel 5:1–31</i> )	33
<b>Lesson 5</b>	Doing Right No Matter What ( <i>Daniel 6:6–24</i> )	45
<b>Lesson 6</b>	Power of Prayer ( <i>Daniel 10:1–14</i> )	55
<b>Lesson 7</b>	Being Prepared ( <i>Esther 2:1–13</i> )	65
<b>Lesson 8</b>	Standing Firm ( <i>Esther 3:1–11</i> )	75
<b>Lesson 9</b>	Taking Responsibility ( <i>Esther 4:1–17</i> )	85
<b>Lesson 10</b>	Faith and Courage ( <i>Esther 5:1–14</i> )	95
<b>Lesson 11</b>	Relying on God’s Protection ( <i>Esther 7:1–10</i> )	105
<b>Lesson 12</b>	Rewards of Faithfulness ( <i>Esther 8:1–17</i> )	115
<i>Leader’s Guide for Small Groups</i>		125

---

## HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

---

**T**he Bible is a peculiar book. Words crafted in another language. Deeds done in a distant era. Events recorded in a far-off land. Counsel offered to a foreign people. It is a peculiar book.

It's surprising that anyone reads it. It's too old. Some of its writings date back 5,000 years. It's too bizarre. The book speaks of incredible floods, fires, earthquakes, and people with supernatural abilities. It's too radical. The Bible calls for undying devotion to a carpenter who called himself God's Son.

Logic says this book shouldn't survive. Too old, too bizarre, too radical.

The Bible has been banned, burned, scoffed, and ridiculed. Scholars have mocked it as foolish. Kings have branded it as illegal. A thousand times over the grave has been dug and the dirge has begun, but somehow the Bible never stays in the grave. Not only has it survived, but it has also thrived. It is the single most popular book in all of history. It has been the bestselling book in the world for years!

There is no way on earth to explain it. Which perhaps is the only explanation. For the Bible's durability is not found on *earth* but in *heaven*. The millions who have tested its claims and claimed its promises know there is but one answer: the Bible is God's book and God's voice.

As you read it, you would be wise to give some thought to two questions: *What is the purpose of the Bible?* and *How do I study the Bible?* Time spent reflecting on these two issues will greatly enhance your Bible study.

What is the purpose of the Bible?

Let the Bible itself answer that question: *“From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus”* (2 Timothy 3:15).

The purpose of the Bible? Salvation. God’s highest passion is to get his children home. His book, the Bible, describes his plan of salvation. The purpose of the Bible is to proclaim God’s plan and passion to save his children.

This is the reason why this book has endured through the centuries. It dares to tackle the toughest questions about life: *Where do I go after I die? Is there a God? What do I do with my fears?* The Bible is the treasure map that leads to God’s highest treasure—eternal life.

But how do you study the Bible? Countless copies of Scripture sit unread on bookshelves and nightstands simply because people don’t know how to read it. What can you do to make the Bible real in your life?

The clearest answer is found in the words of Jesus: *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you”* (Matthew 7:7).

The first step in understanding the Bible is asking God to help you. You should read it prayerfully. If anyone understands God’s Word, it is because of God and not the reader.

*“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you”* (John 14:26).

Before reading the Bible, pray and invite God to speak to you. Don’t go to Scripture looking for your idea, but go searching for his.

Not only should you read the Bible prayerfully, but you should also read it carefully. *“Seek and you will find”* is the pledge. The Bible is not

a newspaper to be skimmed but rather a mine to be quarried. *“If you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God”* (Proverbs 2:4–5).

Any worthy find requires effort. The Bible is no exception. To understand the Bible, you don’t have to be brilliant, but you must be willing to roll up your sleeves and search.

*“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth”* (2 Timothy 2:15).

Here’s a practical point. Study the Bible a bit at a time. Hunger is not satisfied by eating twenty-one meals in one sitting once a week. The body needs a steady diet to remain strong. So does the soul. When God sent food to his people in the wilderness, he didn’t provide loaves already made. Instead, he sent them manna in the shape of *“thin flakes like frost on the ground”* (Exodus 16:14).

God gave manna in limited portions.

God sends spiritual food the same way. He opens the heavens with just enough nutrients for today’s hunger. He provides *“a rule for this, a rule for that; a little here, a little there”* (Isaiah 28:10).

Don’t be discouraged if your reading reaps a small harvest. Some days a lesser portion is all that is needed. What is important is to search every day for that day’s message. A steady diet of God’s Word over a lifetime builds a healthy soul and mind.

It’s much like the little girl who returned from her first day at school feeling a bit dejected. Her mom asked, “Did you learn anything?”

“Apparently not enough,” the girl responded. “I have to go back tomorrow, and the next day, and the next . . .”

Such is the case with learning. And such is the case with Bible study. Understanding comes little by little over a lifetime.

There is a third step in understanding the Bible. After the asking and seeking comes the knocking. After you ask and search, *“knock and the door will be opened to you”* (Matthew 7:7).

To knock is to stand at God's door. To make yourself available. To climb the steps, cross the porch, stand at the doorway, and volunteer. Knocking goes beyond the realm of thinking and into the realm of acting.

To knock is to ask, *What can I do? How can I obey? Where can I go?*

It's one thing to know what to do. It's another to do it. But for those who do it—those who choose to obey—a special reward awaits them.

*“Whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do”* (James 1:25).

What a promise. Blessings come to those who do what they read in God's Word! It's the same with medicine. If you only read the label but ignore the pills, it won't help. It's the same with food. If you only read the recipe but never cook, you won't be fed. And it's the same with the Bible. If you only read the words but never obey, you'll never know the joy God has promised.

Ask. Search. Knock. Simple, isn't it? So why don't you give it a try? If you do, you'll see why the Bible is the most remarkable book in history.



---

INTRODUCTION TO  
*The Books of Daniel and Esther*

---

DANIEL

If you are a Jew in Babylon, you've got reason to be depressed. Jeremiah was right all along. All those times you thought he was one taco short of a platter, he was telling the truth!

Jerusalem is in ashes. The temple is in ruins. And you and the rest of your people are in captivity.

Your captors mock you, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" (Psalm 137:3). But you don't sing. You hang your harps on the poplar trees and sit on the banks of the river, watching the water and your days pass by.

Who can sing songs about the Lord in a foreign country?

Daniel can.

Though he was only a teenager when taken captive, he remembers well the songs of his youth. Somewhere in his early years he came to believe that God was sovereign. Nothing happens without his permission. Nothing happens outside of his plan.

But even Daniel could not have imagined the plans God had for him. Prime minister of the court. Interpreter of dreams. Prophet. Teacher. Ruler. A lifelong voice for God among pagan people.

## LIFE LESSONS

But though the central character of the book is Daniel, the hero is God. “There is a God in heaven . . .” Daniel told the king (2:28), and it was that God in heaven who sustained Daniel and the people while in captivity.

That God, by the way, still reigns.

And anytime God’s people have hung up their harps, listen carefully. God always has a Daniel who remembers how to sing.

## AUTHOR AND DATE

Daniel was among the first of the Hebrews taken captive when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Judah c. 605 BC. He was deemed “qualified to serve in the king’s palace” (Daniel 1:4) and conscripted into service in the Babylonian government. At that time, the king assigned him the new name Belteshazzar—a title connected to the Babylonian god Bel—in an attempt to encourage him to forget the God of Israel and adopt the ways and worship practices of the Babylonians. However, Daniel remained completely loyal to the God of Israel throughout his life. He lived to see the fall of the Babylon Empire at the hands of the Persians and the return of the first wave of Jewish exiles under King Cyrus the Great (see 5:30–31; 10:1). Daniel is believed to have composed his book toward the end of his life, c. 530 BC.

## SITUATION

The idolatry of the kingdom of Israel had led to its downfall in 722 BC when the Assyrians invaded and carried its people into captivity. The smaller nation of Judah lasted until 605 BC, when the Babylonians invaded and began carrying its inhabitants into exile. Daniel was taken in the first waves of exiles, and he witnessed the Babylonians deporting additional waves of Jewish captives in 597 BC and 586 BC. Daniel appears to have written his book to encourage his fellow countrymen to remain true to the one true God during their time of exile and to remind them

the Lord still had a plan for them. Daniel accomplishes this by not only relating narratives of his own experiences and trials under their foreign rulers (see Daniel 1–6) but also by relating words of prophecy and interpretations of dreams that God had given to him (see Daniel 7–12).

## KEY THEMES

- God leads in our lives even in difficult circumstances.
- Sometimes faithfulness is rewarded by miracles.
- God will be faithful to his people in the future as he has in the past.

## KEY VERSES

*I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, and steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end (Daniel 6:26 NKJV).*

## CONTENTS

- I. Daniel's Life Story (1:1–6:28)
- II. Daniel's Prophecy (7:1–12:13)

# ESTHER

The Book of Esther. Some things about it you love. Some things you admire. But there is one thing about it that leaves you scratching your head.

