

**Daniel:**  
**Conviction in an Age of Compromise**

**What Is Faith?**

*Daniel 3:1-30*

**Rev. Freddy Fritz**

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# What Is Faith?

## Scripture

Author Tim Hansel tells the story about the day he and his son Zac were out in the country, climbing around in some cliffs. He heard a voice from above him yell, “Hey Dad! Catch me!”

He turned around to see Zac joyfully jumping off a rock straight at him. Zac had first jumped and then yelled “Hey Dad!”

Tim became an instant circus act, catching Zac. They both fell to the ground. For a moment after Tim caught Zac he could hardly talk.

When he found his voice again he gasped in exasperation: “Zac! Can you give me one good reason why you did that???”

Zac responded with remarkable calmness: “Sure! Because you’re my Dad.”

Zac’s whole assurance was based on the fact that his father was trustworthy. He could live life to the hilt because his father could be trusted.<sup>1</sup>

In our text for today we will notice how Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego trusted their heavenly Father. Regardless of the outcome, they were willing to be thrown into a fiery pit and trust God with the outcome.

Let’s read about this account in Daniel 3:1-30:

**<sup>1</sup> King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup> He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. <sup>3</sup> So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.**

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Hansel, *Holy Sweat* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1987), 46-47.

<sup>4</sup> Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “This is what you are commanded to do, O peoples, nations and men of every language: <sup>5</sup> As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the peoples, nations and men of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

<sup>8</sup> At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. <sup>9</sup> They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup> You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, <sup>11</sup> and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. <sup>12</sup> But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

<sup>13</sup> Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, <sup>14</sup> 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? <sup>15</sup> Now when you hear the 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?”

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> 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, O king. <sup>18</sup> But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

<sup>19</sup> 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 <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

<sup>24</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"

They replied, "Certainly, O king."

<sup>25</sup> 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."

<sup>26</sup> 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, <sup>27</sup> and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. 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.

<sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

<sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon. (Daniel 3:1-30)

## Introduction

In their book, *We Let Our Son Die*, Larry and Lucy Parker recount the tragic story of a misguided faith. In painful and painstaking detail, Larry and his wife paint the picture of how they had come to believe that if they just had enough faith, God would heal their diabetic son. Eventually, their son Wesley got ill and needed insulin. Believing that God would heal Wesley, they withheld the insulin and, predictably, Wesley lapsed into a diabetic coma.

The Parkers, warned by some about the impropriety of not having enough faith, believed that God would heal Wesley. Unfortunately, Wesley died. But even after Wesley's death, the Parkers, undaunted in their "faith," conducted a resurrection service rather than a funeral service. In fact, for more than a year following his death, they refused to abandon their firmly held faith that Wesley, like Jesus, would rise from the dead. Eventually, both Larry and Lucy were tried and convicted of manslaughter and child abuse.

A tragic story? Yes. But even more tragic is that countless other stories like this could be painfully retold. In each case the moral is the same: A flawed concept of faith that inevitably leads to shipwreck—sometimes spiritually, in other cases physically, and in still other scenarios, both.

Many Christians believe that the Bible teaches that faith is confidence in a certain outcome. Christians look at the miraculous way God worked in the Bible and say, "Look at the great faith of those men and women in the Bible. Look at what happened because of their unwavering confidence in a certain outcome."

Now, if this is your entire view of what biblical faith is, then Daniel 3 will disturb you.

Daniel 3 tells us the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They stood up to king Nebuchadnezzar, refusing to bow to the eight-story tall golden image, even when their lives were at stake. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stood on the brink of being thrown into a fiery furnace because of their faith in God and their unwillingness to bow to a false god. They did not pretend to

know what was going to happen to them. Although the three had no desire to burn, they did not claim that they would not die. Instead of offering some confident assertion because of their great faith, these men simply said in effect: “We really don’t know what will happen to us. We only know that we will trust God and obey him” (see Daniel 3:16-18).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did claim that God was *able* to save them and would, in fact, rescue them from the king’s hand (because even if they died, they were still in God’s hands). But, the three faithful men also said, even *if* God did *not* save them from the fiery furnace, they would worship him only (cf. Daniel 3:18).

