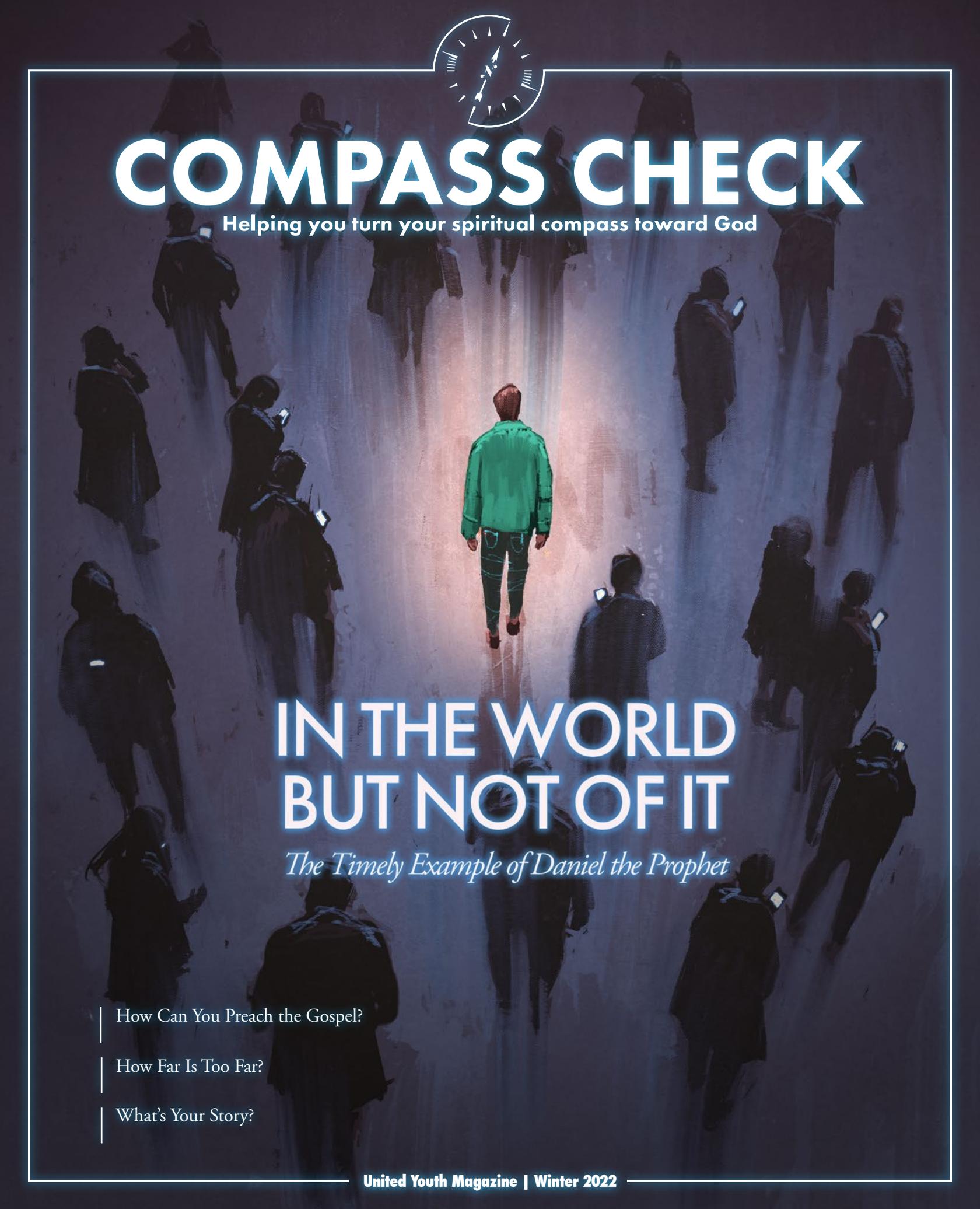




# COMPASS CHECK

Helping you turn your spiritual compass toward God



## IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT

*The Timely Example of Daniel the Prophet*

| How Can You Preach the Gospel?

| How Far Is Too Far?

| What's Your Story?

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## COMPASS CHECK

*Compass Check* is a biblically based magazine for young people of the United Church of God, an International Association (UCGIA). Our name, *Compass Check*, refers to pointing your spiritual compass toward God. Our goal is to inspire readers to respond to the gospel message.

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## COMPASS CORNER

*Dear Compass Checkers,*

I hope this note finds you well and staying warm. When I moved to North Carolina, I gave away a lot of the winter clothes I had in Ohio. Five years later, as I begin to pack for my first ever Winter Camp, I am beginning to regret that decision! Nonetheless, I am very much looking forward to camp in a few weeks, and hope to see many of you there.

