



Can You Take the Heat? (Standing Up for What You Believe)

P_{review}

Have you ever been somewhere that you didn't fit in—that you felt as conspicuous as a clown at a funeral? Going against the crowd can be just as awkward. *Draw two lines. Make one slightly longer than the other. Point to each line, one at a time, instructing everyone to raise their hands when you point to the longest line. Ahead of time, tell everybody except for one person to vote for the wrong line. Does the person who wasn't told how to vote give in to the pressure to follow the crowd? (Be sure to choose someone who won't mind being singled out.)*

P_{raise}

Listen to Forever Jones's song "He Wants It All." (You can find it on YouTube.) As the song plays, think of things in your life you need to surrender to God.

P_{arable}

Nathan Zohner, a 14-year-old high school student, made the news with a science fair project titled "How Gullible Are We?" He informed 50 ninth-grade students of the dangers of a chemical called *dihydrogen monoxide*: It's responsible for thousands of deaths every year. It's colorless, odorless, and tasteless. It's a major component of acid rain, and it causes erosion to our natural landscapes. It has also been found in cancerous tumors.

Forty-three students favored banning this chemical, and six were undecided. Only one recognized the truth: that 'dihydrogen monoxide' is just a fancy name for plain old . . . water. Zohner's experiment illustrated how easy it is for human beings to mindlessly follow a crowd.

P_{resent}

In **I Peter 2:11** we are called "strangers and pilgrims" (KJV). This is because the earth isn't really our home; we'll never completely fit in. Being loyal to God's truth often makes us stick out in uncomfortable ways. It's much easier to be swept along with a crowd than to fight against it. As **Daniel 3** shows, doing the right thing sometimes requires sticking out—and being willing to take the heat.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, besieged Jerusalem and took many of its finest, smartest, Hebrew citizens. This group included three children named Shadrach, Meshach, and



Abednego. Even though they had been ripped from their homes, these three young men impressed the king so much that they were eventually set up in positions of high esteem in the province of Babylon.

One day, Nebuchadnezzar made a huge golden image and called all the leaders of the provinces to come to the image's dedication. When music was played, everyone was to fall down and worship the image. If not, they would be thrown into a red-hot, blazing furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship anything or anyone other than the one, true God, even in the face of death. When the music played, they did not bow.

Naturally, there were tattletales watching, and they told Nebuchadnezzar. When he heard, he went into a rage. "If you don't worship the image," he told the Hebrews, "you will be cast into the fiery furnace, and I'd like to see the god that can deliver you out of my hands!"

The three Hebrews didn't hesitate. "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it. But even if He doesn't, we want you to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

The Bible never promises that doing the right thing will be easy—or that we'll be protected from pain, disappointment, and ridicule. But **I Corinthians 16:13** (NIV) says, "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong." (Check out more promises in **I Corinthians 2:9**.) Just remember: Nothing that you endure on earth is too high a price for the awesome treasure of spending eternity in the presence of God. (If you want to know how the story ends for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, read **Daniel 3:19-30**.)

Pactice

1. Can you think of a time you had to choose between right and wrong?
2. What are some everyday situations teens face where they have to make hard choices?
3. Do you think you could make the same choice the three Hebrews made?

Pray

Pray that you have the courage and commitment to live for God in both hard and easy times. Pray that you're willing to take the heat for what you believe—that you don't let peer pressure sway you. Thank God for your relationship with Him and for never forsaking you.

Plus

Take a few minutes to watch this fun video: www.fevr.net/videos/i-just-want-to-fit-in