BIG IDEA: Representing God to the world requires tactfully taking a stand for biblical convictions. Christian students often find themselves on one of two extremes. They so desire to be accepted by peers that they simply conform. Their lives look outwardly like the non-Christian friends around them. On the other extreme, the young Christian student that is so eager to please God and live according to biblical principles may isolate himself from the very people he should be trying to reach.

In the study of Daniel, we find a man who took a stand tactfully. He did what all of us want to do. He took a definite stand for God, but was so admired even by those who disagreed with him that he was able to point them to God. That is what your students need help in doing. They have a normal desire to be admired by others, but they realize that in living for Christ, their views on certain issues will not be accepted.

DESIRED LIFE CHANGE: The students in your group will, as a result of this study, determine whether they tend to be conformists or isolationists. Also, they will learn how to balance taking a stand for God while reaching out to non-Christians with love and grace.

AUDIENCE: This lesson is designed for growing young Christians and more mature believers who desire to make an impact in the lives of those around them.

LEADER’S PREPARATION: Study Daniel 1 and gather insight from a Bible dictionary or study Bible regarding the background of the book. Read through the entire leader’s guide to get an overview. Familiarize yourself with the flow of the discussion. Think about how to ask the questions in such a way as to get the most response. Be prepared to share your story related to this topic. Let your group see how these truths have changed your life (or how they could change your life, if applied).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - WHY IS THIS STUDY IMPORTANT?

This study will help your students grow in taking a stand with unbelievers. They need to be made aware of their tendency to be either a conformist, one who is not taking a stand, or an isolationist, one who is withdrawing from others or forcing his views on others to the point that no one wants to hear what he has to say about God. Of course there is the danger of a young believer being pulled back into his old ways if he does not find a new set of friends who want to live for Christ. One way this danger can be avoided is by the wise counsel of a more mature believer or the person discipling him.

The balance is taking a stand tactfully while not compromising convictions. It’s a process. None of us can respond perfectly like Daniel, but we can make progress.
**ASK:** What was the greatest pressure to conform you experienced in each stage of your life?

**JR. HIGH:**
- smoking
- drugs
- make-up
- pornography
- stay out late

**HIGH SCHOOL:**
- Hang out with “right people”
- Cheat
- Get drunk
- Party
- Sex

**COLLEGE:**
- Hang out with “right people”
- Cheat
- Get drunk
- Party
- Sex

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**ASK:** What pressures do you think a person in corporate America faces?

- Compromise
- Bend the law subtly
- Unethical business practices

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**ASK:** Across the board, what’s the same about peer pressure at any level?

**ANSWER:** Someone will always be trying to get you to do something that you know is wrong. People will try to convince you that bending your convictions has no consequences. They will tell you you are no fun if you draw the line.

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**DISCUSS**

**ASK**

**ANSWER:** You feel disappointed in yourself. You are not “strong” any more. Later you feel regret or remorse.

**ASK**

**ANSWER:** You feel weird or not “in” at first. Later, you are glad you took a stand.

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**READ**

**STATE:** Let’s look at a person in the Bible who tactfully took a stand before God for what was right.

**DON’T JUST SAY NO**

Share a personal experience when you felt peer pressure.

Two roads diverged in a wood,
and I— I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

—Robert Frost, *The Road Not Taken*

We know what happens to people who stay in the middle of the road. They get run over.

—Aneurin Bevan, *The Observer, 1953*

What does it feel like when you . . .

Give in? Initially? Later On?

Hold your ground? Initially? Later On?

**LORI’S STORY**

“My friend asked if she could use my I.D. one night so she could get into some clubs. I felt really bad saying no because I didn’t want her to be mad at me. It put me in an awkward position. I told my roommate what had happened and then my friend asked my roommate for her I.D. Because I had already said no, it gave my roommate the strength to also say no. We both felt bad and really good at the same time.”
1. **READ**

2. **STATE:** To make sure we all understand what is going on in this passage, let’s answer the questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.

   **WHO:** Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Ashpenaz (chief of the king’s officials), Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah.

   **WHAT:** Judah is taken into captivity and the Hebrew young men are brought to Babylon to be educated in Babylonian culture. They were given a Babylonian diet, Babylonian names, and asked to worship Babylonian gods.

   **WHEN:** After the Babylonian captivity of Judah. After being defeated in battle.

   **WHERE:** In the king’s court.

3. **ASK:** They would have felt pressured to conform to the culture and fear of losing their lives. They probably felt disoriented being in a foreign land, not knowing what to expect.

