

J.D. GREEAR



Faithful in the Fire

J.D. GREEAR

DANIEL

for teen guys



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J.D. GREEAR is the pastor of The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. He has authored several books, including *Just Ask* (2021), *What Are You Going to Do with Your Life?* (2020), *Searching for Christmas* (2020), *Above All* (2019), *Not God Enough* (2018), *Gaining by Losing* (2015), *Jesus, Continued . . .* (2014), *Stop Asking Jesus into Your Heart* (2013), and *Gospel* (2011). He also hosts *Summit Life*, a daily, thirty-minute radio broadcast and weekly NRBTv program. Pastor J.D. and his wife, Veronica, are raising four awesome kids: Kharis, Alethia, Ryah, and Adon.

HOW TO USE

This Bible study provides a guided process to discuss the book of Daniel and what we can learn from his story about being faithful in a hostile culture. The eight sessions work through the book of Daniel and offer wisdom for young men as they seek to embody courage and live faithfully in the places where God has called them as Daniel and his friends did in Babylon.

INTRODUCTORY GROUP SESSION

The first week begins with an introductory session to help the group settle in and get a feel for the study. In this introductory session, you'll be introduced to the themes of Daniel and how they influence our lives.

Weeks 2–8 follow the format outlined below.

PERSONAL STUDY

Three days of personal study are provided prior to the group session each week. These personal studies include a prompt to read a portion of Daniel then offer commentary, devotional thoughts, and questions to discover Scripture's meaning and to apply it to our lives. Each day can be completed in about fifteen minutes.

GROUP TIME

Start

The group session will begin with a few questions designed to help you introduce the session's topic and encourage everyone to engage.

Watch

Fill in the blanks as you watch the video teaching to help students follow along.

Discuss

This section is the main component of the group session. The questions provided are designed to facilitate group discussion about the week's teaching from Daniel.

LEADER GUIDE

A leader guide is provided in the back of this resource to help facilitate discussion when leading a group through this study together.

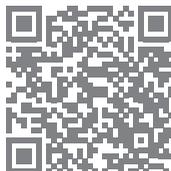
VIDEO ACCESS

TO STREAM THE *DANIEL TEEN GUY BIBLE STUDY* VIDEO TEACHING SESSIONS, FOLLOW THESE STEPS:

1. Purchase the group video bundle at lifeway.com/danielstudy.
2. Go to my.lifeway.com/redeem and register or log in to your Lifeway account.
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ABOUT DANIEL

AUTHOR

Daniel, whose name means “God Judges” or “God’s Judge,” was a sixth-century BC prophet living in exile in Babylon. Daniel details key events firsthand that occurred during the Jewish captivity and also shares visions that were given to him by God. He likely wrote this book sometime shortly after the end of the Babylonian captivity. In the text itself, Daniel claimed to have written down visions given by God (see 8:2; 9:2,20; 12:5). Additionally, Jesus attributed the book of Daniel to Daniel himself (see Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14).

BACKGROUND

The historical setting of the book of Daniel is the Babylonian captivity. The book opens after King Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege of Judah (605 BC) when he brought Daniel and his friends to Babylon along with other captives among the Judean nobility. Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah again in 597 and brought ten thousand more captives back to Babylon. In 586, he once again besieged Jerusalem, this time destroying the city, the holy temple, and exiling the people of Judah to Babylon. Daniel’s ministry began in 605 when he arrived in Babylon with the first Jewish captives, extended throughout the Babylonian captivity (which ended in 539), and concluded sometime after the third year of Cyrus the Great, the Medo-Persian king who overthrew Babylonia (see Daniel 1:21; 10:1).

MESSAGE AND PURPOSE

The theme of the book of Daniel is the hope of the people of God living in a dark and hostile culture. The book promotes hope by teaching that at all times “the Most High God is ruler over human kingdoms” (5:21). Daniel’s purpose was to exhort Israel to be faithful to the sovereign God of Israel. He accomplished this by recounting examples of godly trust and prophecies of God’s ultimate victory.



KEY EMPHASIS

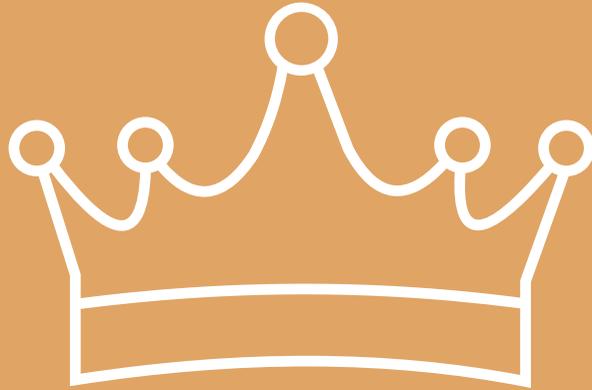
Daniel emphasizes that the Lord rules over all the kingdoms of the earth, even in evil days when wicked empires reign. Two key words in the book are “king” (used over 150 times) and “kingdom” (used over 50 times). Above all, Daniel teaches that the God of Israel is the Sovereign (or ruler) of the universe, “for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation” (4:34). Because of this, followers of Jesus can live with hope and confidence in God in a dark and hostile culture.

STRUCTURE

The book of Daniel tells a story, recounting historical events for the purpose of present and future instruction. The narrative contains history, prophecy, and apocalyptic visions. Apocalyptic literature refers to revelation by God given through visions and symbols with a message of God’s triumph at the end of the world. Although Daniel contains apocalyptic elements, it is not an apocalyptic book; rather, it is a narrative that includes apocalyptic visions.

Noting that the book of Daniel contains both history (chapters 1–6) and prophecy (chapters 7–12), some divide the book into two sections. A better way to view the book’s structure is based on the two languages it uses: 1:1–2:3 (Hebrew); 2:4–7:28 (Aramaic); and 8:1–12:13 (Hebrew). The Hebrew sections pertain primarily to the people of Israel, which is fitting since Hebrew was Israel’s national language. Aramaic was the international language of that time. Fittingly, the Aramaic section of Daniel demonstrates God’s rule over all nations.¹

SESSION 1



FAITHFUL

READ THIS FIRST



The book of Daniel is about how to be a faithful witness in a dark and hostile environment. You see, unlike other books in the Bible, this book was not written from inside Israel. In the first few verses of Daniel, we learn that God's people had been taken from their homes and into exile. Following the reign of King Solomon, Israel was stuck in a downward spiral of unbelief, compromise, and disobedience. God warned Israel that if they continued to walk this path, He would send them into exile. And so, in 605 BC, God kept His promise. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon attacked Jerusalem and took the best and brightest from Israel back to Babylon where they would serve the king who conquered them.

This is where the book of Daniel begins. Yet, the book doesn't take us further down the spiral of unbelief, compromise, and disobedience; rather, it shows us that even in the middle of a sinful culture, godly young men can follow God and thrive no matter where He's placed them. The book of Daniel is a manual for how to thrive in Babylon.

KEY IDEA

We can be faithful in Babylon.



GROUP TIME

As a teen today, what makes it difficult to live out your faith?

What does it look like to live out your faith at school, in your activities, or in your relationships?

The book of Daniel is the story of a young Hebrew man taken by force from his country and home to go and serve the wicked king who conquered his people. The book of Daniel doesn't give us a play-by-play of the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem, but we know from history and from other places in the Bible that the Babylonians were ruthless and vicious warriors. They didn't just come in and take over; they used all the instruments of war to bring their enemies into submission—killings, torture, starvation. Imagine being in Daniel's place. It would be difficult to thrive in that setting.

But that's just what Daniel did, and that's what God is calling all of us to do. Daniel helps us answer the question, What does faithfulness to God look like in a world opposed to Him and at war with the gospel?

PRAYER

Pray, then watch the group teaching together.

**KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 1:1-7**

1. You know how to be _____ to God in the Hebrew chapters. Can you do it in Aramaic?
2. The book of Daniel is about how to _____ in a dark place, how to be faithful in the _____ of Babylon.
3. Babylon represents a spiritual _____ at work in every secular kingdom in every age.
4. What does faithfulness to _____ look like in a secular realm controlled by secular powers at war with the _____?
5. Daniel is the story of how these young men were incredibly faithful to God in an impossible _____.
6. You may be called to Babylon, but you can still be one of the most _____ people on earth.



DISCUSS

READ DANIEL 1:1-7.

While Babylon was a city in modern-day Iraq, the Bible also talks about Babylon as a spiritual reality that we all live in (see Rev. 18:2,10,21). In what ways do you feel like the world you live in is a new Babylon?

When Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon, their names were changed to reflect Babylonian culture and heritage. How does the culture we live in seek to conform you to its ways? What are some ways this particularly affects people your age?

It appears that these young men accepted their Babylonian names without conflict. (Joseph does this as well in Gen. 41:45.) Does this change the way you think faithfulness should look in a sinful culture? Why or why not?

How do we determine which parts of our culture to accept and which parts to reject?²

READ DANIEL 12:3.

Who is someone in your life that has shined for God in our world? What about his or her faithfulness to Him stands out to you?

What challenges do you face being a faithful witness in the places God has called you?

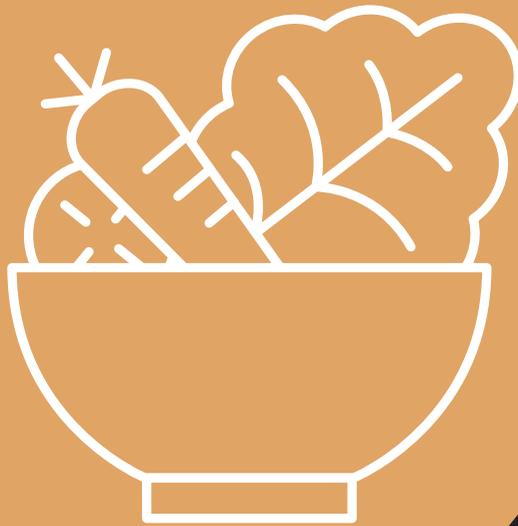
What does it look like in your everyday life to focus on the promise of Daniel 12:3 when it seems like the world is forcing us to make a choice between faithfulness and compromising our beliefs?

What stood out to you as important from this session's teaching video? What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?

PRAYER

Close your time in prayer. Remember to complete the personal study prior to the next meeting.

SESSION 2



DIFFERENT

READ THIS FIRST



In Session 1, we met the central characters in Daniel, learned that with God's help we can serve God faithfully in Babylon, and that ordinary faithfulness can have an amazing impact.

In this session, we'll continue through Daniel chapter 1 and see that we have to be different to make a difference. Our world will constantly demand that we change to its desires and ways—at every turn it will try to press us into its mold. But as young men who are trying to build and live out Christian character, we are called to break the mold, to stand out, to be different. It's the only way we can be an agent of change in our world today.

KEY IDEA

We have to be different to make a difference.

PERSONAL STUDY 1

DIFFERENT VALUES

READ DANIEL 1:1-8.

In 605 BC, God had handed Judah over to King Nebuchadnezzar, who attacked Jerusalem and took Daniel, his friends, and other Jewish nobility back to Babylon in exile. This would have been traumatic and painful for these young Jewish men. As teens, they found themselves in a foreign land with foreign gods and an idolatrous culture. You can probably relate.

Daniel and his friends did not compromise their faith. Daniel saw what Babylon valued and determined to live by a different set of values. Read Daniel 1:8:

Daniel determined that he would not defile himself with the king's food or with the wine he drank.

DANIEL 1:8

Why would Daniel reject the food from the king's table?

What are some common things in our world that conflict with your faith?

Daniel did not eat from the king's table because the food did not meet the standards God set in His law. In other words, the food was unclean. Because of Jesus, we are not held to the same rules about what we eat today (see Mark 7:19). But that doesn't mean our culture won't push us to compromise. Babylon will always ask us to compromise in three big areas—money, sex, and power. Let's consider all three.

MONEY. Babylon looks at money this way: Get all you can; keep all you can; maybe give away a little to show you are a good person, but keep what is yours. In Babylon, money is the key to the good life.

