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FROM THE MINISTRY OF

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**THRU**the**BIBLE**

A person wearing a red jacket and dark pants stands on the peak of a rugged, dark rock formation. The person is looking out over a vast, blue ocean with white-capped waves crashing against the base of the rocks. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall scene conveys a sense of solitude and contemplation.

# STAND UP

LESSONS OF COURAGE  
FROM THE BOOK OF DANIEL

**DR. J. VERNON MCGEE**

# STAND UP

## LESSONS OF COURAGE FROM THE BOOK OF DANIEL

In every generation, courage wears the face of the ordinary person who refuses to back down to evil or injustice. Faced with terrifying consequences, like terrorists on planes or racists on buses, they choose to stand up for what is right or righteous. We'd recognize some of their names but most are known only to silent witnesses and some only to God.

But God sees them all.

Here's a true account of a man named Daniel who repeatedly stood up for God, even when it cost him everything. See what God thought of that kind of courage in this stirring message from Dr. McGee.

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I can't conceive of any man or woman whose life stands out like Daniel's. Not only was he a success by the world's standards, but more importantly, God thought much of him. When he was an old man, a vision from heaven said to him, "*O Daniel, man greatly loved*" (Daniel 10:19). What a testimony to receive such high praise not from men but from God Himself!

It makes you wonder, what is Daniel's secret? Let's go back to the beginning of his story and find out.

# FAITHFUL

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT AND IN THE DARK

We know more about Daniel's story and personal life than we do about any other prophet. We first meet him as a young teenager, around 16, being captured and taken away from his home in Israel as a prisoner of war to Babylon, a foreign and godless country.

By worldly standards, that spiritually dead country treated him well (they had their reasons). For 60 years Daniel won the friendship of kings and walked alongside royalty with dignity and purpose, despite their immoral society. He acted with loyalty and commitment to the pagan prince he served. Eventually this earned him the role of prime minister. This was the very highest position any king could offer a man—and not over one, but over two world governments: Babylon and Media-Persia. Daniel was more famous and more respected in his day than any world leader today.

Pretty impressive, right?

Even more remarkable than the authority and power Daniel wielded, he maintained an unblemished testimony. He kept himself unspotted from the world. He lived so that no one—not even his enemies—could find any fault with him, though it wasn't from a lack of trying on their part:

***So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.*** –Daniel 6:4

In the spotlight and in the dark, Daniel stood faithfully for God. What a marvelous reputation for a man to have in a secular, even a wicked, culture.

Having served God and man with his whole heart, God said of Daniel at the end of his life, “You will now go to your rest. And when the time comes for the resurrection of your people, you will be raised with them and receive the just reward for the life you have lived for Me.” (Read Daniel 12.)

We can learn from Daniel's life and example and be inspired by his choices. Look closely and you'll see his success comes down to one principle that we too can follow.

# WAIT ... THE KEY TO SUCCESS IS *WHAT?*

The secret to Daniel's success, both with God and man, can be expressed in one word: Separation. Daniel was a man *separated* to God.

Stay with me, and you'll see what I mean.

“Separate” sounds like a negative thing. But, in essence, it defines your priority—your first and most important thing—and how you live like it is so.

No matter the century, including our own, the concept of being separate from the world has sent people to opposite corners of how it is applied. Often times the fervor by which the opposite positions have been held has hurt the body of Christ.

