EPIC
"Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego"
Ryan Suzuki // August 26-27, 2017

INTRODUCTION
We close out the EPIC series back in the book of Daniel with the inspiring and challenging story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Their willingness to not compromise their faith, even unto death, is yet another example of how God equips and empowers the ordinary people He calls. Because of this, **we can be unafraid to stand for Jesus**.

WARMING UP (choose one)
1. Which character from this EPIC series was your favorite and why?
2. Are you afraid of heights? Of spiders? Of public speaking or being audited by the IRS? What scares you?!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1. The backstory: Review **Daniel 1:6-19** to refresh your memory on who Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego are, how they came to be in King Nebuchadnezzar's service and what their first challenge was. Who was their early spokesperson or mentor?
    a. Small daily decisions build the character needed to not compromise. How have you seen this evident in your own life or in the lives of your family?
    b. Have you ever been mentored in your faith? Mentored someone else? What stands out the most about those experiences? Who can you come alongside this week? OR, who might you reach out to for mentoring?

2. The culture: Ryan reminded us the Babylonians "conquered through assimilation". What were some of the ways they did this? Did they target ordinary people? Leaders? Why do you think they did it that way? How hard do you think it was to stand up or stand out?
    a. In what ways does our current culture seek to do likewise? Can you give a specific example of ways that you choose to live "counter-culturally"? Is this scary for you?

3. Idols: Daniel 3:1-3 describes the idol and how the leaders attending the dedication ceremony were to react to it. In your own words, describe what an "idol" is. Can you recite the first two of the Ten Commandments from memory? If not, read aloud **Exodus 20:1-6**.
    a. **Leviticus 26:1** and **Ezekiel 14:3** give more details about idols. Which type is around today?
    b. What are some common idols that vie for our attention today and what do we hope they might give us? Why do you think people seem to trust in these idols instead of in God?

c. Which ones tend to pop up in your life? How can you better resist "bowing down" to them?

4. The Stand: What ultimatum does King Nebudchadnezzar give in **Daniel 3:15**? What question does he ask at end of verse 15? What were Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's choices?
    a. Read aloud **verses 16-18**. How could they be so confident in God that they didn't worry about the outcome?
    b. Have you ever not taken a stand because you feared someone's faith would be hindered, or things would reflect poorly on the Church, if things didn't work out? What are some ways people of faith stay silent or under the radar in today's culture?

5. The Confidence to Stand: How did S, M & A have the courage to face death rather than simply bow down with everyone else? How can we?
    a. RESOLVE ahead of time (Daniel 1:8). The Bible assures us we will face trouble in this world (**John 16:33**). How might this have helped them? Do you think it's helpful to consider worse case scenarios ahead of time? Why or why not?
    b. Recall previous provision: What may have influenced S, M & A to respond to this new challenge with such trust in God? Where has God shown up in big ways for you?
    c. Remember what Jesus did for you: See **John 16:33** and **Hebrews 12:2-3**. Both verses are to encourage us. How can this help you take a scary step of faith or take a stand?
    d. Community to stand with you. S, M & A had each other, and they had Daniel as their mentor. How can community make facing trials easier? Has your group walked through any recent trials together? Take a moment to reflect and be grateful.
    e. Even solo, you are not alone. Read the last part of **Matthew 28:20.** That is Jesus speaking to each of us. Read aloud **Deuteronomy 31:6.** That is your Heavenly Father speaking to you!
    f. If you're still not sure what to do, recall the Wisdom Question from Tyler's message on Solomon: "What is the wise thing to do in light of my past experiences, my present circumstances and my future hopes and dreams?"

PRAY ABOUT IT

Tonight spend extra time if possible praying through your prayer requests. Consider adding "...and even if You do not answer, God, I know you are with me/them and I will trust you with the outcome".

Please see the attached **EPIC Series Recap**, a list of key lessons and scriptures from each of the 12 EPC sermons. Which of them is God calling you to focus on this week?

EPIC Series Recap

MOSES: Our lives are marked by "Moses moments" when God calls us out of the "safe zone" and into the "faith zone". You can face anything when you keep your focus on God and trust Him to lead you through. (Exodus 6:6-8)

JOSHUA: When God calls you, He equips you: **Joshua 1:9**-"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

ABRAHAM: The power of Intercessory Prayer: God is sovereign, powerful and also approachable! Sometimes God allows us to catch a glimpse of the work He is doing and to intercede on behalf of others.

GIDEON: God rewrites stories of ordinary people who are willing to step out in faith and allow Him to use them to accomplish the extraordinary. **Judges 6:14-16**: "Go in your strength…I will be with you."

DAVID: Each of us can be "a person after God's own heart": Humble Confidence + Courage Despite Fears = a Champion for God & others! **1 Samuel 17:45-47**, David's battle-cry, can be ours: "You come against me with _____ but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty…the battle is the Lord's."

ESTHER: Heroes are ordinary people willing to trust God in the face of uncertainty. To live courageously, we need faith in God: faith in His plan, His power and His ability to control every situation no matter how hopeless things look. **Esther 4:12**-"And who knows if you have come to this position for such a time as this."

ACHAN: "Sin Splashes" and has a ripple effect that affects others. You cannot compartmentalize your sinful choices. Be self-aware and pursue integrity at all costs, and remember--God sees everything we do!

DANIEL: A life of integrity and influence is built from small daily decisions that, over time, develop into the character needed to stand up under great pressure. Your beliefs and your actions should match up both in public and in private. Refuse to compromise. When you stand up, you stand out.

SAMSON: Counteract "spiritual drift" by actively pursuing God daily. As Christ-followers we are all called to be "set apart". This happens when making God and His work our highest priority as we go about our day. **Matthew 22:37-38**: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind…and Love your neighbor as yourself."

SOLOMON: <u>Best Question Ever</u>: "What is the WISE thing to do…in light of our past experiences, our present circumstances, & our future hopes and dreams?" Use it to help you know what the correct path or action is.

JOSEPH: Life can be very unfair and very hard, even for the most faithful to God. Oftentimes the only way through the pain of your past is Forgiveness. You can trust that God will help you. **Romans 8:28**—"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

SHADRACH, MESHACH & ABEDNEGO: Are you willing to stand up, stand out and potentially suffer for what you believe? Remember, we do not stand alone! Jesus sticks with us and helps us face any trial that comes our way. John 16:33—"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Like these EPIC men and women, we too can live a life "set apart"--a life of COURAGE, FAITH, INTEGRITY and WISDOM. God equips and empowers the ordinary people He calls, enabling them to have lives of impact. The secret is staying focused on God through prayer, time in the Bible and doing life with other believers.

Likewise, God will give us everything we need to be "all in" as a church REACHING PEOPLE and FOLLOWING JESUS. Our trust and obedience to his call will leave an EPIC impact on the San Ramon Valley!