

All right, Daniel 3:14, here's what it says. It says, "And Nebuchadnezzar said to them, 'Is it true Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? Now, when you hear this sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and all kinds of music: if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what God will be able to rescue you from my hand?' Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to the King, 'Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it and he will rescue us from your hand, oh King. But even if he does not, we want you to know, oh King, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.' Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these men wearing their robes, trousers, turbans, and other clothes".

I have to resist the urge to comment on how much outfit is going on here. Because we already have a trouser and a turban and a robe, but that's not to mention all the other clothes they were also wearing on this particular occasion. "They were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. The King's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men fell into the blazing furnace. Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisors, 'Weren't there three men we tied up and threw into the fire?' They replied, 'Certainly, oh King.' He said, 'Look, I see four men walking around in the fire unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.'"

"Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, 'Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the most high God, come out. Come here.' So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire. And the satraps, prefects, governors, and royal advisors crowded around them". Don't miss this. "They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed. Their robes were not scorched and there was no smell of fire on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar said, 'Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who has sent his angel and rescued his servants.' They trusted in him and defied the King's command, and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any God except their own God". As we close out this message series, "Up In Smoke," I want to preach to you a message that I'm calling "Worth Dying For". Come on, anybody have faith to believe that God's going to move and empower.

Jesus, we ask and pray that you will show us something brand new about who you are. And that we could see in ourselves these same qualities that are being held up from these three Hebrew children as a result of your work in our lives because you are the very same God who worked in their lives on this day. And we have access to what made them so strong then even now. Help us to see it, help us to believe it, even though often times it doesn't seem like it. And we ask that if even one person is here who doesn't know you, in this moment you would draw them to yourself by your Holy Spirit. We pray this in the mighty matchless name of Jesus. And everyone who believes said together Amen.

Nebuchadnezzar was king around 600 BC at this time of this story, where he and his Babylonian empire had pulled an Alexander the Great and conquered the world. Or we could have said Napoleon Bonaparte, we could have said Julius, but he was at the top of the food chain. He was in that rarefied air with other dictators who had basically conquered the entire earth. And one of the things that he had the habit of doing was taking captives from countries he overturned. From countries he conquered he would bring the best and the brightest back home to serve in his city. And so those who are teenagers would be what he would be thinking for. So, if he took over America, he'd be going to Harvard, he'd be going to Yale, and going to MIT. And he would basically, like, no, you're coming with me now. And he would change their names because all three of these

Hebrew children, we read their names like 15 times, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, these were not their God-given names. No, their names they were given as Israelites, as people who followed the God of the Bible. He changed their names and gave them all names that paid homage to Babylonian deities.

And so they went through this intense brainwashing situation, but then eventually they were going to ultimately serve in his cabinet. That was the goal. And these three that we are reading about, they were a part of that group of people that were taken captive and dragged off in chains as teenagers to live in Babylon. Now, what we know of these three Hebrew children and their friend, Daniel, who is the author of the book that we are reading, is that they chose to respond to their time living in Babylon the same way that we are called by God to approach living in the culture that we live in today. That is to say that we would follow Christ being in the world, but not of the world. Now, that's easy to roll off the tongue because it's a verse that's somewhat familiar, but so many of us struggle with it every single day. Why is it so hard to live in the world but not of the world? Because what's far easier as Jesus' followers living in a world that does not follow Jesus, because can we all agree our culture, the gods that are worshiped, the way of life, the world view, what is normal today is not like honor Jesus, love God, live your life seeking Him first, focus more on heaven than on here now. No, that's not the plan, that's not the goal, that's not what we think of today, what we see today.

So we're living in the midst of Babylon right now, so we have to live in a world, not of the world. And that means there's two mistakes that we must not make. Mistake number one is separation. Separation where we try and pretend like we're already living in Heaven. Christian bubble, Christian everything, offended by the world, lalalala lalalala, like the world doesn't exist. It's evil and bad, it's got cooties on it so we're going to live over here in this compound 20 floors below the earth. We have a lot of rations, we're going to make it. That's the separation. The problem with separation is that you bring sin and defilement into your bunker with you in your heart. And so you can't escape sin because you've got some inside of you too. So we're trying to avoid being defiled, but we've brought in with us the most sinister of all pride and religion and smugness. And, plus, that's not to say anything of the fact that you can't reach a world you've abandoned. You can't reach a world you're hiding from. You can't reach a world you won't allow yourself to touch.