These words may trouble you. Perhaps you want to say, “Oh, no, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! No ifs, ands, or buts. Believe without doubting.” But these men did not operate on today’s popular notion of what faith should be. Theirs was a *biblical* faith.

## Lesson

Today I would like to examine the biblical description of faith. What is faith? One way to get a better picture of biblical faith, the kind that helps rather than harms—the kind that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shared—is to gain a clear understanding of what biblical faith is not.

### I. What Biblical Faith Is Not

Let’s begin by examining what biblical faith is not.

#### A. *Faith Is Not Trust in Our Belief*

First, faith is not trust in our belief.

Faith is not faith in faith. So often in Christian circles we link the effectiveness of our faith to how strongly we can convince ourselves that there will be a positive outcome to a particular situation.

We decide to let no doubt enter our minds. Some of us go through intricate rituals to convince ourselves that we have pumped up our faith enough for God to honor our desires. We sing, pray, read Scripture, scold ourselves for wavering on second thoughts, and try to convince ourselves that we believe as much as is necessary to get God to do what we think is right.

But that kind of faith is not so much trust in God's wisdom and power as it is confidence in the amount of belief we have conjured in an attempt to control him.

When I was serving as an associate pastor in Beaver Falls, PA a young husband and father of three preschoolers became ill with Hodgkin's Disease. In fact, this was his second bout with the disease; the first bout was conquered some five years earlier. Larry was told by his side of the family that he just needed to have faith again, and the disease would go away. But the disease did not go away; it spread throughout his body and it just got worse and worse. And all the while Larry was told that he did not have enough faith. If he could just exercise more faith, then the disease would go away. It was a dreadful thing to watch this man succumb eventually to the disease. His family was crushed, and they suggested that Larry died because he did not have enough faith.

Well, did Larry die because he did not have enough faith? I don't believe so. Larry did not have faith in faith. His faith was in God, and he understood that God's ways were not his ways. But unfortunately, Larry's family did not accept such a view of faith—or of God.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not have faith in faith. They did not trust in their belief. They did not know what would happen to them. Their faith was not measured by the quantity of belief that they could muster but by the greatness of their God. Their trust was in God alone.

*B. Faith Is Not Trust in What We Want to Happen*

Second, faith is not trust in what we want to happen.

Although you may begin to see that faith is an expression of utmost confidence in God, it is possible still to believe that God should do what you think he should do.

You may have avoided having faith in faith. But have you ever found yourself trusting God to do some very “spiritual” thing that you have decided he needs to do? We all sometimes begin counting on what we would love to happen, simply because we think it is in God’s best interests to make it happen. Because the results we desire are “for God’s sake,” or for what we think will benefit another person, we are convinced they must occur.

Jim Conway is a wonderful pastor and author whom God has greatly used in a variety of ministries. A few years ago, when Jim was pastoring People’s Bible Church in Urbana, IL, his daughter, Becki, was stricken with cancer. The doctors said they would have to amputate one leg to save her life. So the family began to pray, asking God to heal Becki’s leg. They knew that God is able to heal, and so they prayed that he would save her leg as a testimony of his love. Because they sincerely desired glory for God, they believed that God would heal Becki.

So strongly did Jim believe that God would honor the family’s request that, on the day of the scheduled surgery, he asked the doctors to test Becki’s leg again before amputating. The surgeon agreed, and the family went to a waiting room, eagerly anticipating the results they were sure would bring great glory to God and great joy to them. Jim later recounted for Moody Monthly what happened:

A crowd of friends from the church had come to wait with us. So many came, in fact, that they made us leave the waiting room. When the surgeon came out, I knew what he was going to say, and I couldn’t face it. I couldn’t face my friends. So I ran.

I ran to the hospital basement where no one would find me. And I cried. I yelled. I pounded my fists against the wall. I felt like the God whom I had served had abandoned me at the hour of my deepest need. Was he so busy answering prayers for parking places that he couldn’t see Becki?

The experience devastated Jim, but it also drove him back to the Scriptures. There he discovered the problem implicit in a faith that blindly insists on what we would love to happen—even if what we want would seem to honor God. Such a faith is foreign to the Bible!