You love the story. A Jewish girl raised in Persia by a cousin named Mordecai. She becomes the wife of the king by winning the Miss Persia contest. Her husband is Xerxes. (Better known to some as Ahasuerus, which sounds like something you do when you have a bad cold.)

## LIFE LESSONS

It's a rags-to-riches romance, though you've got to wonder how much romance could occur when you are married to a guy who could chop your head off if you popped into his office without an appointment. But that's what Esther did. She took the chance at the chance it would save her nation.

That is the part of Esther you admire. Aside from being a beauty, she was gutsy. Xerxes's right-hand man is Haman. (A name that, as you'll soon see, sounds curiously close to "hangman.") Haman was a raging Nazi. Nothing would suit him better than annihilation of the Jews. One day he got his chance. Mordecai, Esther's foster father, refused to bow before Haman. Haman was so mad he convinced Xerxes to let him do away with the whole nation.

That's where Esther comes in. Literally. She comes into the king's chambers uninvited but not unprepared. After getting the Jews to pray and fast for three days, she puts on her royal robes and stands at the door. Xerxes likes what he sees and invites her in. One invitation leads to another, and by the time she finishes, Xerxes not only agrees to call off the massacre but orders Haman to hang from the same gallows Haman had built for Mordecai.

Whew! Quite a lady, this Esther. You have to admire her courage. You have to love her story. But there is one thing that is tough to figure. God's name never appears in the entire book. His actions do. His thoughts do. His plan does. His fingerprints are on every page. But his name never appears. Could it be that God is more concerned about getting the job done than getting credit?

## AUTHOR AND DATE

The author of the book of Esther is not known, though a number of early Jewish and Christian writers believed it was penned by Mordecai, a character who appears throughout its pages. Augustine attributed the text to Ezra, while others suggested Nehemiah was the author. Whoever wrote

the book possessed a strong knowledge of Persian customs, language, history, and familiarity with palace life at Susa, while also demonstrating detailed knowledge of Jewish history and customs. Given the book ends in 473 BC, before the assassination of Xerxes (or Ahasuerus), it was likely composed sometime around that date, c. 400–500 BC.

## SITUATION

King Cyrus of Persia allowed the first wave of Jewish exiles to return to their homeland c. 539 BC. A year later a man named Zerubbabel led the first group home (see Ezra 1–6), followed by a second group led by the priest Ezra c. 458 BC (see Ezra 7–10). The events depicted in the book of Esther take place in the time space between these events (c. 483–473), specifically during the reign of Xerxes. Although God’s name is not mentioned in the book, there are many allusions to his activities “behind the scenes” (see Esther 4:14; 6:13; 9:1) and several appeals for his divine intervention (see 4:3,16). The Jewish people also came to celebrate his deliverance through a festival known as Purim, from the Persian word *pur* (“lots”) mentioned in Esther 9:24–25.

## KEY THEMES

- Esther became queen even though she was an exile in the land.
- Because Esther was queen she was in a position to help when her people were endangered.
- Mordecai, Esther’s cousin, helped her have the courage to stand up for her people even though it was dangerous.

## KEY VERSES

*Who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?*  
(*Esther 4:14* NKJV).

## LIFE LESSONS

## CONTENTS

- I. Esther Becomes Queen (1:1–2:23)
- II. Haman's Plot (3:1–7:10)
- III. The Jews Are Delivered (8:1–10:3)



LESSON ONE

**OBEDIENCE  
TO GOD**

*But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank.*

DANIEL 1:8 NKJV

## REFLECTION

When is a time in your life that you felt you had to take a stand for something you believed in? How did you approach the situation? What happened as a result?

---

---

---

---

---

## SITUATION

God had warned his people that if they were unfaithful to him and worshiped idols, he would send enemies to invade and take them captive (see Leviticus 26:14–39). Unfortunately, the people failed to heed these warnings, and as a result they were taken into captivity. Daniel would have been just a youth when the Babylonians, under King Nebuchadnezzar, conquered Jerusalem and led the first wave of people into exile. The Babylonians, like other nations in the ancient world, had a policy of incorporating the “best and brightest” among their captives into civil service for the government. Daniel is selected, but it is clear—even from the opening chapter of his book—that he has resolved not to be absorbed into the Babylonian culture.

## OBSERVATION

*Read Daniel 1:3–20 from the New International Version or the New King James Version.*

### NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

<sup>3</sup>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— <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. <sup>7</sup> The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

<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."

<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.

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

<sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and

## LIFE LESSONS

Azariah; so they entered the king's service. <sup>20</sup> In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

### NEW KING JAMES VERSION

<sup>3</sup> Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles, <sup>4</sup> young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans. <sup>5</sup> And the king appointed for them a daily provision of the king's delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king. <sup>6</sup> Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. <sup>7</sup> To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.