Because we trust in God and He is our treasure, we as believers have a different attitude toward money. Yes, we use money to live, but we also recognize that money is given to us for God's purposes. You probably don't have a lot of money right now, and that's okay. Regardless, now is the time to set your heart on a right understanding about money. It's God's; He just lets us take care of a portion of it.

How should you think about money now, even in your teen years?

SEX. Babylon approaches sex from the standpoint of, *It's all about me. If it feels good, it can't be wrong.* As Christians, we see sex as a gift of God to be used for God's purposes, according to His design: between a man and a woman, within marriage.

Of these three areas, this one is the biggest for you right now. The world is constantly telling you a different message about sex. The truth is, God's design for sex is for your good. Yes, trusting God about sex will mark you as different from the world, but it also sets you up for success in life that is beyond what you can imagine. Trust God, not Babylon about sex.

What has been your attitude toward sex up to this point in your life?

POWER. For Babylon, use whatever power you have to your advantage. If it's your looks, use them. If it's your athletic ability, use that. If it's your intelligence, use it to your advantage. But as Christians, we must see any position of power and privilege like Jesus did—something meant to serve and lift up others (see Matt. 20:28).

How did Jesus use His power to serve and benefit others?

PRAYER

*God, please help me to align my values with You
rather than the kingdom of this world.*

PERSONAL STUDY 2

INTEGRITY

READ DANIEL 1:9-16.

The second way we show we're different as Christians is by refusing to compromise our integrity. The four Hebrew men in this passage were likely teenagers, yet they were guided by the strength of their convictions, even when setting them aside would've been easier and refusing to do so threatened to cost them greatly. This shows you can be faithful to God as a teenager, even when it's difficult.

When they made the request to the king's chief eunuch, he could've had them killed. After all, he was afraid of the king (v. 10) and disregarding or dismissing Daniel's request would've been easier and safer than trying to accommodate it. But Daniel met the man's concern with Christlike compassion. As Christians, we should always express our convictions with compassion, treating those with different views with the same kindness God has extended to us.

Why should we resist the urge to be argumentative toward people who have different views than we do?

How can kindness open a door for the gospel?

Holding firm to his convictions gave Daniel favor with the official, but that won't always be the case. This story is not a promise of a magic formula for how to make everything go our way, but an example that points forward to Jesus, who sought peace even with those who hated Him. He is the One we imitate, and He is the One we pursue. For the follower of Jesus, convictions can't be set aside, because everything we do is done first and foremost as an offering to Jesus, even when it costs us.

Maybe you've heard the story of Jaelene Daniels, a female soccer player who refused to wear a jersey that included a pride flag because it compromised her beliefs in God's design for marriage and sexuality. Because she made this difficult decision, she was benched by her team and not allowed to play. Her response to the team's decision was, "I remain committed to my faith and my desire for people to know that my love for them isn't based on their belief system or sexuality."³ She did not compromise her faith. At the same time, she didn't belittle, demean, or respond with hate after the way her team treated her. Having integrity costs, but doing the right thing is always best.

There is no promise or magic formula to avoid the consequences of keeping your integrity. Sometimes you do the right thing and suffer. God often uses our refusal to compromise to show off His power and glorify His name.

In what areas of life would it be easier to compromise your integrity than to hold Christian convictions?

Why should we refuse to set our convictions to the side even if we know other Christians who do?

Can you think of any other examples of people who held their convictions despite outside pressure? What can you learn from them?

PRAYER

*God, may we be people who root our integrity
in You no matter the cost.*

PERSONAL STUDY 3

SCRIPTURE OVER CULTURE

READ DANIEL 1:17-21.

What blessing did God bestow on Daniel for following His ways instead of Babylon's?

The third way Christian men, young and old, show they are different is by following Scripture, not culture. We've seen how Daniel and his friends were removed from Israel and taken to Babylon, where they were expected to conform to its pagan culture. Unclean foods, magicians and sorcerers, and false gods were an essential part of Babylonian culture. Yet Daniel and his friends obeyed God's Word, even though it was opposite of everyone else around them. The way of Jesus causes us to be different in every society.

What are some ways the truth of Scripture causes us to be different in our time?

The Bible is an equal opportunity offender—if it hasn't offended you yet, you're not paying attention. In some cultures, it's Scripture's teaching on sexuality that offends the culture. In others, it's the emphasis on grace and generosity and giving away power. In some cultures, it's Jesus's emphasis on the equality of all peoples as made alike in the image of God that offends. In other cultures, it's God's authority over His creation that offends. No matter the time or the place, we must conform our hearts to Scripture.

When have you needed to adjust your perspective as a result of the teachings of the Bible? Why is shifting our perspective difficult?

Our culture will expect different things from us than Daniel's expected of him, but it will try to make us conform nonetheless. The question is what we will do with those things our culture pushes us to conform to—the “royal foods” it wants us to eat. This is the battlefield where our faith will be tested.

Where is the battle the hottest for you? When is being different most likely to cost you?

When are you tempted to shrink back from being different for fear of the cost?

In today's verses, following God did not cost Daniel, but as we keep going, you'll see that it will. If we continue following Jesus, it will cost us as well (see 2 Tim. 3:12). The way of the cross is different than the way of Babylon.

Where do you see the clearest differences between the way of the cross and the way of Babylon, or the world, in your life today?

The way of the cross makes us different in every way. It impacts the words we say, the things we do with our spare time, and what we look at on our screens. The way of the cross is more than just going to church or having a certain opinion on hot topics of our day. The way of the cross is aligning our hearts with Jesus in every way and saying He is Lord of all. As Christians, we belong to Jesus, not our culture.

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, help us to be shaped by Your Word
more than we are shaped by our culture.*



GROUP TIME

Before starting the new content, we'll take a few minutes to review the personal study from this week.

What is one thing you got from this week's personal study?

How were you challenged or encouraged?

Except for the introductory session, each week's video teaching will summarize and review the personal study leading into it. We'll hear from Pastor J.D. as he pulls the teaching together and helps us connect the truth from Daniel to our hearts and lives. We've already begun looking at what it means to be different in order to make a difference.

How would you define what it means to be different or distinct in our world?

What does it mean to be different in order to make a difference? How is that unlike being different for different's sake?

In the Old Testament, God gave His people the law, which showed them what it was like to live in a relationship with Him. God's people were to be distinct from the nations around them—to be a light to the Gentiles—and to show the world what it looks like to live in a relationship with God. They were called to be different to make a difference. Though Jesus has changed the way we relate to God, the call to be different remains.

PRAYER

Pray, then watch the group teaching together.

**KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 1:8-21**

1. You can't make a _____ unless you are _____.
2. God honors _____ who honor Him.
3. To make a difference, we must live according to different _____.
4. Is your approach to money, sex, and power more characterized by Babylon or the _____?
5. To make a difference, we must _____ to Scripture, not _____ to culture.
6. The _____ always challenges something fundamental in society.
7. What are the royal _____ we must refrain from today? This is where our faithfulness will be _____.
8. You can't make a _____ unless you are _____.
9. The most important thing about Daniel is he points us to _____.



DISCUSS

READ DANIEL 1:8-21.

Verse 8 tells us that Daniel “determined” not to eat the king’s food. Why does being different also require being intentional?

What are examples of the “king’s food” in our culture? Where in our culture should our faith lead us to stand apart from others?

When Daniel stood apart, he also maintained a relationship with the king’s officials that was rooted in kindness and compassion. What can we learn from his example?

How does our world view the big three—money, sex, and power? How should our faith lead us to see the big three differently than Babylon does?

What steps are you taking to regularly develop your integrity so that you will know when you need to stand apart from culture?

How does accountability in groups like this help us develop character?

What has God been teaching you through the Scriptures recently? How is He equipping you to prize His Word over what our world values?

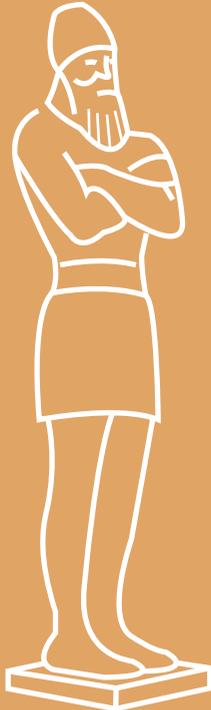
How does Daniel's example point us to Jesus?

What stood out to you as important from this session's teaching video? What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?

PRAYER

Close your time in prayer. Remember to complete the personal study prior to the next meeting.

SESSION 3



TRANSFORMATION

READ THIS FIRST



As we shift into the next session, Daniel and his friends had not yet completed their three-year training program in the king's court (see Dan. 1:5), but at this point they had Babylonian names, spoke the Babylonian language, and worked in the Babylonian palace. While they did all these tasks, they were doing so as faithful servants of God. As Christians in a fallen world, we can learn a lot from this.

When it comes to living in a hostile environment, many Christians choose to either join in or check out. Joining in means you gradually look like everyone else. Their values become your values; your lifestyle imitates theirs. Checking out is the opposite. You see the world as evil, so the more distance you can get from the world, the more faithful you believe you are.

Most Christians, like the Jews in Daniel's day, think the only options are to join in or check out. But there is a third option: transformation. Transformation happens when we see and believe there is a God in heaven, and His kingdom will continue to shine while all earthly kingdoms fade.

KEY TRUTH

There is a God in heaven, and His kingdom will continue to shine while all earthly kingdoms fade.

PERSONAL STUDY 1

A GOD IN HEAVEN

READ DANIEL 2:1-28.

Chapter 2 opens with King Nebuchadnezzar waking up in cold sweat. He had that dream again! It wasn't just any dream; it was a nightmare. And every time he had it, he became more upset. What's easy to miss because we're separated from the days of Daniel by centuries, culture, and customs is that dreams were thought to predict future events. So a king's dream predicted the future of a nation. Babylonian wise men had this little book with an interpretive key that explained what each element in a dream meant. (A cow meant this, a bird meant this, etc.) So he'd tell them his dream, they'd look up the images in their little book, and BOOM: dream interpretation.

The king consulted the wise men but started to suspect their answers were made-up garbage. If these supposed wise men could not give him the answers he was looking for, he had no use for them and would have them eliminated. The problem was that Daniel and his friends were among the wise men, but God had prepared these circumstances for His truth to shine.

Look back to verses 14-16. How was the tone of Daniel's response different from the other wise men?

How did Daniel approach handling this problem (see vv. 17-18)?

Does your response to stressful situations more closely resemble Daniel or the other officials? Explain.

While most of the royal court responded with alarm, Daniel responded with "tact and discretion" (v. 14). He had a settled peace that allowed him to see the circumstance more clearly than more experienced officials. Daniel wasn't just calm—he urged his friends to join him in prayer. God answered and revealed the mystery of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel. Scripture tells us:

"No wise man, medium, magician, or diviner is able to make known to the king the mystery he asked about. But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries."

DANIEL 2:27-28

Could we park there for just a minute on the phrase, "But there is a God in heaven"? That's the most important question, right? Is there a God in heaven, and has He said something to us here on earth? Is His power available to us? Like Nebuchadnezzar, we all get to a point where every human strategy fails. But we have a God in heaven!

How would it change your problems if you stopped and said, "But there is a God in heaven," and responded like Daniel?

Which problems or situations in your life do you need to turn over to God in prayer? Remember, these might be more than the big, impossible ones.

Who are some guys in your life who might come alongside you in prayer like Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah did for Daniel (v. 17)?

End your time today praying for the situations you listed above. Then reach out to some brothers in the faith to join you in prayer.

PRAYER

Praise the God of heaven that He hears and helps you with your problems.

PERSONAL STUDY 2

A TRUE KINGDOM

In the last personal study, we saw that Daniel was given a supernatural interpretation of the king's dream, which saved his and his friend's lives. Today we're going to read the dream itself.

READ DANIEL 2:28-45.

The interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is an important piece of prophecy because it reveals the core substance of our message to Babylon (all worldly kingdoms). Below is a chart that outlines the symbolism in the dream. I'm interpreting this the way many scholars do, but the point isn't, "Who exactly are the toes of this statue?" The vagueness in the Bible is intentional. If God had wanted us to know more specifics, He would have given them to us. The point is what God is saying to all human kingdoms.

