

Dare to be a Daniel

“Go away!” yelled 13-year-old Daniel as his dad, Charles, knocked on the bedroom door.

“Come on, son, it’s 9:30 already. You know the band hates it when we’re late for our run-through.”

“I’m *not coming!*” shouted the teenager. “You can leave me here. I hate my stupid guitar. I don’t want to see those happy-faced people at church, all saying ‘hello, how are you?’ And I don’t believe in God anymore. So just leave me alone, will you?”

Blood rushed to Charles’ temples as he reeled from his son’s defiance, as if he’d been hit in the face. Early Sunday morning was not a good time for a family bust-up especially as both he and Linda were involved in worship. He was about to force the door open and to ‘sort Daniel out’ when Grandpa Joe appeared on the landing. Grandpa had recently been widowed; he’d sold up, and was staying at their house whilst he found a suitable bungalow.

“Here, Charles, the lad’s not usually like this. Something’s up, isn’t it? Why don’t you and Linda set off to church, and I’ll talk to him. P’haps he’ll come with me later?”

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From inside the church, you could dimly hear the chimes of twelve noon peeling out from the tower. After the final blessing, Ryan and Debbie came over to where Grandpa Joe and a nervous-looking Daniel were sitting. They’d noticed straightaway that Daniel wasn’t up at the front playing his bass guitar. With a knowing smile, Grandpa tapped him gently on the shoulder and went off to greet his friends. As the youth leaders searched Daniel’s eyes, his tears began to flow. Out spilled his story. It had all started when the science teacher had stated that life on earth was never designed to happen; it was all a random coincidence, and then asked, “Does anyone not believe this?” Daniel’s hand had gone up...

“...so the whole class has started to call me Jesus,” he sobbed, “just ‘cos they know I come to church. An’ I *hate* it! I don’t want to be a religious freak!”

It took ten minutes for Ryan and Debbie to unpack Daniel's story and to find some answers.

“At the end of the day, Daniel, you have to make a choice,” said Ryan. “You aren't the first young fellow to be laughed at because of your faith. St Paul wrote two letters to Timothy, a young man whom he was very fond of. He said this:-

'Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ' (2 Timothy 2:3).

“You've already made a choice to follow Jesus, but now you have to *live* for him. And the New Testament tells us it's a privilege to 'take up our cross' for Jesus. It's our trials that create our Christian character, and if we stand firm, the end result will be a lot of joy. And look who you're named after? Daniel was one of the bravest men in the whole Bible. He wouldn't stop worshipping God, so they threw him into a den of lions! But God rescued him, and he'll rescue you, too.”

As Daniel's tears had now dried up, Debbie led them in a short time of prayer. They prayed that Jesus would make Daniel proud to stand up for Jesus, and confident in his faith. They prayed for Dave, the class 'ringleader', who was Daniel's chief tormentor. They asked the Holy Spirit to bear fruit out of the situation. And they asked that Daniel would have someone to support him.

Ruth, another young teenager from church, was also in Daniel's class; she played the violin in the worship band. But she was rather off-hand, not exactly a joyful young lady, and constantly complained about her bad luck in being the vicar's daughter. She wasn't exactly popular.

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“C'mon, Jesus!” screamed Dave, as Daniel chased the ball down the wing towards the corner flag. The final of the inter-house football competition was in full flow, the score 1-1. Dave, of course, was house captain and chief striker whereas Daniel had been a last minute choice.

Aware that he was being chased, Daniel was first to the ball. The corner flag was fast approaching. The obvious move now would be to curl his foot around the ball and whip it into the centre. He could sense his marker anticipating this, and that he was preparing to stick out his

foot to block the pass. So instead, in a flash of inspiration, Daniel stopped suddenly and tapped the ball back. He was now facing away from the corner flag and had momentarily given his marker the slip. Although a right-footed player, he swung his left foot and lofted the ball sweetly into the goalmouth at exactly the right height for a header. Up popped Dave to nod over the keeper. 2-1 was the final score.

The talk in the dressing room, and back in the classroom, was all about the goal that had won the trophy. Brilliant though Dave's header was, he'd converted Daniel's superb cross, which had been the vital assist. Daniel wasn't used to being admired. And in the days that followed, Daniel's parents, Grandpa Joe, Debbie and Ryan exchanged a number of nods, winks and excitement over an answered prayer.

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"What? You've got to go to church this Sunday night as well as morning?" mocked Dave, as they walked outside for break. "D'you live there or something?"

"It's 'cos we're running a special event for guests, an' I play the bass guitar in the worship band," answered Daniel. "An' I don't go 'cos I have to. I enjoy it. Why? What are *you* doing on Sunday?"

Daniel looked at Dave and experienced a totally new feeling. Instead of his tormentor, he saw a 13-year-old like himself, looking for answers. But unlike himself, Dave didn't know where to search. Daniel asked,

"Hey, y'know what? You could come and check us out."

Daniel suddenly became aware that someone else was walking close behind them, within earshot.

"Yes, Dave, why don't you come and watch us? I play in the band with Daniel. And I can tell you, he's a real ace on his bass guitar."

Daniel had never seen Ruth's eyes sparkle before. He was only just becoming aware of girls. But he saw a softness in her smile, her glowing cheeks seemed round and gentle, and he noticed the way her auburn hair framed each side of her face. Daniel's new-found courage had awoken something in her spirit.

For once, Dave looked flustered. He actually began to stammer. So Ruth continued,

“I mean, oughtn’t you to find out about Jesus, since you’ve named Daniel after him? Look what happened in the match. Jesus’ cross led to your conversion!”

Both Dave and Daniel saw the funny side. They all laughed.

Dave did come to the service. And it wasn’t just once.

Daniel and Ruth didn’t ever ‘pair off’, but from that day onwards they appreciated and supported each other as friends.

John Hearson