As a rule, I don't like to dwell on the negative too much. I'm just not that type of person, and I like to keep my focus on the positive things in life. For example, while winter might not be my favorite time of year, it brings on some great things. Winter Camp, as mentioned, Winter Family Weekend, hot chocolate, fireplaces and football (if you're into that sort of thing like I am). My point is, no matter what or where you find yourself in life, you can find positive aspects if you look hard enough.

This issue of *Compass Check* focuses on some of those positive aspects. In a society that has drifted from God, how do we maintain a faithful course? As a teen, what are some ways you can preach the gospel (hint: it doesn't involve giving a speech)? If your life has taken a negative turn, or is going a direction you're not happy with, you possess the ability to change course.

As you settle in with this issue of *Compass Check*, grab a cup of hot chocolate (or tea or whatever), curl up by the fireplace (if you have one) and think about the good things in life. Have a happy, safe and warm winter!



Dan Preston

Editor of *Compass Check* magazine





## IF YOU THOUGHT

preaching was a job limited to pastors, you're not alone. I used to believe the same thing—until I learned what it really means to preach. The word translated “preach” in the New Testament can also mean “proclaim.” It’s about getting a message out there where people will hear it and respond.

King David once wrote: “Sing to the LORD, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day” (Psalm 96:2). You may have heard the terms “gospel” and “good news” used interchangeably. When considered this way, David is instructing the listener to preach the gospel—and that includes you! How can you get involved?

### 1. LIVE YOUR LIFE IN A WAY THAT INVITES INQUIRIES

Preaching is an action, but when we visualize a typical scenario, it most likely looks something like this: a pastor standing at the lectern giving a sermon. But consider what comes to mind with the word “proclaim”—a message that’s shared publicly, not just in church. A declaration. You are not invisible. Jesus taught that His followers are a light. “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp

and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16). Light stands out. Jesus didn’t give us the option to be one of those dimmable light fixtures that is brighter when we want it to be. He didn’t add a clause that we can turn the light on and off when it’s convenient. We’re to be a constant example of God’s way of life.

Several years ago, I spoke with a young adult who came into the Church as a teenager. She had a fascinating story of how she, without the aid of her parents or a Church publication, came to learn about God’s truth. In fact, it was as simple as a poster. She was spending the night at her friend’s house, and the two girls got into a conversation about God’s way because of a scripture poster the friend (who attended the Church) had on her wall. What if the poster had been rolled away before guests arrived? It would have been so easy to hide and avoid a potentially awkward conversation altogether. But because one girl decided to let her beliefs be visible to others, she not only had a friend, but eventually a sister in Christ.

### 2. CREATE A COMPELLING CAMPAIGN

While we can proclaim the gospel with our actions, one of

the more direct ways to spread the good news is through our words. The conversations you have with others carry a message, whether or not you intend for them to. There's a difference between a garish neon advertisement and a well-planned marketing campaign complete with tasteful graphics. How do you present the gospel? "Ugh, I have to miss the game tomorrow because my parents are taking me to a church thing" or "I'll have to pass this time because I'm out of town for the Feast of Trumpets, but let's plan on the next game." There are a couple of points to consider here. When we present God's way in a positive light, rather than a religious obligation, we're more likely to invite interest. Additionally, we spread God's truth when we refer to the Holy Days and other biblical concepts by their names. It might lead to questions, even if that means research outside of the conversation itself. "Church convention" is too vague for a Google search, but "Feast of Tabernacles" sounds intriguing and might be the first step in a quest for truth.

Perhaps the most powerful marketing tool you have available is social media. Yes, you can preach the gospel with a cell phone! It doesn't need to be anything formal. It could be as simple as a short video of you and your friends keeping the Feast of Tabernacles (tag with #ucgfot or #compasscheck). Try posting a scripture image from time to time on Instagram. Overall, what type of message does your social media presence send? What type of content earns a like or a share from you? How do you interact with others in the comments? Just as Paul instructed Timothy, a young man in the early Church, "let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12). Set an example for future believers!

### 3. BE READY TO GIVE AN ANSWER

If you are open about living God's way and even promote it, questions will arrive. Will you be ready to answer them? We're instructed to "be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). The best way to be ready is to prepare! The next time you listen to a message at Church, put yourself in the place of one of your friends. What questions would he or she have about the topic? Make a list and see if you know how to answer them. Many times, a message will present the answers along with the questions, but keep in mind that a Church audience is already familiar with most of the terms and biblical stories presented in a sermon. How would you explain these for the first time to your friend? As you ask these questions and learn how to answer them, you are owning your beliefs. This is important as you prepare for your future in God's Church and work



*The conversations you have with others carry a message, whether or not you intend for them to. There's a difference between a garish neon advertisement and a well-planned marketing campaign complete with tasteful graphics.*

towards eventual baptism!