PART	MATERIAL	EMPIRE REPRESENTED
Head	<i>Gold</i>	<i>Babylon</i>
Chest and arms	<i>Silver</i>	<i>Medo-Persian</i>
Stomach and thighs	<i>Bronze</i>	<i>Greece</i>
Legs	<i>Iron</i>	<i>Rome</i>
Feet	<i>Iron and fired clay</i>	<i>Dispersed Roman Empire</i>
Stone	<i>Rock</i>	<i>Future messianic kingdom</i>

Nebuchadnezzar's dream showed a series of successive kingdoms being overthrown and taken over by the one that came next. This side of heaven, we can't know for sure beyond the first two what kingdoms this prophecy referred to, but one thing is perfectly clear in the dream—the stone represented the kingdom of God that stands above and beyond all earthly kingdoms.

What does the description of the stone teach us about our message to Babylon?

Why would this have been important to Daniel in his situation?

Consider a few things about this stone. First, the stone was made without human hands; it came about with no help from humans. Second, rock is the least valuable substance in the dream—yet this rock came with the power of God, and so it shattered into dust the more expensive metals. Jesus was born poor, never owned a home, and never raised an army, yet He came with the power of God.

Third, the rock started small but eventually grew into a mountain that filled the earth. When Jesus went back to heaven, all of His followers could fit in one room. He didn't leave an army or a fortress like Nebuchadnezzar or Alexander the Great or Mohammad. Yet that small movement has swelled into one of the largest religious movements in history.

And that leads us to our core message to Babylon—God sent a Rock to earth called Jesus, who will destroy every false kingdom built by people, whether large geopolitical kingdoms or the independent little kingdom of your own life. As we wait in Babylon, we have the hope and confidence that Babylon is not forever, but the kingdom of our God is.

How will this prophecy help you shine in Babylon?

PRAYER

Thank You, God, for Your everlasting kingdom. May we be people who seek for Your kingdom to come and Your will to be done.

PERSONAL STUDY 3

A PROVEN MESSAGE

The events of Daniel chapter 2 give us another important principle for showing God's work in Babylon: *God proves His message supernaturally in Babylon. Supernatural confirmation is how God distinguishes His kingdom from all the fake ones.* In other words, God proves He is God in ways only God can.

READ DANIEL 2:46-49.

What did Daniel's prophecy teach Nebuchadnezzar about God?

How did Daniel's ability to interpret the dream validate God's work through him?

A wicked pagan king is the last person you'd expect to see worshipping God, but that's how this chapter ends. We'll see in the next chapter that this worship was short-lived, but it's impressive nonetheless. Daniel's determination to remain calm, seek the Lord, and his desire to share the Lord's work with Nebuchadnezzar resulted in the king's worship and Daniel prospering in Babylon. Our message today is the same as Daniel's—"But there is a God in heaven" (2:28). As we live in Babylon, relying on the Lord, He will use supernatural means to call people to Himself and prove His message is true.

How have you seen God prove His message, either in your life or someone else's?

How does Daniel chapter 2 point us to Jesus?

Once again, Daniel's faith, Nebuchadnezzar's dream, and the whole book point us to Jesus. God raised Jesus from the dead to prove His message. If two people are in an argument and one of them dies and rises from the dead, He wins. Like Nebuchadnezzar, you choose whether you'll build your life on that Rock or be crushed by it. There is a God in heaven, and He will destroy every false kingdom made by people. That is true in society and in people's lives.

Now, the irony is, that's not why Jesus came. He did not come to condemn but to die on a cross to save us—to be a rock of salvation we can build our lives on. The rock that the builders rejected became the chief cornerstone for those who put their hope for salvation in Him (see Acts 4:11). The choice is yours—a life of meaning and purpose built on a rock or a temporary kingdom that will be crushed into powder and washed away with the tide.

READ MATTHEW 7:24-27.

What parallels do you notice between Nebuchadnezzar's dream and this teaching from Jesus?

What does it look like to build your life on the Rock?

Who do you need to share the message of the Rock with this week?

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for being the unchanging Rock I can build my life on. Please use my life to prove Your message.



GROUP TIME

Let's take a few minutes to review the personal study from this week.

What is one thing you learned from this week's personal study?

Over the past week, we've read through Daniel 2 and thought about how God can use us as agents of transformation as we engage Babylon. As we work through the group content, consider this question:

In a new situation, are you the kind of person who will jump right in, or are you more likely to become uncomfortable and withdrawn?

Everyone has had the experience of being the new guy at some point, and in those moments, our personalities—whether we're introverted, extroverted, or somewhere in between—determine how we respond. A similar approach plays out as Christians engage the places God has put them in. We either move toward joining in and becoming a part of the culture or check out entirely from it. However, those aren't the only options. God has given us the grace to be agents of transformation in hostile places as well.

PRAYER

Pray, then watch the group teaching together.



KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 2

1. When living in a hostile culture, we have three options:
 - ◆ _____
 - ◆ _____
 - ◆ _____

2. But there is a _____ in heaven.

3. God validates His _____ supernaturally in Babylon.

4. God validates His message supernaturally through:
 - ◆ The miracle of the _____ and fulfilled prophecy.
 - ◆ Your _____ life.
 - ◆ Miraculous answers to _____.

5. The prophesied rock:
 - ◆ Was not _____ with human hands.
 - ◆ Was the least _____ substance in the dream.
 - ◆ Started small but eventually grew into a gigantic _____ that fills the whole earth.

6. Our message to Babylon is the same as Daniel's:

◆ _____ the Rock.	◆ _____ your life
◆ _____ the Rock.	on the Rock.



DISCUSS

This chapter is fairly long. Begin by reviewing what takes place in Daniel 2.

Of the two approaches to culture—assimilation (joining in) and separation (checking out)—which do you tend toward? What are the dangers of both?

Daniel followed God in the middle of a hostile culture. What can we learn from Daniel about the path between both extremes? Why is this a needed approach for guys your age?

In verse 10, the king’s advisors realized they had no ability to interpret his dream. When has a situation presented an opportunity for you to share about our limitless God?

What does it look like to share God’s wisdom with “tact” (thoughtfulness or sensitivity) and “discretion” (carefulness or delicacy) (v. 14)?

READ DANIEL 2:28.

Why is the simple truth “but there is a God in heaven,” so important and transformative?

What was the central message behind Nebuchadnezzar’s dream? What did that mean to him in sixth century BC? What does it mean for us today?

Where do you have influence? Where is God leading you to be a transforming presence in your world? How might God use your faithfulness to prove His message?

What situation in your life do you need to step back and realize, “there is a God in heaven”?

What remaining questions or comments do you have about this session’s teaching video or personal study content? What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?

PRAYER

*Close your time in prayer.
Remember to complete the personal study prior to the next meeting.*

SESSION 4



COURAGE

READ THIS FIRST



Great things in the world are only accomplished through courage. Lots of people have great intentions, but those intentions only become reality through courage. How many of you think of yourselves as naturally courageous people? That's not me. I'm usually the guy who's too chicken to go downstairs and check things out when I hear a strange noise. For most of us, courage is something we have to learn and develop. In this session, we're going to look at what courage really is.

Courage = Confession + Conviction

KEY IDEA

Courage believes not only that God is bigger than the opposition but also better than all alternatives.

PERSONAL STUDY 1

BELIEF LEADS TO COURAGE

READ DANIEL 3:1-12.

Nebuchadnezzar clearly didn't learn his lesson. In the previous chapter, God revealed (in a dream about a giant statue, no less) to Nebuchadnezzar that his kingdom and power was temporary. However, God's kingdom will last forever and crush all competitors. In spite of this dream, the king still had a giant gold statue built in his honor and commanded "people of every nation and language" (v. 4) to bow down and worship him. This was all going pretty well for him until three Hebrew teenagers had the courage to reject the king's commands. The core belief of Christian courage is—*Jesus is Lord*.

What beliefs led Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to reject the king's orders?

How do your beliefs shape when to take a stand?

It wasn't these three guy's faith in God that caused the problem; it was their refusal to *also* bow down and worship Nebuchadnezzar. Nothing has changed today: In our Babylon, faith in Jesus is not the problem. It's our belief that He's the only way to be saved and the only source of authority. You will never get in trouble for saying Jesus is your personal Savior. But you will when you say that there is "no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), and He alone sets the rules about what is right and wrong about sex, morality, money, and everything else under the sun.

List some of the things our Babylon expects guys to bow down to and worship.

Why is Jesus a threat to these things?

Every culture and society has its own idols, and the moment you fail to bow down in worship, the fiery furnace awaits. Probably not a literal fiery furnace, but the feeling of rejection, ridicule, and hate from the world. It's the same today as it was in Nebuchadnezzar's time.

In the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, DC, there's a Bible that belonged to Thomas Jefferson with large passages cut out of it. In Jefferson's day, the academic world had turned against any kind of belief in miracles. That was considered unfashionable and uneducated. These Enlightenment thinkers thought the morality of Jesus was awesome—the Sermon on the Mount was the greatest moral message in human history. But the miracles were a leftover relic of a superstitious past. If people did this today, they would probably cut out Jesus's teachings on the sanctity of sex and marriage. They'd keep the miracle stories and cut out large parts of the Sermon on the Mount.

Babylon says it is fine to worship Jesus, just edit Him to fit our preferences so you can still bow where the world tells you to bow. But hear me: for the follower of Jesus, that's not an option. He's either Lord or He is not. For us to not make that clear is not just cowardly, it is cruel.

Why is it cruel to be quiet about the truth of who Jesus is?

Why is it important for Christians to stand on the courage of their beliefs about Jesus?

These young men understood the call of God and the courage it requires. Because they stood when everyone else bowed—even though they got thrown into a fiery furnace for it—an entire empire saw the reality of the God of Israel on display. Scholars say you can trace the faith of the wise men who came to see Jesus at His birth back to this encounter. What will future generations say about the courage and the testimony of your generation? Their eternal future depends on our courage in the present.

PRAYER

Jesus, give me the courage to bow down to nothing but You.

PERSONAL STUDY 2

COURAGE DEFINED

PART 1

READ DANIEL 3:13-18.

Coming to the understanding that the core belief of Christian courage is, *Jesus is Lord*, leads us to ask the question, how do you define Christian courage? Daniel 3 helps us develop an answer: *Christian courage believes God can, expects that He will, but trusts Him if He doesn't.* This is defined in verses 17-18:

"If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up."

DANIEL 3:17-18

What must these guys have believed about God to stand courageously against Nebuchadnezzar's decree?

How is what you believe about God linked to your courage?

CHRISTIAN COURAGE BELIEVES GOD CAN. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had no doubt who the strongest was in this drama. Their defiance was rooted in their belief that there is only one God, and He is able to deliver His people from any situation. Nebuchadnezzar's threats were nothing compared to the power of their God.

That's the most basic principle of faith: God is bigger than your problems. Any of them. He's bigger than sickness, getting cut from the team, or the divorce of your parents. He's bigger than sin, shame, and even death. Not even a hair from your head falls out apart from His knowledge or permission (see Matt. 10:29-31).

Where do you need to believe God can?

CHRISTIAN COURAGE EXPECTS THAT HE WILL. These guys had no direct promise about what would happen. God did not huddle them together and tell them how it would go down beforehand. But they had faith in their hearts that God would deliver them because they understood God's goodness and His willingness to show His glory. We have every right to expect that God will act on our behalf. The Scriptures lead us to believe so.

What is the difference between a hopeful expectation that God will act and an overconfidence that God will act in the way you desire?

Can I tell you a little secret? Many of the great acts of faith in the Bible were not done in response to a direct command of God or with a promised guarantee of how things would turn out. Think about how many of Jesus's miracles came about because someone, without a promise or plan, dared to trust Jesus's goodness. Think of the woman with the blood disease who came up behind Jesus, believing that if she could just touch the edge of His robe, she'd be healed. She boldly reached out, believing in His power and goodness. And Jesus praised her faith and healed her. We don't have to wait for heaven to be rewarded for our faith—we can expect God to break into our lives right now with the evidence of His goodness.

