

International Conversation Cafe

Bible Topic: How to Survive in Another Culture

There are four stages a person goes through when a move is made from one location to another, one country to another, or one culture to another. Recognizing these stages can give a person patience with oneself and others.

The first stage is “fun,” where meeting new people, seeing new sights, and engaging in new experiences are exciting and fun. But one can easily be overwhelmed by the newness and lack of familiarity. “Flight,” is when culture shock slips in and we find it easier to avoid new people and experiences than continually engage. “Fight,” is when we become critical of our new setting and sometimes our original culture. “Fit,” is understanding and distinguishing between the bad things in each culture, but also appreciating the good. One becomes comfortable and able to adapt.

Tell about your experiences adapting to a new culture. What helped you feel more comfortable?

In the Bible, there was a young man named, Daniel, who was forced to leave his home in Jerusalem and marched to Babylon because the Babylonians conquered his homeland, in 605 BC. There is an interesting account of how Daniel coped with his new surroundings, keeping some of the traditions of his people, but also being flexible and adapting to the new culture.

Daniel 1

Then the (Babylonian) king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king’s service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.

The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king’s table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service.

Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

*Explain in your own words, the situation Daniel found himself in.
What do you think about the name changes?*

But Daniel resolved not to defile (pollute) himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.”

Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” So he agreed to this and

tested them for ten days.

At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

Since Israel had their own dietary laws and regarded some foods to be unclean, Daniel asked that they be given food that was different from what others ate. Why was the official worried about this? What did Daniel risk in this request? How did God honor Daniel? What things about your culture do you keep while in another culture? Is there any risk in doing so?

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Summarize the last paragraph. In the first part of this reading, we see that Daniel preserved some of his traditions, such as the food he ate. In the last part, we see that Daniel learned from his new culture. Describe how he did that? What can we learn from Daniel's behavior and attitudes? What specific things will you keep from your culture and what specific things will you take from your new culture? What do you think is God's role learning to adapt?

This icon tells several of the events recorded in the book of Daniel. What stories do you see depicted in this painting? Which of these stories would you like to read?

Adrianoupolis Konstantinos. The Story of Daniel and the Three Youths in the Firey Furnace. c. 1725-1750. 63. Icon, 630 mm x 480 mm. Benaki Museum, Athens

