

## Dogs and Buzzers

**As soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold** (Daniel 3:7).

**Scripture:** Daniel 3:1-7

**Song:** “Oh, Be Careful”

Nobel Prize-winning Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936) noticed the dogs in his laboratory drooling when the assistants came in. Pavlov surmised that the dogs associated the workers’ lab coats with meals. He put this theory to the test and sounded a buzzer every time the dogs were fed. Over time the dogs salivated at the mere sound of the buzzer. This response became known as “conditioned reflexes.”

Long before Pavlov’s experiment, King Nebuchadnezzar applied his own conditioning to the people under his reign. Whenever they heard the king’s orchestra playing, he wanted them to automatically bow down and worship the image he had set up.

God made us able to develop responses to the familiar in our lives. We can glorify God by establishing habits that usher us into worship of the one true God. When the snow falls, we can praise the Lord for His unique creation. When we see the flowers budding, we can rejoice at the newness of life. And the songs we choose to listen to can prompt thankfulness to our God.

**Father,** may what I hear, see, and do guide me to worship You and You alone. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Who God Is

**[Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said,] “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it” (Daniel 3:17).**

**Scripture:** Daniel 3:8-18

**Song:** “God Will Make a Way”

I flipped the calendar as I counted: only six weeks left on our townhome’s lease. We desperately needed to find a new place to live. When I lay on my bed, staring at the ceiling, there was no comfort to be found in the uncertainty of the future. Instead, I recalled what God had done in my past, reminding myself that He is able to provide. A few weeks later, in a most unexpected way, God provided a home and the means to purchase it.

Facing a fiery punishment, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had no idea what would happen next. However, they stood confident in their faith in God, knowing from personal experience what He was able to do. God had spared their lives when they were ripped from their homeland and taken to Babylon. God had given them favor in the eyes of the king’s official when they asked for vegetables instead of eating the king’s defiling food. And God gave them exceptional wisdom and knowledge as they studied for the king’s service (Daniel 1).

In your times of uncertainty, remember who God is and what He has done in the past. It will help give you the faith you need in the present.

**Father,** thank You for who You are and how You have provided for me in the past. Help me to rest in You as I look at the uncertain future. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Show and Tell

**[Jesus said,] “Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (John 10:37-38).**

**Scripture:** John 10:24-38

**Song:** “Jesus, Son of God”

When I was preschool teacher, one of the highlights for me was seeing a child’s face on show-and-tell day. I could tell whose turn it was because that child walked into the classroom with an extra skip in their step, their large backpack bouncing, a grin from ear to ear. In some cases, the child had been telling their friends that they had a particular toy. Their friends may not have been convinced, but show-and-tell day was a chance for the child to prove ownership of that exciting toy.

The religious leaders who opposed Jesus were disbelieving of His claims. Jesus drew their attention to what He had been showing them. The miracles—the good works that Jesus was doing—demonstrated that He is the Messiah, that He and the Father are one. He turned water to wine, walked on water, fed 5,000 people, and healed a man born blind. These good works proved that Jesus was who He said He was.

When your faith in God is tested because a truth in God’s Word seems unbelievable, remember not only what Jesus said but also what He did during His time on earth.

**Father,** thank You for the testifying works Jesus did so we can know that You and He are one. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Courage to Proclaim the Gospel

**When [Israel's leaders] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus** (Acts 4:13).

**Scripture:** Acts 4:7-20

**Song:** "Jesus Saves!"

Mary Slessor's (1848–1915) feet were tired from walking. The Old Town village in Nigeria couldn't be much further now. The dauntless missionary mopped the sweat off her brow and adjusted the toddler strapped on her back. Traveling to new places was hard work, but Mary was used to hard to work. (She had been working since she was a child in Scotland, laboring in factories instead of continuing her education.) At last, she arrived at the circle of huts whose inhabitants had never heard the gospel. She took a deep breath and summoned her courage. Despite her nervousness, she stepped into the clearing.