Bold faith doesn't just believe He can; bold faith expects that He will. That's not to say God, in His goodness, never tells us no or to wait. But here in this story, as we see multiple times throughout the Bible, God rewards those who take a chance on His goodness, who expect that He will.

Where in your life is your faith timid? Where does it need to be bold?

PRAYER

*Father, help me to eagerly hope for Your best,
expecting You will act on my behalf.*

PERSONAL STUDY 3

COURAGE DEFINED

PART 2

READ DANIEL 3:18-30.

To review, *Christian courage believes God can, expects that He will, but trusts Him if He doesn't.* Let's look at verses 17-18 again.

"If the God we serve exists, then he can rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire, and he can rescue us from the power of you, the king. But even if he does not rescue us, we want you as king to know that we will not serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up."

DANIEL 3:17-18

Verse 18 contains the most powerful words in this story and some of the most powerful in the Bible. These teenagers believed God was not only big enough to protect them from Nebuchadnezzar, but they also believed knowing Him was better than anything they'd ever give up. Courage believes not only that God is bigger than the opposition but that He is also better than all alternatives.

What does it mean for Jesus to be bigger than the opposition?

What about Jesus is better than all alternatives?

How do these truths form a firm foundation for our courage?

CHRISTIAN COURAGE TRUSTS GOD IF HE DOESN'T. Sometimes you take a stand and God delivers you, and sometimes you take a stand and He lets you suffer. The question you have to ask is, *If He lets me go into the fire, is He enough for me?* The only way you'll have the courage to suffer for what is right is if you believe knowing Jesus is enough. This story proves that He is. Though three guys were thrown in the fire, there was a fourth man in the flames with them.

He exclaimed, "Look! I see four men, not tied, walking around in the fire unharmed; and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

DANIEL 3:25

Who do you think the fourth man was, and how did He provide for their security?

How does this encounter point us to Jesus?

There was a fourth man in the fire, and because of Him, they came out of the flames totally unharmed. Though it says the man looked like a son of the gods, we can say in light of the New Testament that it was the Son of God—Jesus Himself. This whole scene foreshadows Jesus enduring the cross—Jesus was thrown into the fires of judgment with us. And because He was, we came through judgment totally unharmed.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). The hair on our heads is not singed with judgment; our clothes are not burned. He took the flame so we could emerge in safety, without a trace of judgment anywhere on our bodies or even our clothes. Only the ropes of our bondage to sin burned away! The God who died for you in the fire is the God who will sustain you in the fire.

Is there a fire you're trying to flee that God intends for you to remain in for the time being? If so, how can you depend on Him to give you the courage to face it?

PRAYER

*God, help me see Your continued goodness to me,
Your ability to protect, and Your ability to preserve.*



GROUP TIME

Let's take a few minutes to review the personal study from this week.

What is one thing you got from this week's personal study?

Over the past week, we've read through Daniel 3 and thought about what it looks like to have God-given courage. As we work through the group content, consider these questions:

How would you define *courage*?

How is courage different than determination? Why must our belief in Jesus be the center of our courage?

Courage is something (we think) we all understand, but is there anything different about Christian courage? If our faith is meant to shape every aspect of our lives, what does it look like for our faith to shape our courage? As we have seen and will see, true courage is a distinctly Christian belief that is centered in Jesus and is defined as believing God can, expecting that He will, but trusting Him if He doesn't.

PRAYER

Pray, then watch the group teaching together.

**KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 3**

1. _____ is an essential quality of those who want to shine in Babylon.
2. Courage = _____ + _____
3. Courage's Confession: God is my _____ authority.
4. It was not their _____ that caused the problem. It was their _____ to acknowledge the validity of other gods.
5. For the follower of Jesus, the compromise of His Lordship is not an _____. Jesus is either Lord of all, or He's not Lord at all.
6. Courage's Conviction:
 - ◆ I _____ that God can.
 - ◆ I _____ that He will.
 - ◆ But I _____ Him if He doesn't.
7. Courage begins in the conviction that God is _____ than any of the opposition.
8. Courage not only believes that God is bigger than the opposition, it also believes He is _____ than all alternatives.
9. The God who died for me _____ the fire is the God who can preserve me _____ the fire.



DISCUSS

READ DANIEL 3:13-25.

When have you needed to be courageous?

Discuss the relationship between belief and courage. Why are these two ideas always linked?

What are the gold statues that Babylon, our world, expects us to bow to today?

Why is Jesus the ultimate confession of our courage?

Review the definition of courage: Christian courage believes God can, expects that He will, but trusts Him if He doesn't. What stands out to you about this definition?

How was each part of this definition illustrated in this passage of Scripture?

Of the three parts of this definition, which is the most difficult for you to believe and trust?

How has God worked in the past to show you He is trustworthy? How do we focus our hearts to draw courage from God that results in trust and courageous obedience?

As you've worked through this session, where do you feel God is calling you to trust in Him? How can we support you in that?

What remaining questions or comments do you have about this session's teaching video or personal study content? What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?

PRAYER

*Close your time in prayer.
Remember to complete the personal study prior to the next meeting.*

SESSION 5



KNOCKOUT

READ THIS FIRST



The first chapters of Daniel follow a familiar structure:

1. Nebuchadnezzar does something that is offensive to God.
2. Daniel or his friends honor God in the situation.
3. Nebuchadnezzar comes to his senses and praises God.
4. Nebuchadnezzar returns to his sin.

This week we'll read about Nebuchadnezzar wandering around like a wild beast for seven years, all because of sin God graciously warned him about. God used Nebuchadnezzar to give us a picture of what happens to humanity when we rebel against Him. You see, like Nebuchadnezzar, we were created to rule on earth (see Gen. 1:28), but when we reject God and give ourselves over to sin, we become like beasts.

So this is not just about Nebuchadnezzar, this is about the whole human race, including you and me. This week we're going to reflect on pride, the sin that had taken over Nebuchadnezzar's heart. Pride can be a problem for us also. This week, we will look at pride's roots, pride's fruits, and pride's cure.

KEY IDEA

Pride in ourselves will keep us from faithfulness to God.

PERSONAL STUDY 1

PRIDE'S ROOTS

This chapter (which, incredibly, was written by Nebuchadnezzar) tells of the work God did in the king's life as he wrestled with pride. In His kindness, God issued a warning to Nebuchadnezzar through a dream, but the king did not listen. Eventually, he had to pay the price for his sin but was also graciously restored and recognized the power of God. Pride happens when we refuse to recognize God's rule over all things.

Read Daniel 4:1-33 and list examples of pride you see in this chapter.

Through this passage, we see that pride has two roots. **The first is a failure to see that every good thing comes from God.** Notice what Nebuchadnezzar said:

"Is this not Babylon the Great that I have built to be a royal residence by my vast power and for my majestic glory?"

DANIEL 4:30

Nebuchadnezzar fell into the trap of believing that he achieved everything he had by himself. Why is this such an easy mindset to fall into?

We can be tempted to think that we can do things on our own. To believe that our hard work is the reason we have what we have. Yes, we are called to work hard and to do our best in everything, but even the slightest moment of reflection will show us that believing we have earned everything we have on our own is entirely untrue.

You had no control over the biggest factors contributing to your success—like where or when you were born, the education you are receiving, the family and community you were born into, the influences that inspire you to succeed, even the genes that provide your talents are given by your parents. These examples don't even touch on all the things God has given you. No one can make it on their own. We take the gifts and blessing God gives us and use

them—and to not acknowledge that is just plain wrong. Your whole life should have one big footnote: “Everything I have come from God, not me.”

What does it look like to acknowledge that your blessings come from God?

Pride’s first root is a failure to see that everything we have is a gift from God. But it’s always accompanied by a second root—**the foolish assumption that the good life will last forever.**

Nebuchadnezzar assumed he was safe, and relatively speaking, he was. Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man in the world in his time. If anyone should have felt secure about the future, it was Nebuchadnezzar. He couldn’t be attacked; literally no army in the world compared to Babylon’s. He couldn’t be fired; he was an unchallenged king. He couldn’t go bankrupt; he was the world’s bank, meaning he had all the money in the world. But you and I both know, God has a way of crushing our prideful assumptions.

What are some assumptions we make about our future?

Out of the blue, Nebuchadnezzar got sick. Maybe you’ve dealt with something like this or seen it happen to someone else. Our future and all that we have is not guaranteed. Parents can lose jobs. Relationships end. People get sick unexpectedly. This isn’t to say we should go around expecting the worst. The point is: we’re not as invincible as we think. One small thing can enter your life and rock your world, changing everything. In those moments, nothing else matters but God. Those struggles have a way of refocusing our attention.

How has a struggle refocused your attention?

PRAYER

God, please help me to squash my pride by acknowledging that every good and perfect gift comes from You.

PERSONAL STUDY 2

PRIDE'S FRUIT

READ DANIEL 4:27-33.

From Daniel 4 and the rest of the Bible, we can identify at least six fruits, or results, of pride. It's important to recognize the fruit of pride because fruit can always be traced back to a root.

As you read these fruits of pride, thoughtfully and prayerfully consider which of these shows up in your life.

Next, after each one write a potential Spirit-guided response to this kind of pride.

- 1. COMPETITIVENESS.** Nebuchadnezzar's language was filled with boasting: "I, I, my, my. Nobody compares to me." That's the surest sign you are eaten up with pride. I don't mean a healthy desire to do your best but a drive to show you *are* the best, and you'll stop at nothing, no matter the cost, to prove it.

Response:

- 2. INGRATITUDE.** The apostle Paul in Romans 1 said that the reason for the fall was that we "did not glorify him as God or show gratitude" (Rom. 1:21). Gratitude is a sign of humility. Gratitude in you recognizes that everything you have is a gift, and because of your sin you deserve none of it, so you're constantly giving God glory and thanking Him.

Response:

- 3. ENTITLEMENT.** When your life is going well, pride says: "This is as it should be. I deserve this blessing in life. I'm owed this; I deserve these friends, these things." Then, when things go poorly, pride says: "This isn't fair. This isn't right." You live with resentment, blaming others for how they have let you down—your parents, your friends, your teachers. You blame God. Pride leads to entitlement; humility leads to gratitude.

Response:

4. OVERCONFIDENCE. Nebuchadnezzar believed his kingdom would last forever. James tells us a sign of pride is that you take the future for granted (see James 4:13-14). A hard working attitude is great, but you can only do anything as God supplies the strength. Paul said it this way: "I am able to do all things *through Him* who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13, emphasis added).

Response:

5. SELF-WILL. Nebuchadnezzar wasn't afraid to arrogantly go into the future without God because he believed he had all he needed to make life work, but God showed him how foolish that was. Those who go through life without seeking God's will are those foolish enough to think they can make it in life without him.

Response:

6. STINGINESS/EXPLOITATION. In Daniel 4:27, Daniel pleaded with Nebuchadnezzar to separate himself from his sin by seeking justice and showing mercy to those in need. It's significant that Daniel put repentance in terms of a new attitude toward the needy because a sure sign of pride is an insensitivity toward the needs of others. If you feel like you are responsible for everything in your life and have no one to thank but yourself, then you will have no compassion for the needs of others. But if you realize how much you owe to God, your heart will naturally go out to those in need.

Response :

Which fruit of pride do you most often struggle with?

How can you bring this pride to the Lord?

PRAYER

Holy Spirit, give me the ability to recognize these fruits of pride in my life, repent, and seek forgiveness.

PERSONAL STUDY 3

PRIDE'S CURE

Failure and suffering alone were not enough to cure Nebuchadnezzar. Without the right perspective, failure often leads to more bitterness and resentment. God's Spirit has to awaken you in your failure. John Calvin said, "Nebuchadnezzar's insanity alone didn't wake him up. God's Spirit had to give him eyes to see."⁴

Read Nebuchadnezzar's words, paying particular attention to the statements he made about God. Circle or underline his statements as you read.