As you prepare yourself to give an answer for your beliefs, remember that Church family is there to support you! Many of them have faced similar questions, whether in school, in the workplace or elsewhere in their lives. Look for people who did not grow up in the Church themselves—many of them have fascinating stories of how God used a friend or a situation to bring them to a knowledge of the truth.

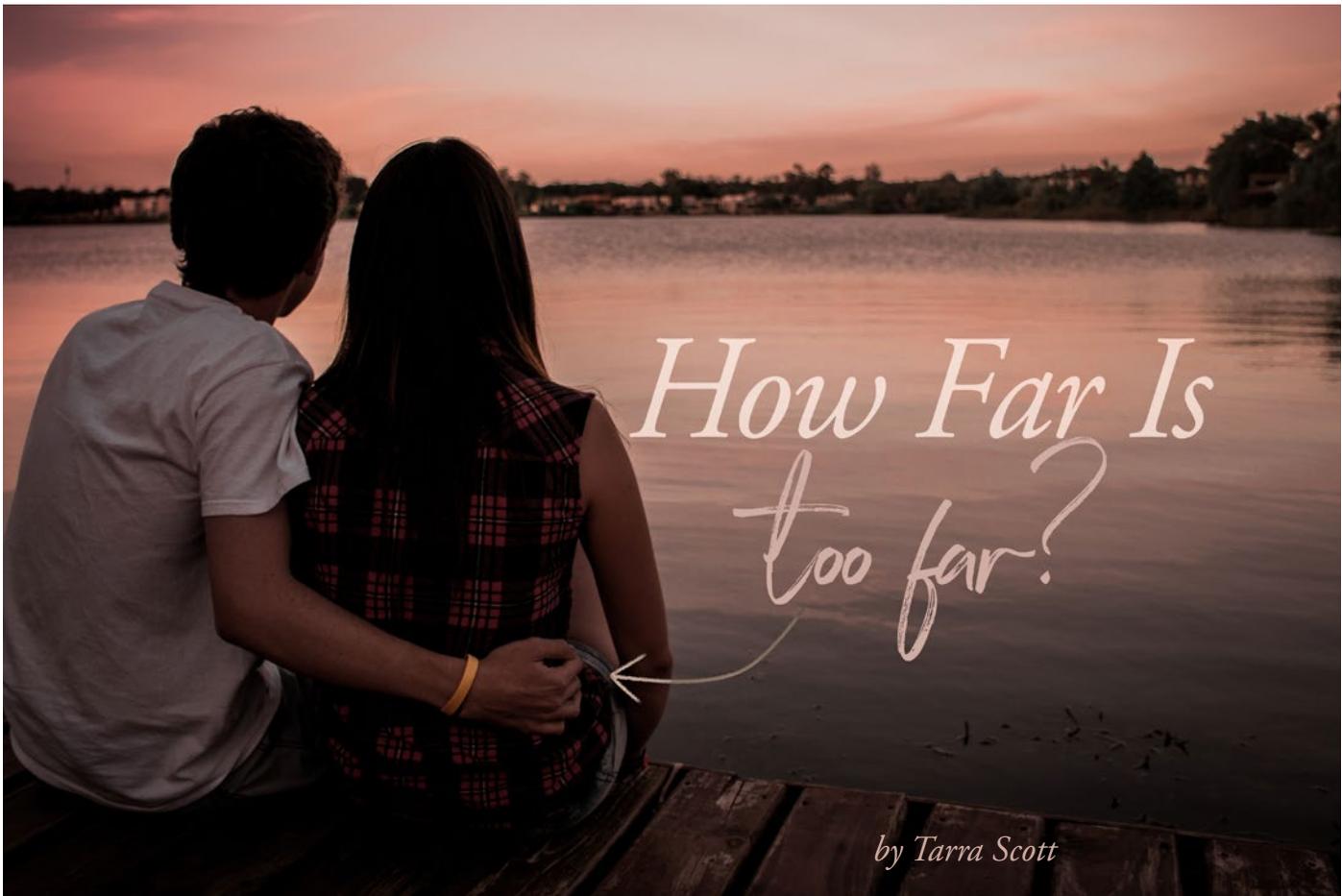
God commends those who make an effort to share His truth. "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says

to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7). The size contrast presented by a pair of feet versus a mountain may seem tremendous, but God notices when even one person represents His way of life wherever they go.