## IN ONE CORNER . . . THE EXTREMISTS

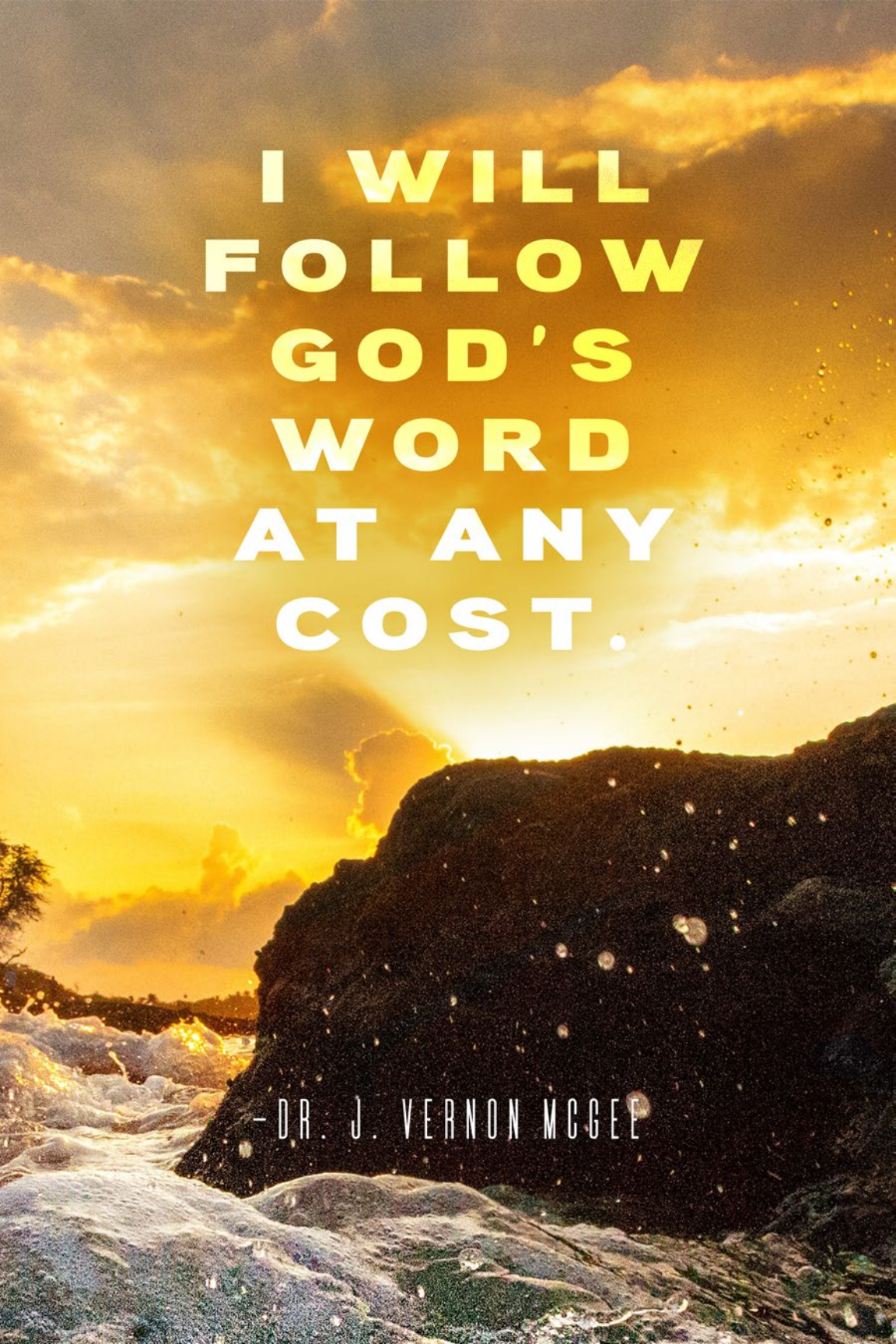
These folks are the legalists who follow a narrow and limited code of conduct. They reduce the Christian life to a little straitjacket, and if you don't get in it things aren't going to turn out so well for you. They say we've been delivered from the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic Law in order that we may get right under *their* law. They don't settle for just ten commandments, either—there are hundreds. This group are present-day Pharisees, and they have adopted the policy of “touch not, taste not, handle not.” Many are unkind and cruel in their conduct and judgment of others. That's all legalism, friend, and it certainly does not manifest the Spirit of our Lord nor is it what the New Testament describes as being “separate unto the Lord.”

## IN THE OTHER CORNER . . . THE REBELS

These folks are anti-legalists. They follow one of the early heresies of the church called “antinomianism.” That's a big word meaning simply, “since we're saved by grace, we can do as we please.” They like the *concept* of grace, but they do not like the *principles* of grace. According to them, you can live however you please. Paul, in Romans 6:15, addressed this sort of thinking: “*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!*” Those who have been saved and yet continue to sin are in spiritual rebellion.

Both of these views have hurt the concept of separation.