And so separation is not a great plan. The other often repeated mistake is imitation. This is where we don't want to separate so we just, basically, we worship the gods of this world. We, basically, live exactly like those who are in this world and we're so eager to not offend anyone that we don't stand up for anything. And, basically, we don't have anything to offer them because we've become identical to them in worldview. We're meant to be a peculiar people in a certain way, we're meant to have different values. And so separation and imitation are both equal mistakes. What Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did that was so wise is they did exactly what we're supposed to do, and that's to not choose either of those. To know that we'll always find tension because, at any given moment, we're being pulled in one of those two directions. Sometimes in the same day, sometimes in the same school day, sometimes in the same work day, sometimes in the same email you're writing, you find yourself wanting to separate and having to catch yourself, wanting to imitate and having to have to correct that too. So what do you gotta do? You've got to infiltrate.

That's number three, that's right in the middle: Infiltrate. We're not going to separate from the world, we're not going to imitate it. We're going to infiltrate the world with the love of God. We've got to be in it without being of it so we can give something to it. Then we can build it, then we can change it, then we can love it, then we can touch it, then we can show it the way that's the way, the truth, and the life. By getting our hands dirty, by getting to know people, by not being offended by the fact that sinners sin. It's what they do and so do we. It's loving them as we follow a perfect God imperfectly. And being on the journey with people, and being in the communities, and being in the city. This is why "Rock the City" is so important to us. If you're watching on TV, we do what so many churches try to do and love the cities that we're in. We're in 12 beautiful cities and our church online family jumps in and shows the love of Jesus in other cities as well. It's amazing to see when that happens. But what we're trying to seek the peace of the city. We care about the parks, we care about the schools, we care about people having blood to have put into them in transfusions. We're going to go willingly give our blood.

Why, we're following someone who's the original blood donor. He shed his blood on the cross so we're willing to give a little bit of ours too. We want to get our hands dirty, we want to get our feet dirty, we want to be around the brokenness of our cities and infiltrate workplaces. And we're not trying to create a sub-Christian culture of this. No, we want to be in the arena, we want to be in politics, we want to be in government, we want to be in sport, we want to be in all of these things not so that we're insulated, but so that we can constantly be doing what Jesus said to do: to give, to show, to serve, to love. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are prototypes for how we should love and serve and have influence. So they're brought in, they could have reacted one way, oh, we should be back in Israel. They're not in Israel and you're not going to be there for a long time. All right? What can we do here? See, so many people live focused on what's been taken from them and they forget about what can't be taken away. If we would live more, what can't be taken away? They could take me to Israel, but they can't take the God of Israel out of me. He's with me here.

I'm going to let this be a little expression of the Holy Land wherever I walk, wherever I go. OK, you're in chains now and you're brought in to Babylon. What are you going to do? Do the best job you can. OK? So that's exactly what they did. And living the way they did was a great plan until the day came to a head, when part of the responsibilities of being a citizen of Babylon was, oh, the King built a really giant statue made of gold and he's ordered that everyone has to bow down and worship it. Now, at this point, they're at a dilemma because their goal is to seek the betterment of Babylon, see the King thrive. They were in, literally, his inner circle. We'll talk about how they got into that in just a little bit longer, but they got favor and influence that's scary in the kingdom. But then one day the King has this crazy idea, wish I could tell you the back story of his resisting the grace of God. The statue was him resisting the grace of God because God had done something crazy to speak to Nebuchadnezzar and he was fighting against it. And he was doing what in the New Testament later, Acts would describe as kicking against the goats. God was goading Nebuchadnezzar trying to reach him with his love. And his statue is his fighting against that and trying to scare God away. So everyone has to worship this statue.

Now, their goal is to infiltrate but to worship this God would be to imitate. So they can't do it. They can't do this. Why? Because here's how they were raised, here's what was imprinted on their heart when they were just babies. The Bible says, "You shall have no other gods before me". Look at this next verse. "You shall not make yourself an idol in the form of anything of Heaven above, Earth beneath, to the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them". So they had to choose between God and honoring man here. And when that push comes to shove, what they had to do, what they were modeling for us how to do, is to say, respectfully, we must not bow. We'll do everything we can, we'll be the best employees we can, but this is something that we cannot do. And the King said, if you don't, you're dead. And they said, but our faith in God is worth dying for. We are willing. We're willing. Can you not celebrate that kind of man! Respectfully, King, Your Majesty. Then we have to go into the oven. 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit, a kiln used for baking bricks. They said, please, show us the way to the oven then. Because we'll honor you, we'll serve you the best of anybody of our effort, but we will have to die then.

And I think all of us just want that to be in us on that day. Let's deconstruct it then and try and figure out how. Because I don't think it's an accident that they ended up here at this place at the top of the mountain, right? There's an old saying that says if you see someone at the top of a mountain, he didn't fall there. And I think it's easy in the Bible to go, at a moment like this and go, man, they're at the top of the mountain, and just assume they fell there and hope that we'll fall there too. But you don't fall up a mountain. And you don't just accidentally end up one day with the kind of guts and steel in your spine that causes, thousands of years later, people to still be stirred by the story of what was written on your soul. So how did they get there? Here's, I think, a couple of things. Jot them down. I think there was a consistency in behavior that we should celebrate. I think Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, long before they're jumping into this fire, they were consistent day-by-day with small decisions in little ways in behavior.

Oh, it's great to talk about the plain of Dura and a 70 foot tall statue. And you think, ah, man, I would do the

same thing, I would die for God. And that's great, would you live for Him? Well, I'll die for Him. That's great but what about tomorrow at work, would you live for Him? What about when you're watching TV and you're choosing what you watch and bringing, will you live for Him? Consistency in behavior. Well, you're kind of reading that into the text. Oh, no, no, I'm not, is actually the back story. If you read Daniel 1 this week, it started with carrot sticks. Started with carrot sticks. First day on the job was like, hey, orientation, here's what you eat. Here's the thing, here's where you're going to read, here's how you're going to study, and they were like, oh, man, there's some dietary issues here, and we're not being picky but some of the things we're supposed to eat, we're not supposed to eat. And so there's this beautiful moment where they just were willing to say, hey, could you, and it was so cool how they framed it, they were just so diplomatic. The guy who was supervising the program.

They said, let's do a test instead of saying, we can't eat that, you pig. How dare you eat such foul things? They were so diplomatic. Daniel was like, well, obviously, the King wants us to be really healthy and this is what you're feeding us. And that makes total sense, actually, it's probably the best thing anyone should eat. But here's a crazy thought. And he suggested what they wanted to eat because they were supposed to eat, which just at that moment would be vegetables and water. He's like, what if you just ran us as a pilot program, a test. Who knows what can happen if for 10 days, let's say, we just ate that, then you let everybody else eat the regular stuff. Then you test us and compare us. Hey, if we're not healthier, we'll be happy to figure something else out. And so they drew a line in the sand on small things is my point. And, of course, at the end of the 10th day, they were better looking in complexion, in strength, in vitality than all those that were eating the delicacies brought in from the King's table and the wine that he drank. And they were healthier, they were better, they were fitter, and so they were allowed to stay on what they wanted to bring into their bodies for the rest of the entire program.

So how do you get one day to have this kind of amazing strength? I believe it starts in the small decisions that you're pre-making day-by-day. I'll have you notice that when they got to this moment, they were asked, we'll heat it up seven times hotter and you'll have to go in. They said, we don't even need to think about it. He was basically saying, take a moment and think about what's going to happen. And they go, we don't actually need to, our decision was made long ago when we got here. And we decided that God first, and after that we're going to honor each other and honor the King and do the best job we possibly can, that he put inside of us. But they said, there's certain things we can't do, there are certain things we can do. Some of y'all need to pre-make more decisions. That is to say, don't wait till you're in the heat of the moment. Don't wait to draw a line sexually till you're on your date. Don't wait till you're in the theater to say, what am I going to bring into my soul? Make some decisions ahead of time for your heart. This is what I'm going to live for, this is what I'm going to stand for, these are some things I'm not willing to do. I'm not willing to get into a shady business deals, I'm not willing to do unethical things or things that are illegal, or things that are outside of law. We need to choose ahead of time who we are going to be. That's how character is formed.