Like the psalmist David, who proclaimed the good news through song, we each have an opportunity and a responsibility to preach the gospel "from day to day" (Psalm 96:2). Does the way you live your life invite inquiries? Is it a well-crafted marketing campaign? If so, be ready to answer those questions as people in your life will want to know "where can I find this hope?" It's your turn to preach the gospel! Where will you proclaim the good news in your life? **CC**



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by Tarra Scott

## When it comes to dating and romance, how do we avoid crossing the line?

**LOVE** and romance can be very exciting, and they are gifts God gives to mankind. Most people date before they decide to get married. The purpose of dating is to evaluate what kind of person you are compatible with, your likes and dislikes, how to communicate effectively and ultimately to choose, and also to *be*, the very best possible person to marry. Within dating are some challenges, one of the more complicated ones being “How far is too far?”

This is a very personal topic, and for many people, it can be uncomfortable. Sometimes it brings feelings of guilt, sadness or regret. Something to always keep in the forefront of your mind is that God is there with you. He knows your thoughts, and Christ is at His side advocating for you.

Approaching dating with the right mindset is essential to having a fulfilling and godly relationship. Dating and marriage are not the primary goals of our life—being like Christ is—but if marriage is a personal goal for you, there

are specific godly guidelines on how to conduct yourself. Knowing your boundaries and communicating those, even before things with a guy or girl become official, is a good start. If you are already dating, it is still an important discussion to have. How far is too far? If you are at the dating age, will be approaching that age or have had this question at all, this article is for you.

### **FLEE FROM SIN**

Understanding the biblical perspective is essential when creating boundaries on this matter. “Flee also youthful lusts;

but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Timothy 2:22). That word “flee” is essential to the attitude we have in matters of sin, especially sexual sin. Approaching dating with the attitude of “How far can I go before it becomes sin?” *is already not a Christ-like mindset*. Looking for loopholes or seeing how close you can get to the line without crossing it is not obeying the spirit of the law. Jesus Christ, our elder brother and role model, fulfills the law perfectly so that we can follow His example (Matthew 5:17-19). A pure heart does not seek sin, nor should it desire to get close to sin! It is our responsibility as believers to put on the mind and conscience of Christ and to train our minds on these matters.

### **A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE**

“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). This is a verse about being unsure if something is okay to do, but doing it anyway. Let’s apply the principle of this verse to matters of romance. If you are doubting the righteousness of your own actions, you are acting against your conscience and faith. Your conscience is a valuable tool from God that helps you discern right and wrong. It gives you that little “ping” when you approach questionable territory and actions. We build our knowledge of right and wrong from God’s instructions in the Bible and Jesus’ example of the fulfillment of those instructions. Flee from actions that “ping” your conscience and turn to God’s instruction, your parents and the ministry He ordained to take care of His Church. If you are struggling with this, you aren’t the only one. It shouldn’t be embarrassing to ask for help; God’s people want to help you.

Everyone has a mind and a conscience. You have one, and so does your boyfriend or girlfriend. We are not going to be judged only for falling into temptation ourselves, but also if we cause someone else to fall into temptation. “Jesus said to his disciples: “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come” (Luke 17:1, New International Version). Influencing someone to go against their conscience is no small matter. It can ruin the relationship and is an extreme breach of trust. It also affects your own conscience, spirit and relationship with God. If you are with someone who thinks something is a big deal and doesn’t want to do it, pushing or convincing him or her to go against his or her conscience is *not* showing love. Communication is important. Being mindful of someone’s

boundaries is a way to show respect and godly love. If there is a difference in opinion, use God’s Word to talk through it and understand each other.

God calls us to be His holy children, and He gives us the resources to figure out how to do that. “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you His Holy Spirit” (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, NIV).





*Being affectionate and showing you care for someone is different from arousing yourself or them to want to do things that are reserved for marriage.*

## **AFFECTION VS. AROUSAL**

An area of the Bible from which we can gain wisdom is the Song of Solomon. “Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires” (Song of Solomon 8:4, NIV). This is applicable not only to the daughters of Jerusalem, but also to everyone. Think about the touching and kissing you may be doing or want to do. What is the purpose? Does it cross a line from affection into arousal?

If what you are doing is causing you to need to exert a lot of self-control to keep from going further, you are tempting yourself. You should not tempt yourself or someone else. Seeking sexual arousal is awakening love, and if you aren’t married, that is before it [love] so desires. Being affectionate and showing you care for someone is different from arousing yourself or them to want to do things that are reserved for marriage. If what you are doing is making it really hard to wait till marriage, flee from that action.

Things like making-out or touching private/sensual areas serve no purpose in godly romance except to increase arousal and desire. Those things aren’t expressions of love if done outside of marriage, and they lead to lust. Similarly, how you dress and what you say is important too. Don’t lead someone to arousal by wearing or saying sexual things; be modest in your speech and dress.

Certain areas of the body are different and are to be treated with special privacy and care. We need to recognize that these parts have an important purpose; private parts have a God-given sexual purpose. Paul elaborates on this differentiation: “And those members of the

body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it” (1 Corinthians 12:23-24). This teaching is an analogy between our human bodies and the body of the Church. Focusing on the former, the verse is saying that your private parts have a special honor, so treat them with care and modesty as God designed. Do not treat them the same as a hand or a leg [our presentable parts], having them visible or allowing access to them for someone who is not your husband or wife. Reserve them for their honorable purpose outlined by God, sex within marriage.

If you are doing things that lead to—or are—sexual activity outside of marriage, even if it is not sexual intercourse, you are not treating them with the dignity God designed for them. You are putting yourself and someone else in a position of lusting, which is not a righteous action. Your boyfriend or girlfriend is a potential child of God, so treat them accordingly, as one of God’s own sons or daughters. Ask yourself this: Would Jesus have been a perfect sacrifice if He had done what you are doing?

## **RATIONALIZATION**

Everyone is guilty of rationalization. It is one of our best skills as humans, but it sometimes becomes a problem when we interpret God’s Word. Trying to convince yourself that certain things are okay because they are not

explicitly addressed in the Bible is rationalizing and that is wrong. By doing this, you are relying on your own understanding rather than our Creator's (see Proverbs 3:5-6).

As mentioned before, an attitude of trying to get as close as possible without explicitly disobeying the law is not Christ-like and needs to change! Jesus told us: "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). That was an instruction that was not explicitly spelled out in the law. Jesus elaborates on the law against adultery and tells us that even *looking* lustfully at someone disobeys the spirit of the law. He addressed it because He knows our hearts. He knows how we rationalize and tip-toe close to disobedience, so He tells us to obey the spirit of the law, not just the letter.

### MANAGING YOUR MIND

Sometimes impure thoughts make their way into our heads. If you catch yourself dwelling on sexual fantasies, turn to God right away and ask Him to help you focus on something else that's good, pure and lovely (Philippians 4:8). Many people struggle with this from time to time. Having wrong thoughts pop into your head isn't evil and doesn't make you an evil person. What you do with those thoughts—keeping them in your mind and dwelling on them, or turning to God and putting them out of your mind—will determine whether you commit sin or not.

*Train your mind* to turn to God's way when



you notice yourself in those thoughts. Turn to God, pray for wisdom and discernment and read His Word. Pray for His protection and guidance. Creating a habit of praying for help *every time* you catch yourself will train your mind and build your relationship with God. "My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:2, NIV). He will help you if you seek Him!

### PURSUE GOD

Fleeing youthful passions does not mean we must strictly avoid every fun activity of youth, but instead of pursuing the passions of the flesh, we should pursue God. Do not be so wrapped up in your boyfriend or girlfriend that it infringes on the time you spend with God. Do not allow your connection with that person to take precedence over the relationship you have with God. Do not allow your passionate feelings to push you away from God, His truth and His way.

In matters of romance, communicate with God first and use wisdom. Talk to your boyfriend or girlfriend about godly boundaries. You can have a healthy, fulfilling and godly romantic relationship, but not without boundaries. Don't tempt each other and risk falling into sin. Flee from sin and obey the spirit of the law! Help each other to protect your purity. Reserve the gift of sex God provides us with until you have committed to each other before the Lord and witnesses in a marriage ceremony. Sex in marriage is the pure and wonderful gift God gives to husbands and wives. Seek wisdom from God, and He will not withhold Himself from you. Flee from sin, pursue God and put on the mind of Christ! **CC**



Tarra Scott attends the Raleigh, North Carolina, congregation and loves talking Bible with her family, friends and campers who have inspired her to write.

**TRAIN YOUR MIND TO TURN TO GOD'S WAY WHEN YOU NOTICE YOURSELF IN THOSE THOUGHTS. TURN TO GOD, PRAY FOR WISDOM AND DISCERNMENT AND READ HIS WORD.**

# IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT

*The Timely Example of Daniel the Prophet*



BY ERIC MOHR

Let's take a little time to reflect on the importance of some familiar biblical heroes. For instance, what do these names have in common: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Daniel and Paul? What about Rahab, Ruth, Hannah, Esther and Mary Magdalene? When we hear these names, do we think of spiritual faithfulness? Of course—we should hold them in the highest regard!

Some of these names stand out, because God used them to serve at various levels of influence in worldly institutions. Separated by several hundred years, Joseph and, later, Moses, served in the administration of the Kingdom of Egypt<sup>1</sup>. Also, Queen Esther and Mary Magdalene each served two different kings: Esther helped save her people by marrying Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) of Persia, and Mary served Jesus, the One—the only—coming King of Kings.

However, one other biblical hero from the list above deserves our careful study. Centuries before Jesus Christ ever prayed that His disciples would function in, but not be of, the world (John 17:15), the prophet Daniel was a teenage Jewish captive, taken by King Nebuchadnezzar's army to Babylon around 605 B.C. His world abruptly pivoted due to forces beyond his control, and he became a servant who now had a different name. How would he react? With the cultural forces at work around you in 2022, how will you choose to respond?