But at the end of those days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven, and my sanity returned to me. Then I praised the Most High and honored and glorified him who lives forever:

*For his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
and his kingdom is from generation to generation.
All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing,
and he does what he wants with the army of heaven
and the inhabitants of the earth.
There is no one who can block his hand
or say to him, "What have you done?"*

At that time my sanity returned to me, and my majesty and splendor returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and my nobles sought me out, I was reestablished over my kingdom, and even more greatness came to me. Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt, and glorify the King of the heavens, because all his works are true and his ways are just. He is able to humble those who walk in pride.

DANIEL 4:34-37

Nebuchadnezzar's final statement is one of the most stunning declarations of humility anywhere in the Bible and worth looking at closely. Notice how it begins: he praised the God of heaven who "lives forever" (v. 34). People who flattered the king had always greeted him with, "O king! Live forever." But now he realized that description only belonged to God. We are only temporary. Our lives are like vapors in the wind, our kingdoms like sandcastles on a beach. God is the only king with "everlasting dominion" (v. 34). Trying to create a life apart from Him is foolish.

How does comparing our limited nature to God's limitless nature bring humility?

"All the inhabitants of the earth are counted as nothing" (v. 35). God's not impressed with Babylon or America. He has no need for any of us, and our greatest achievements don't compare at all to Him. "He does what he wants with the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth" (v. 35). He's fully in charge of history. Armies of angels move at His command, as do the smallest molecules. We're just living here on the earth; God is in control of it.

How can you find freedom understanding that our accomplishments are nothing compared to what God has done?

"There is no one who can block his hand" (v. 35). God's power is irresistible. Ultimately, no one will ever stop His purposes. Not you, not Nebuchadnezzar. No one. God does whatever He pleases; none can restrain or say to Him, "What have you done?" (v. 35). God is the only power that can never be stopped or overthrown.

How does seeing God's power allow us to trust Him and let go of our pride?

"All his works are true and his ways are just" *and* "He is able to humble those who walk in pride" (v. 37). The truth of Nebuchadnezzar's story is the mightiest men and women ever to walk the face of the earth will find themselves humbled before the King of the universe, unable even to lift their heads. "So that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow—in heaven and on earth and under the earth—and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11). That is the story of the richest, most powerful, most wicked king in ancient history coming to faith in God, but it's our story too. All of us turn from God to pride, but He is able to humble all who walk in pride, including you and me.

PRAYER

God, thank You for humbling me. Continue to attack my pride by Your Spirit and build me back up with Christlike humility.



GROUP TIME

Let's take a few minutes to review the personal study from this week.

What is one thing you got from this week's personal study?

Over the past week, we've read through Daniel 4 and considered the problem of pride and the grace of humility. Before we work through the group content, let's discuss these questions:

What is an accomplishment you're proud of?

What is the difference between a healthy sense of accomplishment and sinful pride?

We are created and called to subdue the earth (see Gen. 1:28). A sense of accomplishment and the desire for purpose are gifts from God. But like everything else in life, if these God-given gifts are disconnected from their source, they can easily turn into sinful pride. This week, Nebuchadnezzar has provided a case study for us on pride's root, pride's fruit, and ultimately, pride's cure.

PRAYER

Pray, then watch the group teaching together.

**KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 4**

1. Defeat is sometimes difficult, but success is usually _____.

2. Pride's _____
 - ◆ A _____ to recognize that every good thing comes from God.
 - ◆ The foolish assumption that “the good life” will last _____.

3. Pride's _____
 - ◆ _____
 - ◆ _____
 - ◆ _____
 - ◆ Self-_____
 - ◆ _____

4. Pride's _____
 - ◆ Suffering

5. God is able to _____ all those who walk in pride.



DISCUSS

READ DANIEL 4:28-37.

Discuss the two roots of pride—the failure to believe everything comes from God and the foolish assumption the good life will last forever. Where did these roots show up in Nebuchadnezzar’s life?

Which of the two roots do you struggle with most? How does this show up in your life?

Why are we particularly susceptible to these sins?

Define and discuss the six fruits of pride—competitiveness, ingratitude, entitlement, overconfidence, self-will, and stinginess/exploitation.

Next, share which of the fruits you are most prone to. How can we respond to these fruits in ways that honor God and lead to humility?

How does failure and suffering grow our humility? In those cases, how does Jesus use even the most difficult circumstances for our good and His glory (see Rom. 8:28)?

Read Philippians 2:3-11. How does pursuing Jesus in the way these verses describe help us cut out our pride at its roots?

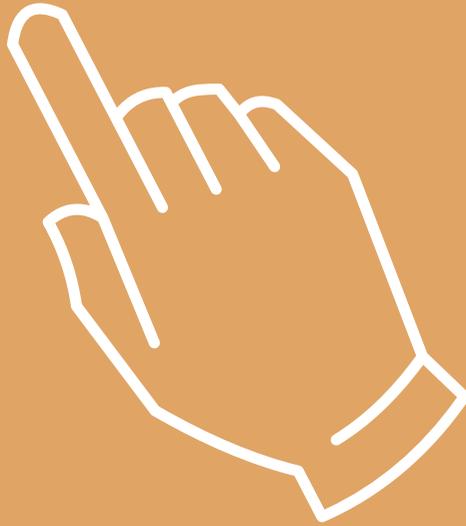
It has been said that pride is particularly dangerous because those who struggle with it are often unaware. What role do God's Word and the community of faith play in keeping you from pride (and other sins)?

What remaining questions or comments do you have about this session's teaching video or personal study content? What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?

PRAYER

*Close your time in prayer.
Remember to complete the personal study prior to the next meeting.*

SESSION 6



VERDICT

READ THIS FIRST



The year was 539 BC. Nearly seventy years had passed since Daniel and his friends were brought to Babylon as captives. Daniel was an old man, well over eighty. Nebuchadnezzar was dead—he had been for about twenty-three years—and Belshazzar, his spoiled grandson, was now king. Belshazzar was hosting a party—an all-out rager. Suddenly, a floating hand appeared and etched four words into the plaster, then disappeared.

As Daniel was brought in to interpret the words, we learn that the message God supernaturally delivered to a wicked king is actually a message from God to people in all times and places.

KEY IDEA

God has given us a Word from above that gives us a right perspective on the present and future.

PERSONAL STUDY 1

PARTYING IN THE FACE OF DEATH

READ DANIEL 5:1-7.

The events of these verses are pretty straightforward, but kind of weird: King Belshazzar was having a huge party using the items taken from the temple in Jerusalem as serving pieces when a floating hand appeared and wrote a mysterious message on the wall. What was happening in the background is less obvious.

Belshazzar *knew* the combined armies of the Medes and the Persians were less than fifty miles away. *Everybody* in Babylon knew that, and everybody was on edge. This was a humongous and well-organized army. So why, in the face of this danger, was Belshazzar throwing a party? We don't know. Maybe he was trying to put on a brave face, to inspire everyone with his courage. Maybe he was trying to hide his own fear in fun and alcohol. Maybe he was so arrogant that he thought Babylon could never fall.

Why was it so offensive for Belshazzar to use the items from Israel's temple?

How does pride play into the actions we see from Belshazzar in these verses?

Years ago, as the year 2000 approached, people got wacky. There was a genuine fear that a computer bug would cause a global crash that would bring civilization to a screeching halt. Some people responded by hoarding food and other goods, while others responded by partying.

In Belshazzar's case, he chose to party because it's easier to distract ourselves with fun than face the truth of what's going on around us. The issue is that our problems don't go away simply because we aren't thinking about them.

When have you used fun to try to distract yourself from unpleasant thoughts?

Why is it difficult for many of us to deal directly with unpleasant thoughts?

When facing a scary or uncertain future, many people respond in three different ways.

1. **Accomplishments:** Many hope their accomplishments will provide security or even an immortality of sorts. Belshazzar did this by bringing out all the gold and silver they'd taken from other kingdoms to show that Babylon was special.
2. **Romantic Love:** Many turn to the physical affection of another person to provide hope. Belshazzar's party was filled with wives and concubines and sex.
3. **Religion:** Many turn to acts of religious faith to convince themselves that they have lived a good enough life to be spared. You can see that in Belshazzar's extravagant toasting of their gods.⁵

Where do you see these things in our modern-day Babylon?

Why should we handle unpleasant thoughts differently than Babylon?

The only difference between Belshazzar and us is that he was told the day he would die. We may not know the exact day like he did, but we are just as certain of that day's inevitability. We have one life to live, and how we live matters. Those who know Jesus can live distraction-free lives because the end has been written for us.

PRAYER

Jesus, help me live with the end in mind and embrace difficulty with a clear mind and a distraction-free heart.

PERSONAL STUDY 2

THE SIN BEHIND THE WRITING

READ DANIEL 5:8-24.

Seems like we've heard this before. The wise men couldn't do the job and the queen remembered who could—Daniel. But before he interpreted the message, Daniel explained the nature of Belshazzar's sin that led to the writing on the wall.

Look through verses 17-24. With what did Daniel charge Belshazzar?

Daniel charged Belshazzar with two things that are the essence of all sin:

1. **You have not worshiped God as God.** You have not given Him glory and credited Him with all your power and success. He has not held first place in your heart. Instead, you worshiped idols because you thought you could control them, and you've lived to please yourself.
2. **You have used what God set apart for His purposes for you own.** Specifically, Belshazzar was using knives, plates, and candlesticks for his party that had been set aside for the worship of God.

How do we do these same two things in our lives today?

In calling out Belshazzar's sin, Daniel gives us a glimpse into the nature of all sin. This is the writing on the wall for all of us. Yet, God graciously calls us to turn from this sin and toward Him for His wisdom and grace.

For us, these sins are particularly clear in a few areas. Let's consider them.

YOUR TALENTS. You were given gifts and talents to glorify God and serve Him. To not use them for His purposes is misusing what He gave you. All followers of Jesus are supposed to lay down their talents before God and say, "What do You want to do with these?" To not do that is stealing from your Master.

What talents has God given you? Where are you using (or where could you use) them to serve Him?

YOUR RESOURCES. "Will a man rob God?" (Malachi 3:8). You may not have much money now, but you are still supposed to give ten percent of what you have to Him. Giving now starts the habit of giving later when you have more resources.

Do you give at least ten percent of your income back to the Lord? If not, why not?

SEXUAL SIN. The body is a sacred thing; it is made in the image of God. For the believer, the body is the temple of the Lord. This means sex is sacred; something you do with someone only after you have joined your lives together in marriage. When you use someone else for sexual pleasure, you use a precious thing for your gratification. Belshazzar's story gives you warning of how seriously God takes this.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31. How should this reshape the way we live every aspect of our lives?

Take a few minutes to consider these areas and confess to God where you need His forgiveness and His Spirit's help to honor Him.

PRAYER

Father, teach me to reject sin and pursue Your wisdom.

PERSONAL STUDY 3

GOD'S MESSAGE TO US

READ DANIEL 5:25-30.

God preserved this story in the Bible because it's not just for Belshazzar, it's for us too. There's some divine imagery at work here that we need to pick up on. This wasn't the first time the finger of God had appeared in Scripture.

In Exodus, when Pharaoh's magicians couldn't duplicate the work God was doing through Moses, they acknowledged the work was from "the finger of God" (Ex. 8:19). Later in the same book, the Ten Commandments were etched in stone "by the finger of God" (31:18). "The finger of God" indicates a power only God has or a direct communication from God Himself.

Fast forward to the New Testament, and we see Jesus doing miracles no one else had ever done—He healed the blind, walked on water, raised the dead, rose from the dead, and He said these miracles proved "the finger of God" was at work among them (Luke 11:20). He claimed that to hear His voice was to hear the voice of God directly.

In Jesus, God has appeared to us. Jesus's identity was verified through prophecy, miracles, and His resurrection. All of these things show that God is speaking. So what do *Mene*, *Mene*, *Tekel*, and *Parsin* mean? Let's take a closer look.

MENE: Your days are numbered.

Belshazzar got a rare gift—he was told the day he was going to die. You may not know the day, but your death is just as certain as his. Knowing our time is limited helps us to see the time we have as a gift to love God and serve others.

What changes in our lives when we keep an eternal perspective?

TEKEL: You have been measured and found deficient.