Peter and John were uneducated compared to the religious leaders of their day. In the leaders' experience, such boldness as the two disciples showed belonged to the educated. Although Peter and John were unschooled, they were courageous about sharing the truth of Jesus. It was obvious that their confidence came from being with Him.

Jesus Christ has commissioned His followers to take the gospel to every nation (Matthew 28:18-20). Our courage is not rooted in any human measure used to deem us worthy. The boldness we have comes from the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Father**, give me courage to share the love of Jesus. Let me not to be discouraged or feel inadequate but to rest in Your love and Your equipping power. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Whose Name Is It, Anyway?

[The high priest said to the apostles,] “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name” (Acts 5:28).

**Scripture:** Acts 5:17-29

**Song:** “What a Beautiful Name”

My husband, Tim Schmoyer, does not have a common name, so what are the chances that there would be two Tim Schmoyers in the same graduating class at Bible college? During the senior class ceremony, a professor announced that Tim Schmoyer had won an award. Neither Tim got up to receive the award; both thought the other had won. When sorting out the mix-up after the ceremony, they discovered that half the professors had nominated one Tim Schmoyer, and the other half had the other in mind! None of them had been specific about which Tim Schmoyer was which.

The Sadducees were a sect of religious leaders who taught about God but who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. The apostles also taught people about God, but they told of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection and of the gift of eternal life through faith in Him. The Sadducees knew this was different than their teaching and forbade the apostles from using Jesus’ name.

Since so many religions use the word *god* when describing their beliefs, we as Christians can bring clarity to our message by being more specific. We believe in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We believe Jesus is God, and we have the privilege of speaking His name when we share about our faith.

**Father**, please give me opportunities to share that my faith rests in Your Son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Reunion Time

**[God said,] “Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name”** (Isaiah 43:6-7).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 43:1-7

**Song:** “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder”

In 2009, nestled among the trees of Flat Top, West Virginia, the annual Lilly family reunion made its mark on the world. A total of 2,585 Lilly cousins attended the event, breaking the previous world record of 2,369 set in 1998 by the Busse family of Illinois. To surmount the 1998 record, Lilly cousins came from 30 states and from as far away as England and Germany.

In today’s Bible passage, Isaiah the prophet communicates hope to God’s scattered people. Isaiah reminds them that God has promised to gather them from among the nations and bring them back to himself again. The promises in these verses can also be seen as pointing to another gathering of God’s people at the end of time when we will finally be safely home with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, celebrating with one another in His presence—an *eternal* family reunion!

When we are feeling lonely or dejected, we can gather with other believers here on earth in our local churches, in small groups, or even over a cup of coffee. The joy and the belonging that come from meeting together can encourage our hearts and give us a taste of what we have to look forward to for all eternity.

**Father**, thank You for the hope of our future gathering with You and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Keep Walking

**[King Nebuchadnezzar] said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods” (Daniel 3:25).**

**Scripture:** Daniel 3:19-28

**Song:** “God Leads His Dear Children Along”

At age 19, Norman Croucher lost his legs when he fell down an embankment onto a railway line. Rather than becoming paralyzed by fear of a future without legs, he became the first person with artificial limbs to complete the trek from John o’ Groats to Land’s End—the full length of the island of Great Britain. He also climbed many large mountains, including the famous Matterhorn in the Alps. Norman Croucher just kept on walking, hiking, and climbing.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were bound and thrown into the fire. But while inside the furnace, they were set free by the one who looked to Nebuchadnezzar like “a son of the gods.” The three men were not paralyzed by fear of their situation but were up and walking in the fire with the help God had sent. They did not seek a quick exit but patiently waited for God’s timing for the trial to end.

Hard times can threaten to paralyze us with fear or discouragement. When we are stuck, not knowing what to do, God is there with us. Though He may not prevent all the hard times, He is walking with us in them, ready to lead us to freedom at just the right time.

**Father,** thank You for walking with me through hard times. Thank You for never leaving me or forsaking me. In Jesus’ name, amen.