### DANIEL KNEW HOW TO REACT

The first chapter of Daniel's story makes it abundantly clear that he and his three friends saw themselves as significantly different from their Babylonian captors. But submission was the Babylonian way: "to the victor belong the spoils." We learn in Daniel 1:7 that Nebuchadnezzar's palace manager gave Daniel the new name "Belteshazzar," which means "Bel protects the king's life" (*Bel*, from *Baal* meaning "lord," was the Babylonian god who managed order in the universe). Despite their new names, Daniel and his three friends—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—simply would not eat or drink the unclean "delicacies" from Nebuchadnezzar's kitchens. After a few trial weeks of a more wholesome diet of vegetables and water, this band of brothers watched the king's chamberlain (his palace manager) approve their dietary change (Daniel 1:17). Daniel's obedience to God in negotiating this privilege helped set the stage for his unparalleled record of public service over roughly the next 70 years.

And what an amazing 70 years it was! Serving multiple kings (Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar of Babylon, Cyrus the Persian, and Darius the Mede), Daniel had a head for business and developed various aptitudes in

*Like Daniel, you and I live as captives in a corrupted reincarnation of Babylon. The name Babylon derives from babel, meaning "a confused medley of sounds."*



administration. Nebuchadnezzar rapidly promoted him to chief coordinator of all the provincial governors in Babylon, a leadership which continued throughout the Medo-Persian empire (Daniel 2:48; 6:2). Perhaps even more remarkable was that, when required, Daniel requested of God in humble prayer that He be able to interpret significant dreams and signs for the kings he served (witness the golden statue from chapter 2, the tall tree of chapter 4 and the writing finger in chapter 5).



*Is God available to us? Like Daniel, the answer lies between our ears: we must choose to accept the sound mind of Jesus Christ.*

## **BABYLON, GOD’S SYMBOL FOR WORLDLY CAPTIVITY**

Like Daniel, you and I live as captives in a corrupted reincarnation of Babylon. The name *Babylon* derives from *babel*, meaning “a confused medley of sounds.” One important biblical reference to Babylon is: “Come out of her my people” (Revelation 18:4). This encourages us to manage the confusing cultural noise that surrounds us. God commands us, His people, to come out; but how do we do that? For instance, there are many forms of captivity that Christians currently navigate in Western society: political captivity (governments with unrighteous leadership), religious captivity (a common calendar with pagan holidays) and financial captivity (capricious taxation systems). How can Daniel’s example help us cope with our Babylon?

Anticipating the advice of our Savior—“render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” from Mark 12:13-17—Daniel rendered unto the kings he served the things which pertained to those kings, but he always saved his best for God. His captors required that he serve with his mind and body, which he did only up to the point of violating his loyalty to God (let’s remember his harrowing night in the lions’ den from

Daniel 6). Despite how long ago Daniel lived, he consistently serves as a surprisingly current example of self-control, in the way he responded to cultural change when he was a teenager.

## **AS OUR WORLD PIVOTS, WE ALSO HAVE HELP**

And what cultural change we are enduring! Every day, the news is filled with more startling ways in which Satan controls human behavior. Like robots, so many people around us relentlessly pursue their obsession with immorality: abortion, gender fluidity, mass shootings, same-sex marriage . . . the list seems endless. A host of voices dominate our news feeds and social media: activist journalists and self-indulgent influencers who insist on keeping their audiences agitated, because they know only the hive-mind of Satan the devil. Is anyone’s sanity safe in our times? Is God available to us? Like Daniel, the answer lies between our ears: we must choose to accept the sound mind of Jesus Christ. “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5).

Throughout the Bible, God’s continued references to the incentive for striving after His righteousness (the desire for the Kingdom of God) should keep all

of us disciples motivated (Matthew 6:33). According to the apostle Paul in Romans 10:9, 15 (quoting from Isaiah 52:7), those who share and live according to the gospel are beautiful to God. In Revelation 22:14, our Savior promises a reward to those who resist assimilation into Babylon. God has given those who seek Him the spirit of a sound mind, to accomplish this long-term assignment of living among all the confusing voices (2 Timothy 1:7). It’s also worth noting that because God takes no delight in followers who won’t confront the world, He has great praise for those who encourage and strengthen others to persevere (Hebrews 10:35-38; James 5:19-20).