We can never be righteous enough to earn our way into heaven. But Jesus was, and He willingly took our place on the cross. His sacrifice as our substitute is sufficient. Trusting Him with your life and righteousness frees you from working to earn your salvation and provides rest for your soul (see Matt. 11:28).

Read Romans 3:23 and 6:23. Why is knowing our standing before God actually freeing for us?

PERES: Your kingdom will end.

Like Belshazzar, everything we're working for will end, but that shouldn't lead us to distraction; it should lead us to seek the coming kingdom Daniel told us about that will never end. Any investment we make in that kingdom will be returned to us.

How would you summarize the importance of this writing for followers of Jesus?

It's easy to get discouraged in Babylon because everywhere you look, Babylonians are in charge. There were Israelites, like Daniel, who'd lived their whole lives under captivity. And many were wondering, "Is God still in charge? Does He remember us?" You might be asking the same thing. This chapter answers a resounding yes to that question. The days of wickedness are numbered. The true King will return, restore justice, and take us home soon to the promised land to spend eternity with Him. Our hope is in that day and that King. Keeping an eternal perspective gives us strength not only to survive as exiles but also to shine as exiles in our dark and hostile Babylon.

PRAYER

Father, thank You for giving us a Word from You and a hope that will never disappoint (see Rom. 5:5).



GROUP TIME

Let's take a few minutes to review the personal study from this week.

What is one thing you got from this week's personal study?

Over the past week, we've read through Daniel 5 and thought about the warning God gave a wicked king and the Word God has given us in Jesus.

When you have big questions or need advice, where is the first place you turn?

How does our response when we are stressed or need help have a way of revealing what's important to us?

Since the garden, we've sought wisdom in the wrong places instead of looking to God and the sources He has provided. God has spoken in previous generations and in our generation through Jesus. We are responsible for hearing Him.

PRAYER

Pray, then watch the group teaching together.

**KEY SCRIPTURES: Daniel 5****Four Focuses**

1. Partying in the face of _____
2. The _____ of our wise men
3. The _____ on the wall for all of us
4. How the finger of God has appeared to our _____
5. Are you prepared to meet _____ or are you partying in the face of _____?
6. Sin
 - ◆ _____ God's authority in our lives with our own.
 - ◆ _____ what God intended for His purposes and spends it on ours.



DISCUSS

READ DANIEL 5:25-31.

Belshazzar and his court partied in the face of death. Why do we have a tendency to distract ourselves with fun when we're asked to face difficult circumstances?

What types of distractions seem to have a particular attraction to young men today? What would you identify as your primary distractions?

What are some ways we can point each other to Jesus when we notice one of us is chasing a distraction instead of dealing with the real problem?

Why are accomplishments, romantic love, and religious activities ultimately insufficient to help us deal with our biggest problems?

In addition to trying to distract ourselves from our problems, we also have a habit of seeking the wrong wisdom to deal with our problems. What are some sources of wisdom we turn to, and why are they ultimately insufficient?

What does it look like when we fail to worship God as the God of our lives and don't use what He has given us for His purposes today?

Review the writing on the wall in verses 25-28. What was the warning for Belshazzar? What is the warning for us?

How did Jesus provide the best answer to the warning in these verses?

What remaining questions or comments do you have about this session's teaching video or personal study content? What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?

PRAYER

*Close your time in prayer.
Remember to complete the personal study prior to the next meeting.*

SESSION 7



HABITS

READ THIS FIRST



In this session, we're going to look at one of the most well-known stories in all of Scripture—Daniel in the lion's den. Babylon had been overthrown by the Medes and the Persians, Nebuchadnezzar and the royal family had all been killed, and King Darius of the Medes was now king.

Daniel, well over eighty at this point, was still living in captivity in Babylon. We don't know what happened to his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—it's possible they had already died. The new king, Darius, in order to try to bring some continuity and stability to his government, had kept a lot of Nebuchadnezzar's wise men on his court, including Daniel.

As in the past, the king gave an order that Daniel would not comply with because of his faith. From Daniel's response we see that courage is not conjured up in a moment; courage is developed through a lifetime of small, consistent decisions.

KEY IDEA

Courage is a habit of the heart.

PERSONAL STUDY 1

COURAGE THAT SUSTAINS

READ DANIEL 6:1-10.

From these verses, what do we learn about Daniel's character?

Even though there was a new king, Daniel kept serving. Like the old kings, he also kept getting attacked by jealous officials in the king's court. They looked for any dirt they could dig up on Daniel, but after six decades of service to various kings, these guys couldn't find anything. Daniel had been completely trustworthy in all that he did.

What must these officials have known about Daniel to believe that his faith in God could be used against him?

If a decree like this were issued today, in what ways would it challenge you personally?

Daniel had been so consistent after decades in a culture that didn't believe in God that they had complete confidence that he would be trapped by this law. Their plot appealed to the king's ego and his desire to be seen as a sole provider for his empire. Even though Daniel lived in the king's house, ran his government, and received his meals from the king's table, he never trusted the king as his ultimate provider. For that he looked to God, and that's exactly how they trapped him.

Where else in the book of Daniel have we seen him turn to prayer?

What does this teach us about Daniel's spiritual life and habits?

Daniel prayed three times a day for seventy years. He did so in Daniel 1 when they tried to force him to eat forbidden foods, and in chapter 2 when the king threatened to kill all the wise men because no one could interpret his dream. His friends prayed in Daniel 3 when Nebuchadnezzar tried to force them to bow down to his golden image. Whenever Daniel had been in trouble, he turned to God. Prayer was as natural to him as breathing.

What did Daniel believe about God to go to Him in every circumstance, including when his life was in danger?

How does this kind of prayer lead to courage?

Daniel recognized that his life didn't belong to him; it always belonged to God. If that was true, his problems didn't belong to him either; they belonged to God. All Daniel was responsible for and all you're responsible for is what God commands you to do—love and serve Him. When you trust God, the Provider and Sustainer of your life, you can be courageous because you realize everything in life is dependent on Him.

PRAYER

Father, help me to turn to You in prayer, no matter the circumstances.

PERSONAL STUDY 2

COURAGE THAT IMPACTS OTHERS

READ DANIEL 6:11-24.

Daniel's habit of prayer was not changed by the threats or the might of the empire he was forced to live in. Daniel chose prayer because he trusted in God. There's a peacefulness in prayer you won't find anywhere else.

When have you experienced peace in prayer, even if your circumstances didn't change?

Notice throughout this chapter that Daniel was calm while everyone around him was frantic. The other officials knew their trap had worked and couldn't wait to tell the king. Darius saw through their deception immediately and was "very displeased" (v. 14), but he was also bound by this ridiculous custom. (Note: the law of the Medes and the Persians was actually a safeguard to keep kings from making laws and decrees on a whim. It was irreversible, not because of stubbornness, but as a means to protect people from unpredictable rulers.)

What evidence is there that Daniel made a strong impression on Darius?

When the order was made and the judgment was passed, Darius couldn't sleep. You'll notice that Daniel was at rest while everyone else was busy. The jealous wise men were probably up all night partying, while the king was up all night worrying, and the angel was up all night protecting—Daniel was the only one who got a good night's sleep! When the king reached the den the next morning, there was Daniel, peacefully resting between the lions.

According to the Bible, why did God preserve Daniel?

The king was overjoyed when Daniel was saved. Daniel's faith drew the king closer to him instead of pushing him away. The Bible makes it clear that Daniel wasn't delivered because he was special, or because God knew he was writing a Bible story, or because God liked him better than anyone else. Why was Daniel delivered?

[Daniel] was found to be unharmed, for he trusted in his God.

DANIEL 6:23

You have the ability to trust God as well. You can look for this same kind of providential protection in your life if you pray like Daniel did. This doesn't mean bad things won't happen to you, but God will be with you and, ultimately, deliver you through them all like He did for Daniel. When God delivers, our trust in Him can make an impact on others.

What are some ways our courageous faith and trust in God make an impression on others?

Where is God asking you to trust Him? Think of one specific area, write it down, then pray.

PRAYER

Father, I trust You with my life, please sustain me through trouble.

PERSONAL STUDY 3

COURAGE THAT POINTS TO JESUS

READ DANIEL 6:25-28.

List all the truths about God contained in Darius's response to finding Daniel unharmed by the lions.

This chapter started with an attack on prayer but ends with a pagan king preaching a sermon about God's protection. It's actually a pretty good mini sermon! Repeatedly in the book of Daniel, we see amazing sermons preached by formerly pagan kings. How did they learn these things about God? Through Daniel and his friends living with consistency and courage in front of them. Darius declares that God is:

- **GLOBAL.** He's the God of all the peoples, nations, and languages in all the earth (v. 25). Contrary to what the Babylonians and twenty-first-century Americans believe, He's not a lowercase god, where "You have your god, and I have mine." There is only one God and one truth for all peoples in all times and at all places.
- **PERSONAL.** He's "the living God" (v. 26). He's not like those Babylonian gods that neither speak nor have relationships with humans—gods that you have to carry around from place to place and have no power. The true God is a living, active, speaking God.
- **ETERNAL.** Not only is He the living God, but He "endures forever" (v. 26).
- **SOVEREIGN.** "His kingdom will never be destroyed" (v. 26).
- **FAITHFUL.** "He rescues and delivers" His people (v. 27).

- **CLOSE.** “He performs signs and wonders in the heavens and on the earth” (v. 27). This is a God actively at work in the world today, pursuing you and working in your life.
- **SAVIOR.** He “rescued Daniel” (v. 27). This is a God who didn’t leave His people to perish in a dark pit but came to them and entered the pit with them. He is ready to help all who call on Him.

This is what’s most important for us. Any time you read about an Old Testament character, it’s tempting to make the application, “Dare to be a Daniel!” But in Daniel, and everywhere else in the Bible, the point is always Jesus. The Old Testament was not primarily written to give us heroes to emulate but a Savior to adore. When you see the story this way, it takes on new meaning.

In what ways does the story of Daniel in the lion’s den point us to Jesus?

How is Jesus better than Daniel?

Daniel and Jesus were both innocent and falsely convicted on fake charges. On the cross, Jesus was thrown to the lions of judgment, which circled Him, taunted Him, and then tore Him apart. No angel came to stand by Him, as they did with Daniel, and shut the lions’ mouths. Knowing that Jesus is with us gives us the courage to face danger like Daniel, to be consistent like Daniel, and to get up and keep going when we’ve struggled. Jesus, who took your punishment, promises to be with you in the den of any lions you face today. With Him, you can have the courage to face anything. Trusting Jesus frees us from sin and gives us Spirit-led courage to shine in Babylon.

PRAYER

God, help me to trust Jesus above all else. Through Your Spirit help me lead a courageous life that points others to Him.



GROUP TIME

Let's take a few minutes to review the personal study from this week.

What is one thing you got from this week's personal study?

Over the past week, we've read through Daniel 6 and seen how Daniel prayerfully and courageously defied an unjust law and trusted God in scary circumstances. Daniel was able to do this in part because he had developed courage over time through a habit of prayer.

What is a habit you engage in every day?

How have you benefited from that habit?

Most of us are familiar with Daniel in the lion's den. It's among the most well-known and retold stories in all of the Bible. But the reason he found himself in a lion's den to begin with is because of Daniel's refusal to stop praying to the one, true God. Daniel's courage was developed over a lifetime of prayer. We have the same opportunities in our Babylon as Daniel did in his to develop courage in our lives. We just hope we don't end up in a lion's den like he did!

PRAYER

Pray, then watch the group teaching together.

**KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 6**

1. Courage is developed through a _____ of small, consistent decisions.
It is a _____ that you program into your heart.
2. _____ is an autofill habit that you build up from years of consistent patterns.
3. What is your _____ when you get pushback for some moral stand you've taken?
4. Possible Responses to Pushback:
◆ _____ ◆ _____ ◆ _____
5. Daniel chose prayer because Daniel _____ in God.
6. When you _____ God, things happen—heaven moves.
7. If we _____ like Daniel, we'll _____ like Daniel.

Two Takeaways from Daniel 6

8. Courage in the lion's den comes from _____ in the prayer closet.
9. Understanding _____ as the greater Daniel fuels courage.