<sup>8</sup> But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. <sup>9</sup> Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. <sup>10</sup> And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king."

<sup>11</sup> So Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had set over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, <sup>12</sup> "Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. <sup>13</sup> Then let our appearance be examined before you, and the appearance of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies;

and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.”<sup>14</sup> So he consented with them in this matter, and tested them ten days.

<sup>15</sup> And at the end of ten days their features appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king’s delicacies. <sup>16</sup> Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.

<sup>17</sup> As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

<sup>18</sup> Now at the end of the days, when the king had said that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. <sup>19</sup> Then the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah; therefore they served before the king. <sup>20</sup> And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.

## EXPLORATION

**1.** What were some of the qualifications needed for a young man to enter into civil service for the Babylonians?

---



---



---



---



---

**2.** What were some of the benefits these candidates would have received?

---



---



---



---

LIFE LESSONS

**3.** The name “Daniel” means “God is my Judge,” while “Belteshazzar” means “Bel protects his life.” (Bel was a Babylonian god.) Why do you think the Babylonians changed Daniel’s name?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**4.** Why do you think Daniel and his three friends objected to eating “the royal food and wine” (verse 8) that was offered to all the candidates?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**5.** What was the “test” that Daniel and the others put to the guard of the chief official? What was the result?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

6. Why was it important for Daniel and his friends to stay true to their convictions in this case?

---



---



---



---



---



---

## INSPIRATION

Perhaps changes are in the air right now. Maybe you're in the midst of a decision. It's disrupting, isn't it? You like your branch. You've grown accustomed to it and it to you. . . . You've been a pretty good branch-sitter. And then you hear the call.

"I need you to go out on the limb and . . . *take a stand*. Some of the local churches are organizing an anti-pornography campaign. They need some volunteers."

"I need you to go out on the limb and . . . *move*. Take your family and move overseas; I have a special work for you."

"I need you to go out on the limb and . . . *forgive*. It doesn't matter who hurt who first. What matters is that you go and build the bridge."

"I need you to go out on the limb and . . . *evangelize*. That new family down the block? They don't know anyone in town. Go meet them."

"I need you to go out on the limb and . . . *sacrifice*. The orphanage has a mortgage payment due this month. They can't meet it. Remember the bonus you received last week?"

Regardless of the nature of the call, the consequences are the same: civil war. Though your heart may say yes, your feet say no. Excuses blow as numerous as golden leaves in an autumn wind. "That's not my talent." "It's time for someone else to take charge." "Not now. I'll get to it tomorrow."

But eventually you're left staring at a bare tree and a hard choice: his will or yours? (From *God Came Near* by Max Lucado.)

## REACTION

**7.** When are a few times in your life that God had you “step out on a limb”?

---

---

---

---

**8.** What happened when you chose to obey God in spite of your own fears?

---

---

---

---

**9.** Why is it often hard to move from being a “branch sitter” to a “limb climber”?

---

---

---

---

**10.** In what area of your life right now is God asking you to “step out on a limb”?

---

---

---

---

**11.** What are some of the blessings you have received as a result of following God?

---

---

---

**12.** How have you seen your decision to obey God impact the lives of others?

---

---

---

## LIFE LESSONS

Obedience is an expression of our love to God. Sometimes the world will try to hinder our obedience and tempt us to make small compromises to our values. This was certainly true in the case of Daniel and his three friends, who could have easily chosen to abandon their Jewish diet in favor of the rich delicacies of the king's diet plan. At such times, we have to resolve in our hearts to follow God's plan . . . and perhaps get creative in the process. Daniel's alternate plan was not only creative but also a step of faith. The four men believed God would reward their obedience with physical health—and God did indeed bless them. Their robust health even caught the king's attention, and he affirmed them and promoted them to be his advisors.

## DEVOTION

*Heavenly Father, thank you for your promise to be near us in every situation we face. Help us to be obedient to you in all things—both the great and the small. We pray that our lives would serve as an example to others of what it truly means to put you first in all things.*

## JOURNALING

What is a particularly difficult decision that you are facing right now in your life?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## FOR FURTHER READING

To complete the books of Daniel and Esther during this twelve-part study, read Daniel 1:1–2:49. For more Bible passages on obeying God, read Deuteronomy 28:1–14; Joshua 1:7–9; 1 Samuel 15:12–23; Ecclesiastes 12:13–14; Isaiah 1:18–20; 50:4–9; John 14:15–18; Acts 5:27–32; and Romans 6:15–18.