Decades ago, I made the choice to pursue Daniel’s careful example of being in, but not of, the world. Will you join me in aspiring to be like Daniel? **CC**



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### *References*

<sup>1</sup> [answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/how-long-were-the-israelites-in-egypt](https://answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/how-long-were-the-israelites-in-egypt)

# What's Your Story?

*Life is full of choices.  
What will you decide?*

**By Dan Preston**

# THERE

are hundreds if not thousands of fascinating stories about people's lives in the Bible. Some, like David, have multiple chapters and books that cover them. We know a lot about David—his calling to be king as a young shepherd boy, his numerous battles, his game of “cat-and-mouse” with King Saul, his sin with Bathsheba and much, much more. While he died long before I was born (I'm not that old . . . ), I feel like I know him fairly well because his story is well documented in the Bible.

Others, like the judge Shamgar, have only one verse about them: “After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed six hundred men of the Philistines with an ox goad; and he also delivered Israel” (Judges 3:31). This guy managed to whoop up on 600 Philistines single-handedly with a farm implement and save an entire nation, but I don't get to know anything else about him? C'mon! There has *got* to be way more to the story than that . . .

At any rate, it got me thinking: everybody has a story. While our lives might not be as exciting as David's or Shamgar's, there is a story to your life. There is a story to my life. I've shared some of it on these pages before, and I'd be happy to share it with you in person someday if you like. But that's not really the purpose of this article. What I want you to think about is *your* story.

## WHERE TO START?

God has a purpose for your life. He wants you to become His sons and daughters and be a part of His family in eternity as a part of the Kingdom

of God (see “Consider Your Future” in the Fall 2022 issue of *Compass Check*). But within that framework, as you live your life seeking first the Kingdom (Matthew 6:33), you have choices to make: What will you do for work? Where will you live? Who will you marry?

As a teen, your story is just beginning. It might feel like it's not much of a story at this point, and that your life has been pretty boring. Maybe you grew up in the Church with your parents raising you and your siblings to keep the Sabbath. It might feel like your story is no different than anyone else's. But no two people's stories are the same. Yours is unique. Maybe you have siblings who have a *similar* story, but it's not the same.

Perhaps your story has been rather . . . complicated. Not as straightforward as your whole family liking and being a part of the Church.

*The really neat thing about our stories is that they are continuously unfolding and not over yet.*

Maybe there are things that weren't so great, and that you don't like to talk about. That's okay. Not every part of your story needs to be shared with everyone. One of the things that you will learn over time is how and when to share various parts of your story. You are the narrator. And while you should always be honest, you get to decide exactly how your story will be told.

The really neat thing about our stories is that they are continuously unfolding and not over yet. If I were to tell you my story from 10 years ago, it would be very different than it is today. Back then, I was an engineer who rode a motorcycle to work every day. Now I'm a pastor, and drive a very boring four-door sedan. And those are just two parts of my story—my job and my transportation. There's a lot more to me than what I drive and where I work!

**YOU ARE THE WRITER. IF LIFE'S CIRCUMSTANCES TAKE YOU IN A DIRECTION YOU DIDN'T WANT TO GO, YOU HAVE THE POWER TO WRITE A NEW CHAPTER.**

My point is, our stories are constantly changing. They aren't always happy and there are some unpleasant bits and pieces to them, but you are the writer. If life's circumstances take you in a direction you didn't want to go, you have the power to write a new chapter. Go in another direction—one you *want* to go in. And while there may be detours here and there, ultimately, you get to write the story. You get to decide what your life will be about.

### **DECISIONS ABOUT THE NEXT STEPS**

You've probably had to write papers for English or history in school, right? You turn in the first draft and your teacher comes back with some suggestions for modification. Maybe she wrote a note on it that said, "Why did you feel this way?", "Expound on this concept" or "What does this have to do with your main point?" Something to let you know that maybe one part of your paper needed more work, or that perhaps some parts should be emphasized less.

In a way, your teacher is helping guide your next steps. They aren't telling you in what direction to take your paper, but rather asking you questions to help you make that decision yourself. Why is

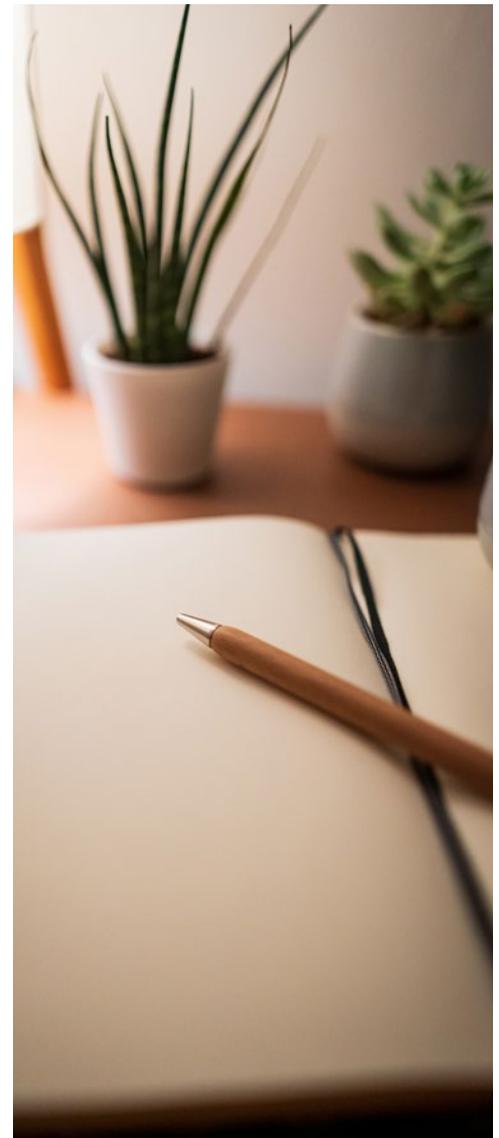
it that you feel a certain way? Does some particular detail of your paper have anything to do with what you want to talk about? Maybe what you thought your main point was at the start of the paper isn't really your main point, and by asking the question, your teacher has helped you see that you really wanted to talk about something else.