DISCUSS

READ DANIEL 6:19-28.

Daniel had formed a habit of prayer that could sustain him through every circumstance. How can you develop healthy habits in your daily spiritual life?

Daniel turned to prayer, but we often turn to other strategies when faced with trouble. What are some things we try instead of prayer? Why are they so appealing?

What does it teach us about Daniel's life that his opponents *knew* he would not stop praying?

Reread verse 23. How does trusting God with our lives lead us to trust God with our problems? What problems do you need to entrust to God?

How can we support one another in these struggles? Why does this kind of support sometimes feel awkward or unnatural to us?

Repeatedly, we've seen Daniel's consistent faithfulness give him personal favor with kings and officials in Babylon. In what ways does genuine faith make our lives attractive and help us shine in our Babylon?

What does Darius's statement in verses 25-27 teach us about God? Who is a "Darius" in your life that God might use your faith to reach?

The point is not to be like Daniel but to worship Jesus. How does linking ourselves to Jesus provide us with courage?

What remaining questions or comments do you have about this session's teaching video or personal study content? What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?

PRAYER

*Close your time in prayer.
Remember to complete the personal study prior to the next meeting.*

SESSION 8



PRAYER

READ THIS FIRST



Prayer is the most undervalued resource of the church—neglected by many, completely discarded by others. However, Scripture tells us many of the blessings of God are activated in our lives through prayer. It's something we've seen over and over again throughout the book of Daniel.

It's not surprising that at the end of Daniel's book, he circled back around to the power of prayer. It was a running theme of his life, and there's a lot we can learn from Daniel about this vital spiritual practice. This is a one-of-a-kind story because it pulls back the curtains and shows us the inner workings of prayer. Yet at the center of prayer is a God who loves us.

You are greatly loved like Daniel was. Therefore, you can trust God like Daniel and learn to pray like he did.

KEY IDEA

Prayer is our first, final, and finest resource.

PERSONAL STUDY 1

PRAY GOD'S PROMISES

READ DANIEL 9:1-27.

The truth is, we do not value prayer the way we should. Because of this, we miss out on many of God's blessings simply because we do not ask for them.

Can you think of a time when you may have missed out on a blessing from God because you failed to pray for it? If so, what was it?

Whenever I hear older saints—people you'd like to resemble—talking about what they'd do differently, most say that looking back they wish they'd prayed more. In our verses for today, we find Daniel at the end of his life praying. This prayer started because he noticed a promise of God in Jeremiah.

Daniel read in Jeremiah that God would send His people away from their homes for seventy years (see Jer. 25:11-12). He and his friends were taken into captivity around 605 BC. "The first year of Darius" he referred to in Daniel 9:1 was sometime around 538 BC, and if you do the math, that means he had been there for around seventy years. Daniel decided He would pray for what God promised and call on God to take the exiles home. God's promises are there for us today as they were for Daniel. In fact, we have even more because we have the complete Bible.

According to Gabriel, why was God willing to answer Daniel's prayers (see v. 23)?

Incredibly, as Daniel was praying, God sent him an answer directly through the angel, Gabriel:

*"At the beginning of your petitions an answer went out,
and I have come to give it, for you are treasured by God."*

DANIEL 9:23

Notice how Gabriel began: "You are treasured by God." This was the secret to Daniel's consistency in prayer. Sometimes, we think our failure to pray is a failure of self-discipline.

But at its root, prayerlessness is the result of failing to grasp how much God loves you, how kind He is to you, and how much He wants to hear from you. Prayer is not just a way to get close to God but a response to knowing how close God is to you. That's why Daniel's prayer tied God's glory to His faithfulness and promises (see vv. 16-17).

From these verses, what can we learn about the connection between prayer and Bible reading?

What promises of God are you praying right now?

The Bible is filled with promises, but you have to find them for yourself. I can't do it for you. There are promises about forgiveness and restoration after sin, joy in suffering, godly relationships, provision in time of need, and many others. Read it for yourself. It's our job to find and claim them. Effective prayer recognizes the gap between where something is and where God wants it to be. This means the quality of your prayer will be connected to the quality of your knowledge of the Bible. This isn't meant to guilt you into praying or reading the Bible but to show you how connected they are and how God desires to show us Himself through them. Amazing things happen when you take the purposes of God and pray them into reality. The prayers that start in heaven are heard by heaven.

Where do you recognize a gap in what God's Word says He wants and where your life is now (in your relationships, in your activities, at school, etc.)?

Pray for this need saying, "In _____ as it is in heaven."

PRAYER

Father, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

PERSONAL STUDY 2

DON'T GIVE UP

READ DANIEL 9:20-27. Pay particular attention to verse 21.

While I was praying, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the first vision, reached me in my extreme weariness, about the time of the evening offering.

DANIEL 9:21

Why does it matter the state Gabriel found Daniel in?

Flip through the book of Daniel and list all the times we've seen him pray that have been highlighted in this study.

When Gabriel arrived, Daniel was exhausted because he'd been deep in prayer. He had been praying for the same thing for seventy years at this point. Throughout the Scriptures, God teaches us that some answers to prayer only come through asking over and over again. Jesus compared it to a neighbor who shows up at your house to borrow some PopTarts™ at 3 a.m. and the only reason you get up and help him is because you know he is not going to leave you alone until you lend him that sugary goodness (see Luke 11:5-13). Jesus said, "That's how you should pray." Keep asking.

Does your attitude toward prayer match the person in Jesus's parable? Do you ever feel like your requests are tiresome to God? Why or why not?

Praying for the same thing over and over again is something that happens frequently in the Bible. In fact, it continues in the book of Daniel.

READ DANIEL 10:10-13.

Why is it good that we don't know all the specifics of how prayer works?

In these verses, Daniel had prayed for twenty-one days with no answer. Then he got to entertain another angelic messenger. These verses raise a lot of questions, but what we're meant to take from them is that God is always active and listening. We have good reason to keep praying—both because Jesus told us to and because we have biblical examples of God answering according to His own timeline.

Have you ever looked back with gladness that God didn't answer a prayer in your time? How did that build your faith and trust in Him?

What request(s) have you made repeatedly to God that you're still seeking answers for? Write them down and spend a few minutes praying, knowing God loves you and hears you.

The point is, who knows what is happening up there as you pray. So you've prayed for twenty days with no answer? Keep praying. Help is on the way. You've prayed for seventy years with no answer? Keep praying. God gives some things only when we keep asking. You say, "Why does He do it this way?" I don't know. Maybe it's to test our faith. To see how much we actually trust Him. Or to see how quickly we'll turn away from God and pursue some other means. Don't give up. He promises never to turn you away. Don't give up on year sixty-nine. Who knows what is happening in heaven while you keep praying on earth.

PRAYER

Lord, I know You are not slow as others count slowness (2 Pet. 3:9) but are always loving and faithful. Please answer these requests in Your way and in Your time.

PERSONAL STUDY 3

PRAY IN VIEW OF GOD'S MERCY

READ DANIEL 9:17-18.

What Daniel says in verse 18 might be one of the most significant “secrets” of prayer:

Listen closely, my God, and hear. Open your eyes and see our desolations and the city that bears your name. For we are not presenting our petitions before you based on our righteous acts, but based on your abundant compassion.

DANIEL 9:18

How have you experienced God's abundant compassion in your life?

How does that change the way you pray?

God doesn't answer our prayers because of who we are or how we pray but because of who He is. The longer I walk with Jesus, the less confident I grow in my abilities to change people, and the less convinced I am of my worthiness to demand anything from God. When I first started out in ministry, I was pretty confident. I thought, “If I just explain this the right way, with the force of my personality, I can change this person.” I can't even keep myself in the path of righteousness, much less get somebody else. So I pray, “God, I'm not asking You to work in this person's life according to the measure of my abilities. And I'm certainly not asking You to reward me for my righteousness, because I don't really have any. No, give to me according to the abundant riches of the mercy of Jesus. According to the abundance of His capabilities.” The mercy of Jesus is a well that will never run dry.

Is this attitude freeing for you as you pray? Why or why not?

How does praying “in Jesus’s name” connect our prayers to God’s mercy?

That phrase “in Jesus’s name” is not just a little signal to God that you’re about done praying, but that’s what many Christians think. When you say, “in Jesus’s name,” you are saying, “God, I’m not praying according to my worthiness but Yours. My hope is not in my righteousness or ability—so I bring this prayer, not in my name, but in Yours. I’m not asking this based on my worthiness to receive it but Your worthiness to give it.”

What thoughts about prayer have you discovered through this study that you need to correct?

Friend, *you* are greatly loved and treasured by God. I know because Jesus came to die on a cross to save you from your sin, if you are willing to receive it. Give up trying to make yourself worthy for God to hear and just receive His grace as a gift in Jesus. It’s ready for you. Once you do, God is ready for your burdens, and when you pray, the angels move. Reading about prayer is great, but the most important thing we can do is act on it. And that’s how I want to challenge you to end your day.

What is burdening your heart? Pause for a moment, then approach God with the confidence that you will be received by the God of the universe in the throne room of heaven—all because He loves you and is merciful toward you.

PRAYER

God, thank You for receiving me as a perfect Father receives a beloved son, in Jesus’s name.



GROUP TIME

Let's take a few minutes to review the personal study from this week.

What is one thing you got from this week's personal study?

Over the past week, we've read through Daniel chapter 9 and 10 and seen the importance of prayer, even when we have to keep asking God over and over again.

Why do you suppose even people who aren't religious pray?

What are your earliest memories of prayer? Who has taught you the most about prayer?

Does prayer come naturally to you or is it a habit you need to develop more consistency in?

Prayer is a vital practice for Christians because it connects our hearts to God's in a way that nothing else does. It's a practice most Christians engage in but hope to do more. Imagine what would happen if we became devoted to the practice of prayer. The goal of this session is not for you to learn how to pray more or to prayer better but to help you see God's heart for you in a way that will draw you to Him, which will lead you to pray more.

PRAYER

Pray, then watch the group teaching together.

**KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 9**

1. Root your prayers in God's _____.
2. _____ prayer perceives the gap between where something is and where God wants it to be.
3. Make prayer a daily _____.
4. Strength for God comes only from _____ with God.
5. Don't _____.
6. Trust in God's _____, not your _____.
7. Like Daniel, you are deeply _____ by God, and He stands ready to _____ you in the darkest of days when you _____ on Him.



DISCUSS

READ DANIEL 9:20-27.

One of the central ideas of this session is that prayer is one of the most undervalued resources in the church. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

Thinking back over your life so far, what usually leads to times when you do not pray?

Daniel prayed because he understood he was “treasured by God” (v. 23). How does this same truth apply to us? How should it transform our prayer lives?

What is the connection between Bible reading and prayer? How do we engage in both out of a love for God rather than a sense of guilt or duty?

In this chapter, Daniel was an older man but had prayed the same prayer for seventy years. Why should we keep praying even when we feel like there’s no answer? Who has modeled this well for you?

Share with the group at least one thing you've been praying for over a long period of time. Consider stopping right now to lift up those requests to God.

Read verse 18 again. Why is it essential that we link God's willingness to answer our prayers to His compassion toward us?

What have you learned over the course of this study that will help you be more consistent in prayer? How can the others in this group support you in that?

What remaining questions or comments do you have about this session's teaching video or personal study content? What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?

What is one key takeaway from this study that you've taken to heart or plan to implement in the days ahead?

PRAYER

*Close your time in prayer.
Thank students for being part of the study.*

LEADER GUIDE

Follow these guidelines to prepare for each session.

PRAYERFULLY PREPARE

REVIEW. Complete the personal studies and review group questions ahead of time.

PRAY. Be intentional about praying for each person in the group. Ask the Holy Spirit to work through you and the group discussion as you point to Jesus each week through God's Word.

MINIMIZE DISTRACTIONS

As best as you can, create a non-distracting environment. Teens are easily distracted, and if they're distracted, they won't engage in the group experience. Plan ahead by considering the seating, temperature, lighting, snacks, surrounding noise, and general cleanliness of the meeting space. Do everything in your ability to help students focus on what's most important: connecting with God, the Bible, and one another.