**I WILL  
FOLLOW  
GOD'S  
WORD  
AT ANY  
COST.**

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

# A CASE STUDY IN TRUE SEPARATION

In Daniel's life we see true biblical separation played out. An old church song has the line, "Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone." It's easy to casually sing along to that, but what does it really mean to dare to be a Daniel and stand alone for God today?

Daniel was young when he was taken into Babylonian captivity. When Nebuchadnezzar first captured Jerusalem in 606 B.C., he deposed the king and set his brother on the throne. He also took into captivity the choicest young men.

May I say, the devil has always gone after the best. I'm personally jealous, wanting the Lord to have the best. I don't see why we can't have more Christian workers with high IQs. What's wrong with dedicating *brains* to God occasionally? We *need* it these days. Nebuchadnezzar was wise enough to take those with the highest intellect, the best personalities, and who were the most physically attractive. Among those were Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.



Now these four young Hebrew men were brought up under the Mosaic system. They were familiar with a large part of the Old Testament Scripture—in fact, through the book of Jeremiah. When they found themselves in a foreign land with strange customs and pagan ways, they were homesick. Psalm 137 gives us a window into how the captives felt:

***By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, and those who plundered us requested mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" How shall we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—if I do not exalt Jerusalem above my chief joy.*** –Psalm 137:1-6

Of course, some captives remembered Jerusalem but most never returned to their homeland. But Daniel, through his long life in Babylon, never forgot God or Jerusalem, even when it meant endangering his life. One time it meant being thrown into a den of lions because he opened his window and prayed toward Jerusalem, as was his custom. But as a teenager, he was a homesick boy in a strange land.

Nebuchadnezzar's plan was to brainwash these young men to prepare them for service under his government. He took away from them everything in their background, put new ideas and philosophies into their thinking, and made them servants of his great world government. He changed their names and their diets. My friend, he intended to change them thoroughly.

In response, Daniel made a bold request, so bold it jeopardized his life. He was in the court of a man who suffered a dangerous form of insanity. Without a moment's notice, Nebuchadnezzar could put these young upstarts to death for not wanting to eat what he provided for them. After all, he was providing Babylon's best!

***But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.*** –Daniel 1:8

Daniel respectfully requested that he and his friends be put on a special diet. Note what Daniel *didn't* do: He didn't lecture on the evils of alcohol. He could have—believe me, Babylon needed it. Neither did he act obnoxiously. He just “purposed in his heart” that he would not eat that diet, but instead would be true to God. That's all. Oh, how we need today men and women who will purpose in their hearts to be true to God! *That's all.*

God was with Daniel. The fact that Daniel had such favor among the ruling leaders was no accident. Through His providence, God worked on behalf of these young men:

***Now God had brought Daniel into the favor and goodwill of the chief of the eunuchs. And the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, “I fear my lord the king, who has appointed your food and drink. For why should he see your faces looking worse than the young men who are your age? Then you would endanger my head before the king.”*** –Daniel 1:9, 10

This official really believed in Nebuchadnezzar's diet! He said, in effect, “Now, Daniel, I like you. But suppose I let you go on this diet you want, and then the day comes when you are brought before the king alongside your companions who have been eating his fine food. What if they're all good-looking fellows and the four of you are anemic little things? You see what a position that would put me in? I can't do it.”

So Daniel made a sensible and fair request: “*Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink*” (v. 12). These young men were not juvenile delinquents rebelling against the law of the land. They simply and respectfully requested their diet be tested for ten days.

Maybe you're wondering what was wrong with the meat in Babylon. Was it contaminated? Quite the opposite. They probably had the best filet mignon you could get anywhere. Nothing was wrong with the meat in Babylon. We get our key to the problem in this statement: "*Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies,*" and then in his request to the prince of the eunuchs "*that he might not defile himself.*" That's the key. This has to do with religious and ceremonial defilement. Remember Daniel was raised under the Mosaic system. He had been brought up to read the Word of God and to understand Scriptures like Psalm 119:9, "*How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.*" In effect, Daniel said, "I will follow God's Word at any cost."

What about eating the meat would defile Daniel and his Hebrew friends?