One need just look at the Faith Hall of Fame chapter in Hebrews 11 to learn that things didn't always work out the way God's people wanted.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego did not have a faith that said that God should act in a certain way. Faith is not trust in what we want to happen. Faith is trust in God.

*C. Faith Is Not Trust in Our Ability to Read God's Will*

And third, faith is not trust in our ability to read God's will.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego teach us that believers are not more “holy” because they have a certainty that such-and-such will happen or believe they have identified correctly what God needs to do next. The account of these faithful men crystallizes the related truth that believers are not more “faithful” when they think they can tell what God will do next. Too often Christians try to prove their faith to themselves or others by predicting God's actions. Some believers link their faith to read circumstances through the filter of providential insight. Faith of this sort is measured by the conviction with which one speaks about how “God will bless” and by the specificity with which the blessing is described.

Bryan Chapell, president of Covenant Seminary, tells of a time he attended a prayer meeting in which a woman praised God because he was going to heal her sick dog. She said she knew God would do that because the very day the pet got sick she “just happened” to read in the Psalms that the Lord “heals all your diseases” (cf. Psalm 103:3). This could be nothing less than God's providential leading, she said, a way to let her know what he would do.

This well-meaning but poorly informed woman had tied her faith to her ability to read circumstances in order to determine how God would act. Unfortunately, the circumstances were about to change. When Bryan Chapell next met the woman, she told him that her husband experienced a heart attack during the week following the prayer meeting. “Obviously,” she surmised, “God was not telling me that he would heal my dog when I read that Psalm. God was telling me ahead of time that he would heal my husband.” Dr. Chapell says that he wondered what the woman would have said if her son got sick the next day. Or, what if she read the next day in Numbers 14:12, “I will strike them down with a plague”?

Friends, faith is not trust in our ability to read God’s will. It is simple trust in God alone. Great faith does not claim to know what only God can know; it claims only to know the God who knows.

## **II. What Biblical Faith Is**

Let us now turn our attention to what biblical faith is.

Biblical faith is trust in God alone. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego show us that faith is not trust in our beliefs. It is not trust in what we want to happen. Nor is it trust in our ability to read God’s secret will. Faith, quite simply, is trust in God alone.

Edith Schaeffer says that “we must let God be God.” True, biblical faith lets God be God. It does not depend upon our efforts or our view of what God should or should not do. It is simply resting upon the truth that God is God and we can trust him, no matter what.

## **Conclusion**

The truest test of your faith is when God’s answer is *No*. When there is no healing. When there is no deliverance. When the house forecloses. When you lose your job. When your loved one never recovers or even dies. And all the while you have been doing what is right. You are honestly trying to live a life that honors God.

You don't have to be a Christian very long before you will find yourself in a tough situation. And even though you pour out your heart to God in prayer, the heavens remain silent. God's answer is *No*.

That is the greatest test. Is your faith still in God when the answer is *No*? When there is no miracle? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, "But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:18).

One of the early church fathers, John Chrysostom, lived in the late 4th and early 5th century. One day he was brought before the emperor and commanded to renounce Christ. The emperor threaten him saying if he would not renounce Christ he would be banished from the country forever—he would be separated from his father's land for the rest of his life. John responded, "You cannot. The whole world is my Father's land. You cannot banish me."

The emperor then said, "Then I will take away all of your property and treasures." John replied, "You cannot, for all my true treasures are in heaven."

The emperor then said, "I will send you to a place of absolute solitude where there is not one friend for you to talk to." John said, "You cannot, for I have a friend that is closer than a brother to me. He is my elder brother, Jesus Christ, who has promised to be with me always—to the very end of the age."

In anger the emperor then said, "I will then take your life." John said, "You cannot. For my life is forever hidden in Christ with God."

Chrysostom was of the same spirit as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

May it be that you and I are of the same spirit as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego too.

Biblical faith is trust in God alone. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego show us that faith is not trust in our beliefs. It is not trust in what we want to happen. Nor is it trust in our ability to read God's secret will. Faith, quite simply, is trust in God alone. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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## Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

*Answers for Life!*

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: [Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org](mailto:Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org)

Web site: [www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org](http://www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org)