The same can be said about life. As a teen, you might have a pretty good idea of what you want to do for the rest of your life. I knew by the time I was eight or so that I wanted to be an engineer. That's not right or wrong, good or bad, it's just my story. Consequently, I spent most of my academic life in pursuit of this goal and it served me well for many years. (God later led me away from engineering as a career and guided me to be in the ministry, but that's a story for another day!)

On the other hand, maybe you're not so sure where your story is going right now. Maybe you know you like to write, but you're not sure how that translates into a job. Maybe you like spending time outdoors, but aren't sure how that will impact the rest of your life. While the final choice is up to you, a mentor or guide such as a parent, teacher or other trusted adult who has had some life experience is a great resource to help you make the choices that will best help you pursue your desires.

### **EDITS AND CORRECTIONS**

Go back to David's story for a minute. Overall, he was a great guy, or at least God thought so during one point of his life. While addressing Saul, who was king over Israel at the time, God's servant, Samuel said, "But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has



commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:14). God was letting Saul know that his time as king was coming to an end and David would be the new king. Why? Because David was a man after God’s own heart. In other words, David was someone who was really trying to be like God.

Of course, later on, he made some pretty big mis-

just a realization that what you thought you wanted to do for a living isn’t really what you wanted to do. It’s okay to change your story, even in mid-sentence sometimes.

Even if a decision we make turns out to be the wrong one for a time, just like a sin, we can learn from it and try not to repeat it. If it turns out accounting isn’t your thing, randomly taking a class in carpentry might

*While we might not forget the mistakes we make, God does. And even though mistakes might have consequences, they do not need to define who we are or our future story.*

takes. As mentioned before, his sin with Bathsheba was a pretty big one. It’s one that David learned a lot from, and quite frankly, so can we. Psalm 51 was written in the wake of this mistake, and David pours his heart out in genuine repentance, asking God for mercy and forgiveness of his sins. “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Psalm 51:2). David not only wanted to be forgiven of his mistakes, but he also wanted them cleaned—removed—from his story.

He continues in verses 7-9, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.”

Here’s the point: While we might not forget the mistakes we make, God does (compare Psalm 103:12). And even though mistakes might have consequences, they do not need to define who we are or our future story. Sure, they might influence it, and hopefully make us wiser to avoid similar mistakes in the future, but our past does not need to define our future.

### **NOT ALL MISTAKES ARE SINS**

Like David, in our own personal story, we will make mistakes. Some are bigger than others. But not all mistakes are sinful. Maybe you think you want to be an accountant, but after a few classes at a local community college, find out it’s not right for you. Perhaps you spent a little time and money figuring that out, but that’s okay. It’s not a sin,

not be the best choice. A better decision would be to go back to your mentors, or perhaps a guidance counselor and evaluate what might be the wisest next move.

### **START WRITING!**

What’s your story? Maybe you’ve got a pretty good idea, or maybe no clue at all. But now is the perfect time to begin writing yours. Take out a paper and pencil (or use a tablet or whatever works for you), and put some things down on paper. What do you like to do? Do you know anyone who has this job now? Are there things you are interested in learning more about? Is there a particular activity that brings you joy? All of these are great starting points to begin writing your own personal story.

Everyone has a story. You, me, everyone. There is a story behind the life of the quiet widow at church who you barely know. Your parents and pastor have stories. The mother of three children you help watch after services has a story. Ask them what their stories are, and learn how and why they made the choices they did in life, and why they think/feel/do the things they do. All this will help you as you create a story of your own! **CC**



*Dan Preston pastors the Charlotte and Hickory, North Carolina, and Columbia, South Carolina, congregations. His story is a little different today than what it was 20 years ago, and will probably change again someday.*

# COMPASS CHECK

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