First, God categorized food as either clean or unclean for His people—that is, certain meats could be eaten and some couldn't (see Leviticus 11:44-47). That was the Old Testament legalistic system, and He intended it to be followed to the very letter. Why did God do this? So that men and women would know from the days of the Old Testament right down to the present day that some things are black and white, right and wrong, and that there is honor in believing something, standing for something, and paying a price for your stand.

Second, every bit of meat had first been offered to idols, and Daniel of course refused to have any part in idolatry. So Daniel said, "I can't eat the meat of Babylon—God forbids it."

Daniel also said he could not drink the wine. Many Bible scholars believe all four of these Hebrew young men were Nazarites. Numbers 6 lays out instructions for the Nazarite, a person separated wholly unto the Lord. One of the three things Nazarites were not to do was drink or even get near wine. Daniel

and his three friends were separated unto God, and they did not believe they should defile themselves. They were obeying God. They knew the book of Isaiah and were aware of his admonition:

***Depart! Depart! Go out from there, touch no unclean thing; go out from the midst of her, be clean, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.*** –Isaiah 52:11

They wanted to be clean in God's sight.



Separation

means God has  
first done a work  
on the inside.



- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE



## WHAT SEPARATION IS NOT

So is separation a matter of diet? No. And aren't we delivered from this very thing in this age of grace? Yes. Paul makes it very clear that meat today has nothing to do with our separation to God:

***Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake.*** –1 Corinthians 10:25-27

***But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse.***

–1 Corinthians 8:8

In this age of grace, meat has nothing to do with our relationship with God. Eat anything today that you want to eat. It is a matter of taste now and has nothing to do with our separation to God.

We tend to draw a line down on questionable things and be dogmatic about debatable things. Back when I first began midweek Bible studies at the church I pastored, I received a letter that is quite revealing. Here's part of what the woman shared:

I've returned to California after a year of full-time Christian service and an extended trip east. I've come back almost spiritually shipwrecked. I have been a Christian for three and a half years, and until recently was able to give a glowing testimony about being saved. But lately I've been so dead that Christ seems way up there and I'm way down here. I have all the negative virtues of a Christian. I don't smoke, I don't drink, I don't play cards, I don't attend movies, I don't use makeup. But those things do not make a happy Christian. My friends tell me I'm becoming bitter, and oh, I don't want that to happen. Before becoming a Christian I was very ambitious, worked hard for whatever I believed in, and incidentally, was listed in *Who's Who*. But now I wonder, what's the use?

Her words exemplify a misunderstanding of what real biblical separation is—and what it leads to. What a sad state this fine woman was in. (As an aside, she eventually found out what true separation is and was delivered from this thinking.) Is separating to God really about what you do or don't do? No, it's not.

## Does being separated mean I can't worship with people I disagree with in matters of faith?

You can fellowship with anyone who will meet with you around the person of Jesus Christ. We ought to stand together where we can—around the inerrancy of God's Word, the deity of Christ, and His death for our sins. But it doesn't matter if we disagree on things of application: like how to baptize or how to take the Lord's Supper or on what day we worship. Keep focusing on Jesus, the most important thing. Separation is *unto*, not just *from* something. So if you get separated unto Christ, you'll find you automatically separate from some people—you won't have to withdraw from them, because they'll withdraw from you. Likewise, those who hold up the person of Christ and defend His Word as you do will be drawn to you.

Actual physical separation isn't necessarily the answer, either. Remember monasteries in the early church? At first, it was a good idea. Men protested the licentiousness of the Roman Empire and the awful sin of that day and thought that by withdrawing from it they would solve their problems. But before long, it was worse on the *inside* of the monastery than it was on the *outside*. Why? Because they weren't truly separated.

The Pharisees had it wrong, too. Jesus said to them, "*The trouble with you is you make the outside of the cup clean, but the inside of it is filled with corruption!*" (Read Matthew 23:25-28.)

# WHAT SEPARATION LOOKS LIKE TODAY

Then what is true Bible separation in this age of grace?

Many people think, *If I just don't do the questionable things, I'm a separated Christian*—but their hearts are far from God. My beloved, separation is not whitewashing the outside of a tomb. There must be *life* on the inside first.

***... Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. –Titus 3:5***

Separation means God has first done a work on the inside. We must be born from above. We must receive new life from God. We can't rub it on the outside.

