

Explore It

FOR LEADERS



IDENTITY

Daniel 1:1-21 Daniel taken to Babylon

Modern-day society goes out of its way to convince us to change ourselves. Our children face the pressure of fitting in and may even feel they live two lives – what happens on Sunday and at church compared to the rest of the week. Daniel faced similar pressures. But his story is there to inspire us; we see Daniel refusing to compromise. Instead, he remains quietly faithful to God.

In this session we will look at our identity as a Christian. We take space to think how we equip our children to live out their love for Jesus in different places. We affirm that by knowing our true identity comes from Jesus, and by knowing him, we can have confidence to be the person he needs us to be.

Each child will need:

- Two colours of sticky notes (optional), pens/pencils

You will need:

- A new name for each child, on a label. Here is a name generator to help you – <https://www.imagineforest.com/blog/funny-name-generator/>
- To dress up as a king or queen (optional) – see Start It section
- A large sheet of paper with the outline of the person drawn in the middle

Start It

- **Say:** Welcome, I am King/Queen (add name). For today's session I am making a royal proclamation. I have decided that you will all be known by a different name of my choosing. You have absolutely no say in the matter as I am in charge of you now and I would like you to have a name that is more to my liking.

Ask: What do you think of your new name?

- **Say:** For the rest of the session you must address each other using your new name at all times. Our Bible character for today knew just what it was like to be called by a name that he didn't recognise.

Sing It

- **Say:** As part of the starter, you were each given a new name to be used throughout the session. We will discover later that Daniel was given a new name as well. Even though people called him by a different name, Daniel knew that his identity was found in God.

Today's song is all about how special we are to God and how he knows our name.

'He knows my name' by Francesca Battistelli. Lyric video by Worship God (3 mins 26 sec)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pDWcO6_B0g

Tell It

- **Say:** The book of Daniel is found in the Old Testament and tells the story of a man full of integrity. In case the word integrity might be new to you, when someone lives with integrity they are honest and do what they say they are going to do.
- **Say:** Daniel loved God with all his heart and his life matched what he believed. This month we are going to discover more about Daniel and the way he lived his life of faith. Daniel's story began in a time of conflict when his city was surrounded by the Babylonian army.

Read Daniel 1:1-4 (ICB)

'Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and surrounded it with his army. This happened during the third year that Jehoiakim was king of Judah. The Lord allowed Nebuchadnezzar to capture Jehoiakim king of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar also took some of the things from the Temple of God. He carried them to Babylonia and put them in the temple of his gods.'

'Then King Nebuchadnezzar gave an order to Ashpenaz, his chief officer. He told Ashpenaz to bring some of the men from Judah into his house. He wanted them to be from important families. And he wanted those who were from the family of the king of Judah. King Nebuchadnezzar wanted only healthy, young, Israelite men. These men were not to have anything wrong with their bodies. They were to be handsome and well educated. They were to be able to learn and understand things. He wanted those who were able to serve in his palace. Ashpenaz was to teach them the language and writings of the Babylonians.'

- **Say:** When the Babylonians captured a city, they liked to take all the clever, strong, handsome young men away to serve in their own royal palace.

Ask:

- Why do you think they did that?
- Daniel was one of the young men chosen. How old do you think he might have been when he left for Babylon?
- **Say:** Many scholars think that Daniel and his friends were around 14 years old when they were taken away to Babylon.

Ask: How do you think the young men felt having to leave their friends and family and go to a different country?

Read Daniel 1:5-7 (ICB).

'The king gave the young men a certain amount of food and wine every day. That was the same kind of food that the king ate. They were to be trained for three years. Then the young men would become servants of the king of Babylon. Among those young men were some from the people of Judah. These were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.'

'Then Ashpenaz, the chief officer, gave them Babylonian names. Daniel's new name was Belteshazzar. Hananiah's was Shadrach. Mishael's was Meshach. And Azariah's new name was Abednego.'

- **Say:** Not only did the Babylonians take Daniel away from his home, they took away the food he was used to eating and also his name! Daniel's name meant 'God is my judge' but it was changed to Belteshazzar which meant 'Bel protect his life'.

Ask: Daniel's name was changed so that it meant the Babylonian god Bel was supposed to be protecting him. As someone who loved the true God with all his heart, how do you think this made Daniel feel?

- **Say:** For three years the young men were trained and encouraged to follow the rituals and customs of the Babylonians who worshipped many gods.

Ask: Why do you think this might have caused a problem for Daniel?

