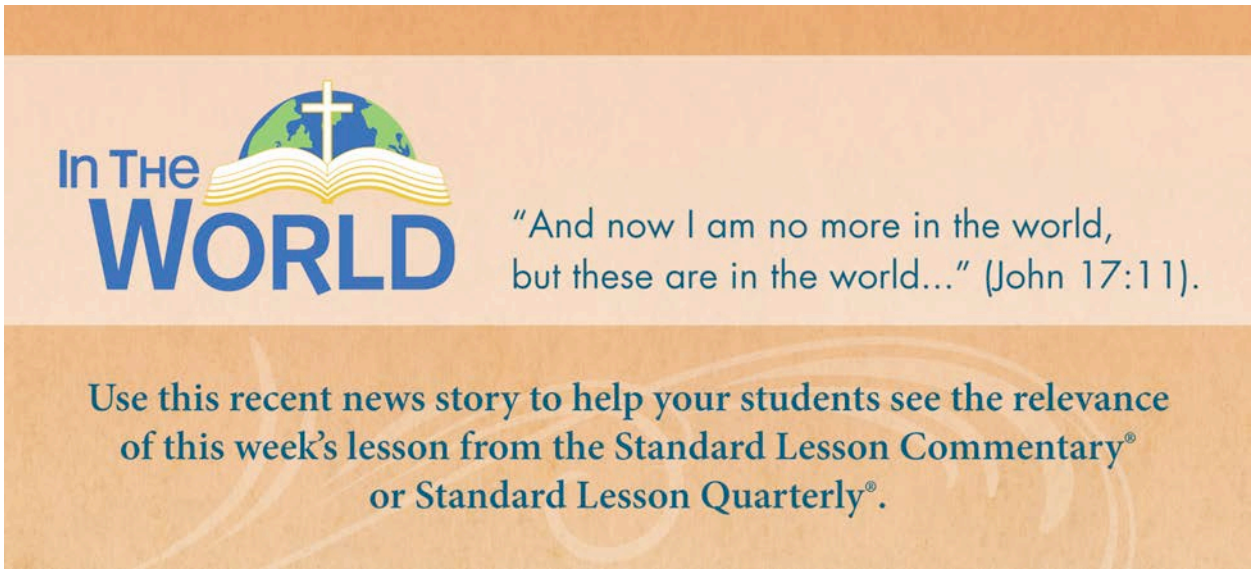

FORCED RESTRICTIONS

A "potentially historic" blizzard bore down on the northeastern U.S. this week. Taking the warning to heart—a warning that turned out to be overstated in certain areas—shoppers cleaned out grocery stores, emptying the shelves of almost everything edible, in addition to toilet paper, batteries, and fireplace logs. People feared being trapped for days in homes without sufficient food and supplies. Some undoubtedly were alarmed at thoughts of having to ration their food should the paralysis-by-blizzard linger.

VOLUNTARY RESTRICTIONS

When faced with the demand to feast on the kind of food the king thought was best, Daniel and his companions voluntarily chose different dietary selections. Hundreds of years later, Jesus had important things to say about voluntary fasting, as the second portion of this week's lesson text establishes. The decision by Daniel and the instructions by Jesus both deal with spiritual tests. Whether we feast or fast, the attitude of our hearts is what determines the quality of our relationship with God.

1. What dangers loom when people do not prepare well in advance for emergencies that are bound to come?
2. How is the answer to question 1 different regarding emergencies that threaten the soul rather than the body?
3. Why did the plan of Daniel and his friends turn out to be the right one?
4. What spiritual principles can we draw from Daniel's experience regarding dietary rules for ourselves for today, if any?
5. What experiences have you had with fasting for spiritual reasons?

—Charles R. Boatman

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