Remember, “*Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.*” He didn't try to isolate himself—he said, “In my heart I'll be loyal to God, and that will order my conduct on the outside.”

Daniel's separation back in the Old Testament is the same separation Paul speaks of in the New Testament. Romans 12:1-2 outlines it nicely for us:

***I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, ...***

God has been merciful to you, and He has saved you! I beg of you, because He has been merciful to you...

***... that you present ...***

This same word is translated "yield" in Romans 6:13. It is an act of the will.

***... your bodies ...***

Present or yield your total personalities—meaning, all you have, my friend, all you are. If God doesn't have you, He doesn't have anything. He doesn't even want your pocketbook. He wants *you*. I beseech you, I beg of you, that you yield your total personalities...

***... a living sacrifice, ...***

Maybe when the occasion calls for it we could work up our courage and die for Christ by being thrown to the lions. But it's this old humdrum living on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday that's hard.

***... holy, ...***

Dedicated to God.

***... acceptable to God, ...***

God encourages us, saying, "I want you to do this. You are the lost sinner—corrupt, ungodly—who I have saved. And now it is acceptable for you to come and offer yourself to Me if you so purpose in your heart."

***... which is your reasonable ...***

Rational, intelligent, spiritual.

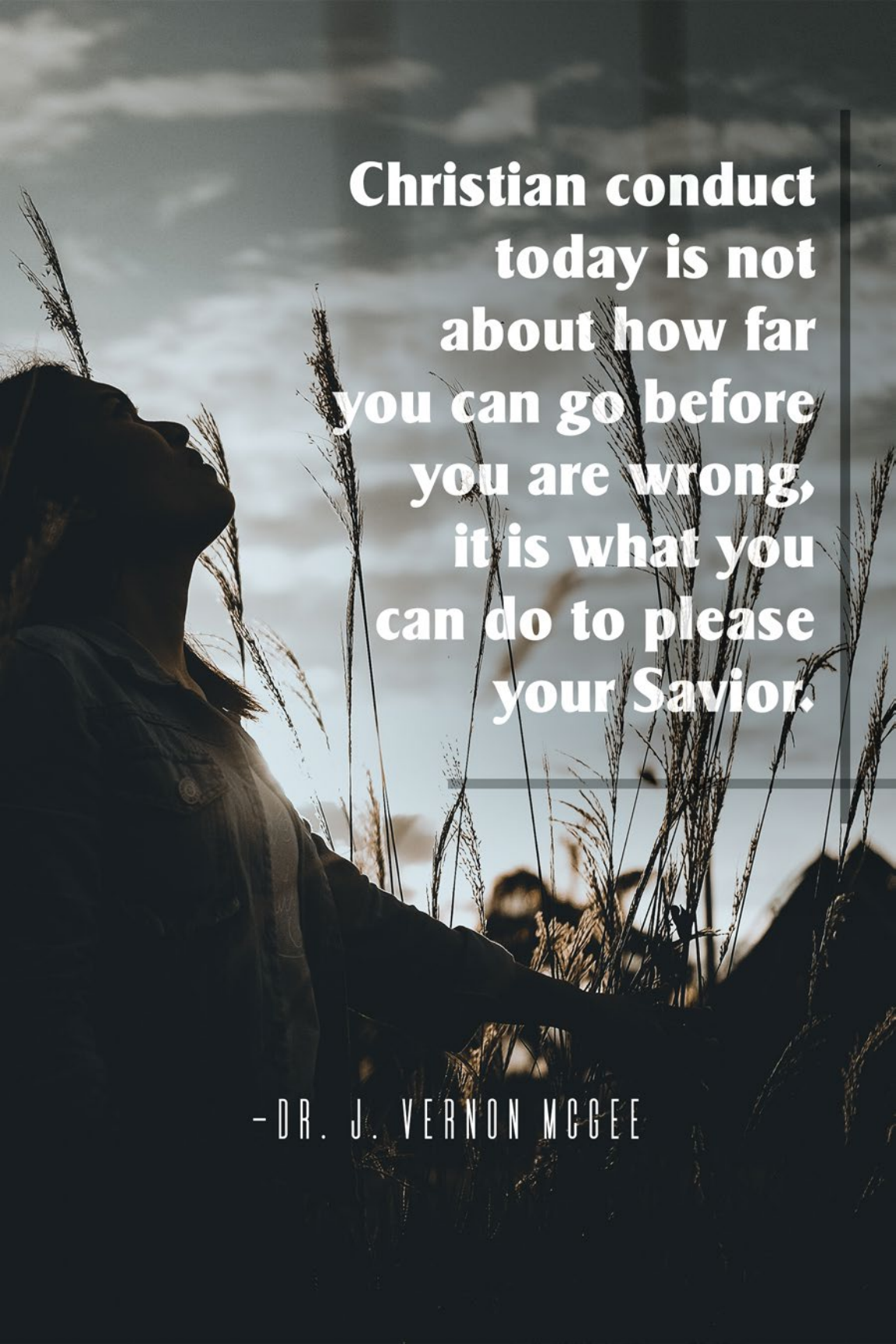
***... service. And do not be conformed to this world, ...***

This culture that we live in.

***... but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.***

Instead of allowing his life to be influenced and shaped by his culture, Daniel yielded himself to God. Daniel's experience is also our experience. We, too, are captives in this world, in our bodies, and we cannot serve both God and man today, my friend.



A person is shown in silhouette, looking upwards and to the right. They are standing in a field of tall, thin grasses. The background is a cloudy sky with some light breaking through. The overall mood is contemplative and spiritual.

**Christian conduct  
today is not  
about how far  
you can go before  
you are wrong,  
it is what you  
can do to please  
your Savior.**

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

This yielding to God becomes clearer in light of two areas of Christian conduct. In the first, Romans 12 and 13 is very clear: As Christians we are to be good citizens, submitting to the laws of the land. We should pay our taxes and bills, and show respect to those in authority. We are not to commit adultery, kill, steal, bear false witness, or covet what someone else has. This is how we as believers in Jesus Christ can love our neighbor as ourselves. We are to be honest and avoid carousing, drunkenness, strife, and jealousy. The Bible is very clear on these things.

The second way the Bible says we should live is not so black and white. For this grey area God hasn't laid down rules for us in His Word; instead He has given us three important guidelines.

#### GUIDELINE #1: CONVICTION

***One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.***

–Romans 14:5

Whatever a Christian does today he should first purpose in his heart. That's the answer to all questionable things. If there's any question in your mind about it, then it is wrong for you to do. Be fully persuaded in your own mind and carry out your conviction with enthusiasm.

#### GUIDELINE #2: CONSCIENCE

***Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.***

–Romans 14:22

Anything that a Christian looks back upon and wonders, "Should I have done that?" was wrong for him. It may not be wrong for the next man or woman, so don't criticize them. But, friend, if your conscience bothers you about it then it was wrong for you.

### GUIDELINE #3: CONSIDERATION

***We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.*** –Romans 15:1, 2

Let's not argue about what is right and what is wrong. The Bible is clear on those points. Instead, the question is, are you driving somebody away from following Jesus Christ by what you are doing? If so, it is wrong.

I have a friend who quit going to professional baseball games. Baseball isn't wrong, so why did he choose not to go to games? He found out a bunch of little boys followed him, and he said, "I don't think I can win them for the Lord there with that crowd at the stadium." That was for *him*; it may not be for *you*. Consideration of others is a principle, not a rule.

My friend, when you believe and receive Jesus Christ, you come to the Lover of your soul. You are wedded to Him, you love Him, and you are now trying to please Him. Can you imagine if a fellow got married and after the honeymoon was over he presented his wife with ten commandments she was supposed to follow? "You shall not date any other men. You shall cook my meals, etc." What would that do to his bride? To begin with, it would probably break her heart. But I imagine she'd say, "Well of course I'm not going to date anybody else—I married *you*. And I'll cook your meals not because I have to but because I want to. I love you."


Christian conduct today is not about how far you can go before you are wrong, it is what you can do to please your Savior. To be separated to Him means you feel as Daniel felt when he "*purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself.*"

In any given situation, ask God to give you wisdom and courage like Daniel, to stand for Him. Ask Him for eyes to see the true issues and the righteous path forward. God is pleased with this kind of request and will surely point the way for you to walk, and to stand apart for Him.

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and greenery.

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