What I'm trying to say is that the key to confidence in the bad times is consistency in the good times. And you are today determining what you're going to do on that dark ultimate day. When you get into that, like the pressure's really on, it's right now that you're forming character, or the lack thereof of, that's going to be there to help you or to be there to hurt you. Don't wait till you're off at college to figure out what you're going to believe and wait till you're off at this situation. Choose now what kind of a husband you're going to be, choose now what kind of a wife you're going to be, what kind of a mom you're going to be. I just encourage you to make some decisions ahead of time, make some resolutions inside your soul. But because they were consistent in their behavior, they ended up courageous under pressure. And that's the second thing that we have to marvel at: that these men reached a place where they were just courageous under pressure. Why is that? Well, because I believe they knew who God was. They knew who God was and that's what they were thinking of on this day. The cool thing about the Bible is that we get a picture of chronology. And I love that the book of Isaiah was written before the book of Daniel. The book of Isaiah was written before the book of Daniel. What does that mean? That means Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had access to what Isaiah when he talked about this.

Look at it. "When you pass through waters, I'll be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they won't sweep over you. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned. The flames will not set you ablaze". So they are consistent in behavior, they remember God is with them, now they're courageous under pressure. Why? Because they fear God. These are three people who fear. They revere God. Like the encounter Isaiah had. Woe is me for I am undone. God is worthy. They had this worship of God that was written over their life. It was the major story, it was the all caps headline, everything else was a detail. And church, I got news for you. When you fear God, you don't have to fear anyone else. You never have to fear men, you never have to fear situations, you don't have to be afraid of anything when you ultimately fear God more than everything. So they were courageous under pressure. Third thing I see is that they were cut free by the fire. As I read the story, I marvel at the fact that they actually, if you want to be technical about it, they were better off after the situation than they were before it. This was actually a gift, strangely wrapped, I'll grant you that. Strangely wrapped, I'll grant you that, by a gift.

When it was all over, not in the moment, I guarantee you that. They were standing there, everyone's bowing. They're like ahh. It's hard to go, that's a gift, this is a gift. This is a gift, what a great gift. Yeah, thanks for the gift. But by the time it was over: why? Because before they were thrown in they were tied up. And by the end of it they were unbound and unharmed. They went in tied up, they came out unbound. Tied up, unbound. Tied up, unbound. Tied up, unbound. How many of you know that sometimes the only way to get unbound is to be going into the fire sometimes? That God has to put you in to a situation that will burn away what ties you up and keeps you away from your God-given destiny. Sometimes there are passions in our heart that aren't helping us, sometimes we're tied up to addiction, sometimes we're tied up to situations, sometimes we have unhealthy addictions. We have unhealthy dependencies, reactions, and sometimes going into a fire helps you to find the dross burned away, that you're actually going to have more liberty because of the hard thing you went through. Because God's going to show you he's with you and that He'll never abandon you. 1 Peter talks about this kind of purifying. He says, "In this now you greatly rejoice". Greatly rejoice, greatly rejoice, all God's people said: Greatly rejoice.

So that's not a little rejoicing, that's not like, yay. Praise Him. With a shout of joy, with arms raised in belief, with eyes closed in humbled dependence: "Greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you've been grieved". Look at it, go back. Grieved. Grief? Greatly rejoice in grief? Greatly rejoice, triumphant victorious joy? Grief? Hurting, hard, weeping, our automatic go-to response isn't yay. Why? Because we're back in Dura and everyone's bowing, and it's hard to go, gift. It takes faith to say this is a gift. Strangely wrapped, I'll grant Him that, but a gift. Look at this. Why would we rejoice in the grief? Here we go. Because the result of it it's going to be that, "The genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ". The only thing that comes out of a fire is preciousness. Gold comes in, pure gold comes out. And I just encourage you to believe you're going to be cut loose by the fire. And that just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who by the end of the story, we didn't read it, they get promoted.

So the goal of this backstory is their enemies wanted to tear them down and that's why they set up this whole thing. And then made sure, engineered this situation, to cut them down. The end result was they get promoted. Now in the middle of it, it felt like they were going to die. But the end result is better, the end result is purified, the end result is stronger, the end result is more confident, the end result is more reliant on God's presence, miraculous strength. What I'm trying to say is I just encourage you to believe that when life gets seven times hotter, it's actually God trying to make you 10 times better. That right now, whatever you're going through that feels like it's not just a furnace, it's a furnace heated up seven times hotter. It's because on the backend, God wants you to be 10 times better than you are right now, 10 times fitter than you are right now, 10 times the father that you are right now. But what we shouldn't be so naive to believe would be that it's always going to look exactly like it looked on this day.

What do you mean? Well, I mean on this exact occasion God chose to glorify himself and purify His people by bringing them out of the furnace. But God doesn't just work in one way, He has lots of ways and his ways are not our ways. And what I've learned in my life and from scripture is that God can deliver you from the furnace

or through it. He can deliver you from something or through something. So what does that mean? That means that sometimes God calls you out of the furnace and that's the deliverance. But other times the deliverance is He allows you to stay in the furnace and that can deliver you too. And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew exactly that that was a possibility. In fact, if you look back at verse 17 and 18, they mentioned three things. I'm going to show them to you. The God we serve is able, He will rescue us from your hand, third thing is but even if He doesn't.

Look at it again. Our God is able, He will deliver us from your hand, but even if He doesn't. And if you could learn those three things and hold them up, our God is able, no matter what I'm delivered, no matter what I win, no matter what God is glorified, no matter what his plans are aren't thwarted. And even if He doesn't choose to do what I hope He does right here, what He is able to do, we're not going to bow anyway. We're still going to fear Him, we're still going to love Him, we're still going to keep loving you, we're still going to keep praying for you. Let's define our terms. God is able. He could snap his fingers, the oven goes out. Snap his fingers, your heart goes out, Nebuchadnezzar. Right? This is what was in that. He could right now swoop in with angels. Our God is able. But even if He doesn't, meaning He may not choose to do what He can do because of the plans that He understands that we don't even have access to.

So what's the middle part? The triumphant part is no matter what, He will rescue us from your hand. What does that mean? Well, let's say God chose to let them get put into the fire and they burn and they die. What happens to them next? They instantly are transported to Heaven, where they are delivered from Nebuchadnezzar hand and they instantly have no pain, instantly have no guilt, instantly have no sin where they are out of his clutches forever in God's presence for all eternity. So even if they die, they win. But if God chooses to deliver them out, which He is able, we win also. So no matter what, all we do is win, win, win, because we are on the winning team. So no matter what, we're going to bow because we've already bowed down. You can't bow down when you're already bowing, and in our hearts we're already worshipping the true and loving God. The fourth thing is I love that they came out of the fire collected and not sour. Jot it down, they came out collected.

These are men who have just been in an oven. An oven so hot the people who threw them in died throwing them in. They came out collected, which, by the way, I could preach for a long time about how when there's a grace on your life, you can do what other people find impossible. It's just all about the grace on you. But I won't. I want to talk about they came out collected and not sour. Why? Because the text tells us that their clothes, they weren't burned. The hair on their head not singed. They didn't even smell of smoke. I'm just telling you there's just something beautiful about understanding that the hard things you've gone through don't have to define you. They don't come out smelling like their trial. Oh, man, you must have been through it. Yeah, let me tell you about it, it was horrible. You would never even know. And I'm just believing for a kind of strength, a kind of faith, a kind of resolve, a kind of worship in your life that being around you, I'd have to even wait, you've been through what? You've been through that, you're going through cancer, you're going through this? But there's such a strength about you, such a sweetness about you. You're not walking in all the time like, oh, it's so bad. Oh, it's so hard. Oh, woe is me. Oh, woe is the world.

There's such a beautiful strength about you, that God has done such a vibrant work in you. We'd be surprised if we even knew what went on inside of you. Because the devil wants you to smell like your trial. But there's just such a beauty in understanding that the work God wants to do is to free you from the victim mentality by giving you the victor's personality. And just to understand the power and the strength that comes from being able to go through bitter experiences without becoming bitter yourself. And that these men were still sweet. They didn't smell like burnt flesh, they didn't smell like burnt hair, and they still had a pure heart towards Babylon. The next day, what do they do? Go to work. Go back to work for the King and work alongside people who had conspired to take them out.

These are people who had the kind of faith my friend, Pastor Jensen Franklin, talks about, that is to be able to love like you've never been hurt. To love like you never tried to get assassinated, to love like you weren't

maligned, to love like you weren't conspired against, to love like you weren't gossiped about. I'm just believing for you that you will not smell like the smoky situations you've been through. Why? Here we go. Because like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you're going to live a life coated in God's power. Coated in God's power. I bought my kids a book of science experiments and one of the ones that we read about in the book was one that involved soapy water and a beach ball. This is my daughter, Alivia, by the way. Say hi, Alivia, everybody. But I think, safety first, children, so we'll be protected. This one involves a beach ball, but not just any beach ball that you would fill normally with air before you take it to the beach. We filled this one up with methane gas, which is pretty dangerous, actually, to be completely honest with you. And if you take a beach ball full of methane gas into a container full of dish soap, you can kind of do something neat. Because what you can do is... This is a methane bubble. Don't breathe this, kids.

Let's get a little deeper. It's like I'm playing the bagpipes. There we go, that's the sweet spot. So these bubbles are all full individually of trapped methane gas. Before I grab it and have Alivia set it on fire in my hands, what I'm going to do is coat my hands in water. Hey, come on, let's hear it. Good job, Alivia, thank you so much. Now here's the thing, the reason that didn't burn me is because the fire couldn't touch me. Because they were coated in the water that absorbed the heat. And I love so much that we get a picture of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, how are they loose walking in the fire? Because of the one who was walking with them. The fire couldn't touch them because of who they were walking with, who absorbed the flames, who absorbed the heat, who took the pain so they were pleasant walking around the fire. And this story in Daniel 3, it actually points to Jesus. It points us not only because He was the one walking, I believe, in the fire with them, not only because Jesus was the son of God who showed up in that fire, but because on the day that He went to the cross, He willingly walked into the furnace so that you could safely come out.

That's the gospel. Jesus willingly went into the fire. You'll notice that Jesus didn't walk out. These three men walked out, he stayed in. Why? Because He had unfinished business. As He would go to the cross and hang there in the fire, absorbing the fire in the heat of the wrath of God against sin, so that we could safely come out. And I love so much that this story shows us what happens when we're coated with God's power. And, ultimately, the great strength we're going to have in the battles that we face is not relying on our love for God, but relying on His love for us. I titled this message "Worth Dying For" not because I want you to walk out of here thinking, I'm going to live for God and he's worth dying for. No, no, no, it's about you. You are worth dying for. What do you mean? I mean John 3:16. "God so loved the world that He sent his only begotten son, so that whoever would believe in Him would not perish but have everlasting life". We're going to walk out of here today with our heads held high. We're going to praise God in trials and in grief because we were worth dying for. He loved us so much, He gave himself for us.

Father, we pray for peace in trials and strength in difficult deeds. And consistent obedience in unseen little ways. And that through all of it, what would give us power, would give us victory, is keeping our eyes on the one who walked into the fire so we could safely come out. This belief in you surrounding us like a coat, surrounding us like a blanket, surrounding us like armor, surrounding us with power from above. Even when it seems like that's the last thing that seems true, believing it's true and keeping our eyes on you. And that the things that we face are no match for the one who walks beside us and who surrounds us. Help us to believe this, we pray in Jesus' name.