

# THE PRIZE: Under Pressure

## Session 5 – Aspiring to Excellence

### Leader's Guide

Featuring Cacau and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego

DVD – 12:53 to 14:31

#### WARM-UP

Share with the group about someone you really admire because he or she was willing to give up everything for a cause he believed in, or because he wanted to be the best he could be at something.

#### TEAM HUDDLE

Cacau shared how the German public expects excellence from their national team.

What do you think it takes to become a top international footballer?

It might be good to write the responses on a flipchart or something similar if one is available. Responses are likely to include the following: hard work, talent, discipline, a good coach, a training program, proper diet, etc.

Even though Cacau seeks to be excellent in his football, he still experiences defeat and disappointment. However, he says knowing that God accepts him is a great source of hope and strength. How do you think knowing this might help him in his life and football career?

#### COACH'S CORNER

Read Daniel 3:13-30

It may be helpful to introduce this reading with some very brief background. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are followers of God. The land where they were born and educated has been conquered by the Babylonians and these highly educated young men (who probably had dreams and ambitions about how their life in their homeland would look like) have been taken to Babylon to serve the foreign king as administrators and advisors. The King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, has ordered that everyone bow down to the statue of their 'god'. Our three heroes refuse to do this even though the punishment for failing to do this is death. This is where we pick up the story.

*<sup>13</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and ordered that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought before him. When they were brought in, <sup>14</sup> Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you refuse to serve my gods or to worship the gold statue I have set up? <sup>15</sup> I will give you one more chance to bow down and worship the statue I have made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments. But if you refuse, you will be thrown immediately into the blazing furnace. And then what god will be able to rescue you from my power?"*

*<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. <sup>17</sup> If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. <sup>18</sup> But even if He doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."*

*<sup>19</sup> Nebuchadnezzar was so furious with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face became distorted with rage. He commanded that the furnace be heated seven times hotter than usual. <sup>20</sup> Then he ordered some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. <sup>21</sup> So they tied*

*them up and threw them into the furnace, fully dressed in their pants, turbans, robes, and other garments. <sup>22</sup> And because the king, in his anger, had demanded such a hot fire in the furnace, the flames killed the soldiers as they threw the three men in. <sup>23</sup> So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, securely tied, fell into the roaring flames.*

*<sup>24</sup> But suddenly, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, “Didn’t we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?”*

*“Yes, Your Majesty, we certainly did,” they replied.*

*<sup>25</sup> “Look!” Nebuchadnezzar shouted. “I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!”*

*<sup>26</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar came as close as he could to the door of the flaming furnace and shouted: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!”*

*So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stepped out of the fire. <sup>27</sup> Then the high officers, officials, governors, and advisers crowded around them and saw that the fire had not touched them. Not a hair on their heads was singed, and their clothing was not scorched. They didn’t even smell of smoke!*

*<sup>28</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king’s command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. <sup>29</sup> Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be turned into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!”*

*<sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon.*

In verses 13 and 14 it is clear that Nebuchadnezzar is not only angry but surprised by the decision of the three men to not bow down to the idol. Why do you think their decision is strange to the king?

In verses 17-18 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego make it clear that they won’t compromise their faith. Why do you think the three young men made this decision? How do you react when you hear about people who are willing to make big sacrifices for what they believe?

It looked like it was all over for our three heroes (vs. 19-23) as they were thrown into the furnace. Following Jesus and staying true to Him can be costly. Be willing to share with the group a time when following Jesus cost you. What motivated you to make this decision? What helped you to stand firm?

Incredibly and miraculously the three friends are rescued by God (vs. 25-29). After seeing their faith and the miraculous rescue, the king gives the order for everyone to now worship their God.

- In your work, studies or sport have you ever experienced the rewards of being single-minded and committed to achieving something?
- Have you ever experienced a time when you were rewarded for taking a stand for what you believe in?

In God’s kingdom, becoming a person of excellence isn’t primarily about being the fastest, the fittest, the strongest or the richest (1 Corinthians 1:26-31). It’s about knowing and loving God (Mark 12:30-31), growing godly CHARACTER (Galatians 5:22-23; Romans 8:29) and making a godly CONTRIBUTION (John 15:16).

What does it take for this to happen in our lives?

Answers may vary, but may include:

- Responding to Jesus with saving faith (you got to know “the Coach”)
- Practicing spiritual disciplines (God’s gym)

- Reading the Bible and prayer
- Connecting with God's family
- Giving, fasting, worship
- Using our talents and time to serve others in the church and in the world (Exercising you faith so you grow spiritual muscle)
- Sharing our faith in actions and with words (inviting others to join God's team)
- Connecting with the poor
- Working of the Holy Spirit
- Challenging or painful circumstances

## **WARM-DOWN**

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were willing to sacrifice their lives because they knew God. Spend a few moments in silence reflecting on their example and story. Ask God to show you where and how you could be more disciplined in seeking after Him so when you are tempted to compromise your faith you will stay true to Him. Spend time as a group praying for followers of Jesus who are being persecuted.

In preparation for the warm-down, you may want to look at the following websites: [www.csw.org.uk/home.htm](http://www.csw.org.uk/home.htm) or [www.opendoors.org/](http://www.opendoors.org/). These will give you more information for your group's prayer time.

## **EXTRA TRAINING**

### **Memory Verse**

*"God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs."* (Matthew 5:10)

### **Prayer/Worship Focus**

Millions of followers of Jesus throughout the world are persecuted because of their faith in Him. Be intentional this week about spending time in prayer for the persecuted church. You can find more details at <http://www.csw.org.uk/home.htm> or <http://www.opendoors.org/>.

### **Putting it into Practice**

Using the website links above, investigate ways you can support persecuted Christians. This might mean sending a donation to the work of an organization supporting the suffering church, writing a letter, or adopting a person or country to pray for regularly.