4. **READ**


6. **READ**

7. **STATE:** Let’s answer Who, What, When, Where, Why and How for these verses.

   **WHO:** Daniel, Ashpenaz (commander of king’s officials)

   **WHAT:** Daniel says “no” in regard to defiling himself by eating the king’s food, but devises an alternative plan.

   **WHEN:** After the kings order for their education, diet, and name change.

   **WHERE:** In the king’s court.

   **WHY:** Daniel wants to obey God, not the culture.

   **HOW:** Daniel devises a plan to have the commander test and see the results of their Hebrew dietary convictions.

8. **ASK:** How did Daniel show that God’s way is better than the world’s way?

   - He resolved not to defile himself. He offered a plan to the king’s official.
**READ**

**ASK:** What would Daniel say to Rachel and Sean? Ask yourself, What does the Bible say about this issue? Resolve to be pure in private and before others.

What are some biblical guidelines that speak to the issues raised in the above stories? (see 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Ephesians 5:3-5; Romans 13:14, and 2 Timothy 2:22).

**NOTE TO LEADER:** One problem in this scenario is that on the inside they are different, but on the outside they are exactly the same.

**FOLLOW-UP:** What would people have thought if Rachel and Sean had decided not to stay together?

**ASK:** What would Daniel say to Cassandra?

“No” is not enough. How will others see the benefits of God’s way?

**NOTE:** Daniel chose neither conformity nor isolation. What kind of plan could Cassandra follow in reaching out with love and grace to her non-Christian friends?

**ASK:** Describe a time when you were pressured to do something wrong.

**FOLLOW UP:** What tensions did you feel?

**ASK:** What would the consequences have been given in?

**ASK:** What would the benefits have been if you had not given in?

**ASK:** Do you tend to be a Rachel/Sean or a Cassandra?
TAKING A STAND

It had been hard for such a young believer. The word had gotten around the fraternity that Dan had become a Christian. There were a good number of brothers who weren’t very happy about it. So they turned up the heat. They talked behind his back and they mocked him to his face. They even knelt down and pretended to worship him once he walked down the hall. But still he hung in there. Outside the house, his involvement with C.C.C. helped him nurture his faith. Within the house, he sought to live an exemplary life before his brothers.

Four years later, when Dan was a senior, a Campus Crusade staff man spoke to Dan’s fraternity chapter on “How You Can Know God Personally.” The living room was full. There had been a change in the house since Dan was a freshman, but the most revealing comment came from the brother who had given Dan the greatest grief. His comment card read, “If you are from the same organization that Dan is a part of, you are welcome in this house at any time.”

NOTE: While compromise is never an acceptable option for the Christian, isolation is sometimes an appropriate and often necessary course of action. The biblical term is ‘separation.’

LEADER’S NOTE: As these students talk about issues they are struggling with, encourage them to only share things that would be appropriate to share in the group.

CONFORMITY

Where do I succumb to the pressure to conform?

What specific passages speak to this issue?

How can I “resolve” not to “defile” myself and do right?

ISOLATIONISM

Do I tend to isolate myself from relationships with unbelievers?

How does this prevent me from reaching out to them?

What can I do to strike a balance between not conforming yet not isolating myself from relationships with non-Christians?


ANSWER: When the temptation is too great, when an activity is in clear violation of God’s Word, when involving myself with a questionable activity might jeopardize my witness for Christ.

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The following excerpt from Em Griffin’s book, “The Mind Changers,” would be an excellent tool for helping our students dig deeper into the subject of conformity. You may want to copy this for each student and give it to them at the end of the study. Encourage them to take it home and read it and think about it during the week and be prepared to discuss it next week as a review. You could use questions like, What is the main point of this article? How does it increase our understanding of conformity? How might a person apply it?

The easy popular criticism of conformity also assumed that the man who follows the crowd in one instance will automatically do so in another situation. But it just isn’t so! ... The difference is not in personality, but in situation. Some conditions encourage a person to weigh his own perceptions and experience heavily, while almost ignoring the thoughts and desires of those around him. In this case—no conformity. But change some of the situational factors and the very same man will tend to doubt the value of his own judgement and rely almost totally on the opinion of those around him.

As Christian persuaders we need to know those situational factors. On the negative side, we want to avoid placing anyone in such a strong group pressure situation that they simply can’t say no to our message. This would be dishonoring to the Lord and show a casual disregard for them as fellow human beings. We also want to be able to spot those non-Christian group situations where the cards are stacked so high that believers will have a tough time maintaining their faith and witness. Again, it’s not without reason that Christ taught us to pray, “Lead us not into temptation.”