Read Daniel 1:8-16 (ICB).

'Daniel decided not to eat the king's food and wine because that would make him unclean. So he asked Ashpenaz for permission not to make himself unclean in this way.

'God made Ashpenaz [the chief officer] want to be kind and merciful to Daniel. But Ashpenaz said to Daniel, "I am afraid of my master, the king. He ordered me to give you this food and drink. If you don't eat this food, you will begin to look worse than other young men your age. The king will see this. And he will cut off my head because of you."

'Ashpenaz had ordered a guard to watch Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Daniel said to the guard, "Please give us this test for ten days: Don't give us anything but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then after ten days compare us with the other young men who eat the king's food. See for yourself who looks healthier. Then you judge for yourself how you want to treat us, your servants."

'So the guard agreed to test them for ten days. After ten days they looked very healthy. They looked better than all of the young men who ate the king's food. So the guard took away the king's special food and wine. He gave Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah vegetables instead.'

🗨 **Say:** Daniel politely asked Ashpenaz if he could refuse the rich food and wine from the king and follow the diet required by God. At the end of the ten days, Daniel, Hananiah and Michael were healthier than all the other young men.

Ask: Why do you think Daniel was so determined to follow what God had asked him to do?

🗨 **Say:** Daniel knew that his identity was in God and that he needed to follow what God had asked him to do. It would have been so easy for Daniel to be influenced by those around him, but he decided to follow God instead.

Read Daniel 1:17-21 (ICB).

'God gave these four men wisdom and the ability to learn. They learned many kinds of things people had written and studied. Daniel could also understand all kinds of visions and dreams.

'The end of the three years came. And Ashpenaz brought all of the young men to King Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked to them. He found that none of the young men were as good as Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. So those four young men became the king's servants. Every time the king asked them about something important, they showed much wisdom and understanding. He found they were ten times better than all the fortune-tellers and magicians in his kingdom. So Daniel continued to be the king's servant until the first year Cyrus was king.'

Ask: Daniel decided to obey God rather than obey the Babylonians. How did God reward Daniel for following his commands?

🗨 **Say:** By the end of the three years of Babylonian training, Daniel, Hananiah and Azariah were well respected by the king. Even though their names had changed to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, their identity in God stayed the same.

Action It

Video

What is identity? by Crossroads Kids' Club(1 min 30 secs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjM6QxXknms>

Ask the group to write on sticky notes, or on the sheet itself, all the different ways that **we could describe ourselves and things about us**, eg daughter, sister, friend, footballer, loves horses, hates celery, wears glasses ...

Place these ideas around the outside of the figure on the paper. Using a different colour or sticky note, ask the children to think of all the things **other people might expect us to be** and write those around the edge of the figure as well, eg cool, pretty, athletic, funny ...



🗨️ **Say:** There are lots of things written down here that describe who we are and what others expect us to be. Although there is absolutely nothing wrong with many of the things written down, we need to know that they do not make us who we are.

➔ We are precious children of God.

➔ We are made by God and loved by God.

Write 'made by God and loved by God' in the centre of the figure.

🗨️ **Say:** This is your identity, and all the other things are just part of who you are. As it says in the clip, God loves you, he's always with you and he has a plan for you, just like he did for Daniel.

🗨️ **Say:** At the beginning of today's session, you were given a new name.

Ask:

➔ What has it felt like to be called a different name?

➔ It may have seemed like fun while it lasted an hour, but how would you feel if it carried on for the next few weeks or months?

🗨️ **Say:** Our identity is as God's children, and when we try to live differently it will feel awkward and uncomfortable in the long run. Instead of trying to be someone that we're not, we need to live like Daniel, following God throughout the whole week, not just on Sundays.

Pray It

🗨️ **Say:** Think back to the song that we shared at the beginning of the session where you heard these words:

**'I don't need my name in lights
I'm famous in my Father's eyes
Make no mistake
He knows my name.
I'm not living for applause
I'm already so adored.
It's all his stage,
He knows my name.'**

— (Francesca Battistelli)

🗨️ **Say:** It would have been so tempting for Daniel to try and fit in with everyone around him, but instead he remembered how much he was loved by God.

Read this prayer together:

Thank you, Heavenly Father, that I am famous in your eyes and that you know my true identity as your precious child. Help me to follow the example of Daniel and live to please you, and not focus on the approval of others. Thank you that you know my name and that I am so precious to you.

Amen

Explore It

Remember to send home the Explore It (For Me) and Explore It (Together) ideas for children and families.