INCLUDE EVERYONE

Your goal is to create a community in which everyone is welcome just as they are and encouraged to grow spiritually. Always be aware of opportunities to include students who visit the group or invite new people to join. If possible, have extra copies of this Bible study book on hand for any guests or new students.

ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION

A good small group experience has the following characteristics:

EVERYONE PARTICIPATES. Encourage everyone to ask questions, share responses, or read aloud.



NO ONE DOMINATES—NOT EVEN THE LEADER. Be sure that your time speaking as a leader takes up less than half of your time together as a group. Politely guide discussion if anyone dominates.

NOBODY IS RUSHED THROUGH QUESTIONS. Don't feel that a moment of silence is a bad thing. People often need time to think about their response or to gain courage to share what God is stirring in their hearts.

INPUT IS AFFIRMED AND FOLLOWED UP. Make sure you point out something true or helpful in a response. Don't just move on. Build community with follow-up questions, asking how other people have experienced similar things or how a truth has shaped their understanding of God and the Scripture you're exploring. People are less likely to speak up if they fear that you don't actually want to hear their answers or that you're only looking for a certain response.

GOD AND HIS WORD ARE CENTRAL. Opinions and experiences can be helpful, but God has given us the truth. Trust God's Word to be the authority and God's Spirit to work in people's lives. You can't change anyone, but God can. Continually point students to the Word and to active steps of faith.

KEEP CONNECTING

Think of ways to connect with students during the week. When people move beyond being friendly to truly being friends who form a community, they come to each session eager to engage instead of merely attending.

When possible, build deeper relationships by planning opportunities for students to gather outside your regularly scheduled group time for activities, meals, hangouts, or projects around your home, church, or community.

SESSION 1 / FAITHFUL

KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 1:1-7; 12:3

KEY IDEA: We can be faithful in Babylon.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- While Babylon was a city in modern-day Iraq, the Bible also talks about Babylon as a spiritual reality that we all live in (see Rev. 18:2,10,21). When have you felt like the world you live in is a new Babylon?
- When Daniel and his friends were taken to Babylon, their names were changed to reflect Babylonian culture and heritage. How does the world we live in seek to conform you to its ways?
- How do we determine which part of our culture to accept and which parts to reject?⁶
- What challenges do you face being a faithful witness in the places God has called you?

KEY CHALLENGE:

Ask God to help you identify places where you might have the opportunity to shine in your present-day Babylon. What relationships can you grow here? What challenges can you expect? How can God overwhelm and overcome those challenges? What's something God-sized that you might hope and expect God to do through your ordinary faithfulness?

WATCH GUIDE ANSWERS: 1) faithful; 2) shine, fires; 3) power; 4) God, gospel; 5) situation; 6) righteous

SESSION 2 / DIFFERENT

KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 1:8-21

KEY IDEA: We have to be different to make a difference.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- Verse 8 tells us that Daniel “determined” not to eat the king’s food. Why does being different also require being intentional?
- What are examples of the “king’s food” in our culture? Where in our culture should our faith lead us to stand apart from others?
- When Daniel stood apart, he also maintained a relationship with the king’s officials that was rooted in kindness and compassion. What can we learn from his example?
- How does our world view the big three—money, sex, and power? How should our faith lead us to see the big three differently than Babylon does?
- What has God been teaching you through the Scriptures recently? How is He equipping you to prize His Word over what our culture values?

KEY CHALLENGE:

How do we know the difference between being different and being weird? In the Bible, we are called to be distinct or set apart. What does that look like in the places where you have influence?

WATCH GUIDE ANSWERS: 1) difference, different; 2) those; 3) values; 4) Bible; 5) conform, cave; 6) Bible; 7) foods, shown; 8) difference, different; 9) Jesus

SESSION 3 / TRANSFORMATION

KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 2

KEY IDEA: There is a God in heaven, and His kingdom will continue to shine while all earthly kingdoms fade.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- Of the two approaches to culture—assimilation (joining in) and separation (checking out)—which do you tend toward? What are the dangers of both?
- Daniel followed God in the middle of a hostile culture. What can we learn from Daniel about the path between both extremes?
- In verse 10, the king’s advisors realized they had no ability to interpret his dream. When has a situation presented an opportunity for you to share about our limitless God?
- What does it look like to share God’s wisdom with “tact” (thoughtfulness or sensitivity) and “discretion” (carefulness or delicacy) (v. 14)?
- Read Daniel 2:28 again and ask, “Why is the simple truth ‘but there is a God in heaven,’ so important and transformative?”
- What was the central message behind Nebuchadnezzar’s dream? What did that mean to him in sixth century BC? What does it mean for us today?

KEY CHALLENGE:

Two things:

1. Where do you need to apply the truth “but there is a God in heaven” to your life?
2. What position or influence—however big or small—has God given you? How can you use the Spirit’s work inside of you to bring renewal and transformation in these places?

WATCH GUIDE ANSWERS: 1) Assimilation, Separation, Transformation; 2) God; 3) message; 4) resurrection, transformed, prayer; 5) made, valuable, mountain; 6) Receive, Embrace, Build

SESSION 4 / COURAGE

KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 3

KEY IDEA: Courage believes not only that God is bigger than the opposition but also better than all alternatives.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- When have you needed to be courageous?
- Discuss the relationship between belief and courage. Why are these two ideas always linked?
- What are the gold statues that Babylon, our world, expects us to bow to today?
- Review the definition of courage: Christian courage believes God can, expects that He will, but trusts Him if He doesn't. How was each part of this definition illustrated in this passage of Scripture? Of the three parts of this definition, which is the most difficult for you to believe and trust?
- How has God worked in the past to show you He is trustworthy? How do we focus our hearts to draw courage from God that results in trust and courageous obedience?

KEY CHALLENGE:

As you've worked through this chapter, where do you feel like God is calling you to trust in Him? How can we support you in that?

WATCH GUIDE ANSWERS: 1) Courage; 2) Confession, Conviction; 3) only; 4) faith, refusal; 5) option; 6) believe, expect, trust; 7) bigger; 8) better; 9) in, from

SESSION 5 / KNOCKOUT

KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 4

KEY IDEA: Pride in ourselves will keep us from faithfulness to God.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- Discuss the two roots of pride—the failure to believe everything comes from God and the foolish assumption the good life will last forever. Where did these roots show up in Nebuchadnezzar’s life? Which of the two roots do you struggle with most?
- How do these roots of pride most often show up in your life? Why are we particularly susceptible to these sins?
- Define and discuss the six fruits of pride—competitiveness, ingratitude, entitlement, overconfidence, self-will, and stinginess/exploitation. Which of the fruits are you most prone to? How can we respond to these fruits in a way that honors God and leads to humility?
- It has been said that pride is particularly dangerous because those who struggle with it are often unaware. What role do God’s Word and the community of faith play in keeping you from pride (and other sins)?
- Do we feel permission to call each other out on pride? Why or why not? How might this practice build faith?

KEY CHALLENGE:

Spend some time this week doing a self-diagnostic on your own pride. Where is there pride in your heart? How can you replace it with something more productive for your own soul and for the kingdom of God?

WATCH GUIDE ANSWERS: 1) fatal; 2) roots, failure, forever; 3) Fruit, Competitiveness, Ingratitude, Entitlement, Self-will, Stinginess; 4) Cure; 5) humble

SESSION 6 / VERDICT

KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 5

KEY IDEA: God has given us a Word from above that gives us a right perspective on the present and future.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- Belshazzar and his court partied in the face of death. Why do we have a tendency to distract ourselves with fun when we're asked to face difficult circumstances?
- What types of distractions seem to have a particular attraction to young men today? What would you identify as your primary distractions?
- How do our distractions keep us from thinking about what is truly important? How might the devil be using these as a strategy to keep us from pursuing God?
- What are some ways we can point each other to Jesus when we notice one of us is chasing a distraction instead of dealing with the real problem?
- Review the writing on the wall in verses 25-28. What was the warning for Belshazzar? What is the warning for us?
- How did Jesus provide the best answer to the warning in these verses?

KEY CHALLENGE:

Take an account of your own distractions—whether sports, gaming, school, friends, girls, or any number of things. What are they keeping you from? How are you a less effective servant of the Lord because of them? How should the urgency of eternity shape the way we view our distractions?

WATCH GUIDE ANSWERS: 1) death; 2) failure; 3) handwriting; 4) generation; 5) God, death; 6) Displaces, Steal

SESSION 7 / HABITS

KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 6

KEY IDEA: Courage is a habit of the heart.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- Daniel had formed a habit of prayer that could sustain him through every circumstance. How can you develop healthy habits in your daily spiritual life?
- Daniel turned to prayer, but we often turn to other strategies when faced with trouble. What are some things we try instead of prayer? Why are they so appealing?
- Repeatedly, we've seen Daniel's consistent faithfulness give him personal favor with kings and officials in Babylon. In what ways does genuine faith make our lives attractive and help us shine in our Babylon?
- Who are you building relationship and a connection with outside the faith? How can we make genuine friendship with others a spiritual habit without turning those friendships into a project?
- The point is not to be like Daniel but to worship Jesus. How does this chapter in Daniel point us to Jesus? How does linking ourselves to Jesus provide us with courage?

KEY CHALLENGE:

It has been said that what we repeat in times of ease, we remember in times of hardship. What habits are you developing now that will help you when life becomes difficult?

WATCH GUIDE ANSWERS: 1) lifetime, habit; 2) Courage; 3) instinct; 4) Panic, Pride, Prayer; 5) trusted; 6) trust; 7) live, shine; 8) consistency; 9) Jesus

SESSION 8 / PRAYER

KEY SCRIPTURE: Daniel 9

KEY IDEA: Prayer is our first, final, and finest resource.

KEY QUESTIONS:

- One of the central ideas of this session is that prayer has the ability to move heaven and earth. When have you seen prayer be this effective?
- Consider your own life, what usually leads to times when you do not pray?
- Daniel prayed because he understood he was “treasured by God” (v. 23). How does this same truth apply to us? How should it transform our prayer lives?
- What does the book of Daniel teach us about persistence in prayer? Share with the group at least one thing you’ve been praying for over a long period of time. Consider stopping right now to lift up those requests to God.
- Do you set aside regular time with nothing else to do but pray? Do you pray regularly with others or with your family? If so, what have you gained from that practice? How has God changed you through it?
- What is one key takeaway you have from this study that you’ve taken to heart or plan to implement in the days ahead?

KEY CHALLENGE:

What are you expecting God to do that can only be accomplished through prayer?
How can we join one another in that?

WATCH GUIDE ANSWERS: 1) promises; 2) Effective; 3) habit; 4) time; 5) give up; 6) mercy, goodness; 7) loved, assist, lean

END NOTES

1. Adapted from: Michael Rydelnik, "Daniel," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1321-1323.
2. Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 23, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 90.
3. "Christian Women's Soccer Player Sidelined for Refusing to Wear LGBTQ Pride Jersey," *Decision Magazine* [online], August 1, 2022, <https://decisionmagazine.com/christian-womens-soccer-player-sidelined-for-refusing-to-wear-lgbtq-pride-jersey/>.
4. John Calvin and Thomas Myers, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Daniel*, vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 295.
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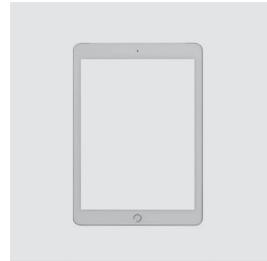
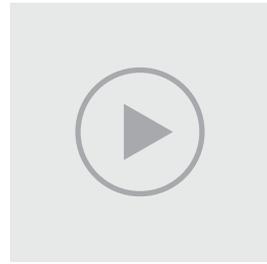


Daniel and his friends lived in a world hostile to their faith—just like the one we live in today. With every step, they were pushed to compromise and turn their backs on God. But they knew that the way to make a difference is found in the commitment to be different. Just like them, God is calling us to be faithful, even if it means facing lions' dens and fiery furnaces. What was true then is still true today—we do not face these challenges alone. Through this eight-session study, teen guys will learn that God is with them.

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