Hi,

This is Hump Day -- Wednesday, right? I wonder if we are past the Hump Day in this Time of Virus -- I sure hope so ( . . . from my keyboard to God’s ears!).

Here are today’s updates:

* People without a Facebook acct have been unable to access my personal page for the Facebook Live class events. It should work, but it isn’t. So . . . [**if you don’t have a Facebook account you will have to view the class on my YouTube channel.**](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChtwqaUcpZbwyTWnkp6INwQ?view_as=subscriber) I will make sure all recordings are up and ready for viewing by the end of the day of the class. (YouTube willing!).
* It has been suggested that **my next Sunday class be a Q&A**, which sounds like a splendid idea. It will help if you email me questions ahead of time or at least have them ready before we start class. It is a bit cumbersome working from the Facebook comments -- easy to miss some. **Sunday at 12 noon** -- on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). All of this week’s recordings and podcasts are posted.
* Keep sending in those movie and book recommendations!

Here is the second friendship story, certainly one the most dramatic in the Bible -- three friends tossed into a fiery furnace rather than worship a false god.

***Daniel 3:8–18 (CEB)***

**At that moment some Chaldeans came forward, seizing a chance to attack the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar:**

**“Long live the king! Your Majesty, you gave a command that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument should bow down and worship the gold statue. Anyone who wouldn’t bow and worship would be thrown into a furnace of flaming fire. Now there are some Jews, ones you appointed to administer the province of Babylon—specifically, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who have ignored your command. They don’t serve your gods, and they don’t worship the gold statue you’ve set up.”**

**In a violent rage Nebuchadnezzar ordered them to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They were brought before the king.**

**Nebuchadnezzar said to them: “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: Is it true that you don’t serve my gods or worship the gold statue I’ve set up? If you are now ready to do so, bow down and worship the gold statue I’ve made when you hear the sound of horn, pipe, zither, lyre, harp, flute, and every kind of instrument. But if you won’t worship it, you will be thrown straight into the furnace of flaming fire. Then what god will rescue you from my power?”**

**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered King Nebuchadnezzar: “We don’t need to answer your question. If our God—the one we serve—is able to rescue us from the furnace of flaming fire and from your power, Your Majesty, then let him rescue us. But if he doesn’t, know this for certain, Your Majesty: we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you’ve set up.”**

Peer pressure. Conformity. Going along to get along. . .

All the Babylonian king wanted from these three friends was that they kneel and worship a golden statue. Couldn’t they at least go through the motions? Surely, all their fellow Jews would know they didn’t really mean it.

Nebuchadnezzar had quickly forgotten about Daniel’s God and erected a sixty-foot golden statue which he ordered everyone to worship. Just to make sure that no one would refuse, the king ordered that a big furnace be fired up, ready to consume any ‘lunatic fringe’ that might disobey. Despite the furnace, word got back to Nebuchadnezzar that not everyone was going along. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego remained defiant. When the king learned of their stubbornness, he flew into a rage. Though ordered to worship the statue, the three friends simply refused. Though uncertain of the outcome, they trusted God. W. Sibley Towner writes:

Since time immemorial this scene [the defiance] has served as a paradigm for every tiny group of resisters standing before tyrannical authority. In the three Jews standing before Nebuchadnezzar one can see the forebears of Peter and the apostles before the High Priest in council, saying, “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29); Paul, before Felix and Agrippa (Acts 24–26); and above all, Jesus before Pilate (Matt. 27:11–14). In the calm solidarity of the young men who have an absolutely firm grip upon their identity and who know clearly what they are commanded to do, standing before the towering, wrathful authority, one sees the spiritual ancestry of the Quakers making their hat testimony before the magistrates, or the covenanters refusing to acknowledge any sovereignty but God’s. Calvin himself loved the scene: “When, therefore, … death was placed straight before their eyes, they did not turn aside from the straightforward course, but treated God’s glory of greater value than their own life, nay, than a hundred lives, if they had so many to prove faith …” (*Daniel,* I, 219).

To punish the insubordinate Jewish exiles, the king had the friends tossed into a fiery furnace so hot that it burned up the soldiers who did the tossing. It isn’t very difficult for us to imagine the depth of Nebuchadnezzar’s astonishment when he looked into the furnace and saw four men, not three, walking around the furnace, unbound and unhurt. So he ordered the three to come out of the furnace. They didn’t even smell of smoke. As he had done before, Nebuchadnezzar submitted himself to the power of the Lord God, even outlawing any blasphemy against God throughout the empire.

*The power of three*

Whenever Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are mentioned in the book of Daniel, all three are mentioned together. There is not a single instance in which any one of these friends do or say anything apart from the other two. Today, we might refer to these friends as being “joined at the hip.”

Early in the last century, the sociologist Georg Simmel wrote extensively about the power of three. He noted that three close, mutually supporting friends or loved ones can create a bond capable of withstanding troubles that might crush a pair. In the touching movie, *About a Boy*, young Marcus knows that he and his troubled mom can’t make it on their own. As he puts it, “we need back-up . . . everybody needs back-up.”

The exiled Jews living in Babylonia had three choices. They could give up their Judaism entirely, fully embracing the religion of their Babylonian neighbors. They could accommodate themselves to the Babylonian culture and demands, perhaps not turning their backs on God entirely, but making whatever changes were needed to get along with their new “masters.” *Or* . . . they could stay defiant. They could choose the path of most resistance and simply refuse to diminish, in any way, their commitment to the Lord God, to God’s covenant with them, or to each other.

We can be sure that some exiles gave in entirely and that others took the path of accommodation. But some, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego found in their bonds of friendship and faith, the strength to withstand the threats and the pressures. Their trust in God endured.

*A bit more -- what does it mean to be in the world, but not of the world?*

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were administrators in the Babylonian government. Clearly they were “in” the world, making their way through the dog-eat-dog world of imperial matters. But still, they were not “of” the world. They didn’t surrender one bit to the Babylonian demands. They did not adopt the ways of the world around them, at least those that would have undermined their covenant with God. Where did they get the strength to stand strong?

When Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth person in the furnace, we are reminded that God has been the friends’ companion through all this. It is God who saves them from the furnace. But there is more. The three men share not only the bonds of friendship, but the commitment of covenant. They are people of God, living in deep and trusting relationship with God and one another. Their commitment to faithfulness and to friendship provides them with the strength to withstand enormous pressures to conform, to just go along.

*A movie recommendation*

Glenn Silva recommends that we all watch *Giant*, the sweeping Texas epic starring Liz Taylor, Rock Hudson, and James Dean. It was Dean’s last film before his death in 1955 in a car accident, before the film was released. The film is 95% fresh on Rotten Tomatoes. I’ve never seen it -- so I guess now is the time.

*A book recommendation*

Here’s one you may not know about: *The Art Forger* by B.A. Shapiro. It is the story of a talented artist who decides to forge a painting for a gallery owner, in exchange for a one-woman show. A great mystery with a lot of fascinating detail about art forgery.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott