

Series Based Bible Study



Vineyard Columbus

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Strangers in a Strange Land

A Vineyard Columbus Small Group Study Series

Series Description

As society rapidly secularizes, many Christians experience increasing tension with the values of our workplaces, schools, government policies and media messages. How does a person of faith successfully navigate our changing landscape? What issues should we not compromise on and when should we go along? Fortunately, we're not the first people to experience a culture crash. In this series from the book of Daniel, we'll consider how a faithful follower of God lives successfully in the hostile environment of Babylon.



This guide offers a 8 week study for your small group to work through. At Vineyard Columbus, we encourage your group to use this study as one component of your time together. We truly believe that disciples of Jesus will mature best when they engage in corporate worship, prayer ministry, practicing the prophetic, studying the Bible, serving our neighbors, community, church, and fellowshiping together. This study only covers one of those aspects, the Bible. Suggestions and ideas will be posited to aid the leader regarding the other areas. We pray this will be helpful to your group as you explore “Strangers in a Strange Land.”

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How to use this Study Series

Leaders are encouraged to briefly look over all studies before you teach or hand them out to alternative teachers within the group. *There is a summary of Ministry Ideas from the entire series in the back. The ministry ideas are meant to build upon each other whenever possible and some ideas will take longer planning than others. Reading the full arch of Ministry Ideas before you start the series as a small group may provide a much richer and fuller experience.*

Having all studies provided at the start of a sermon series will give leaders the opportunity to give studies to potential teachers or co-leaders weeks ahead of time. Our prayer is that many more disciples of Jesus will feel comfortable sharing and leading others in discussion during small group. If you have any questions, please email us at: smallgroups@vineyardcolumbus.org

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Week 1



Daniel 1

Daniel 1: 1-21

Tips: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Background and Context:

The book of Daniel, titled after its author, is the historic narrative of a group of young Judean men who were removed from their homes and forced to live and become students in Babylon, by the conquering Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar. It takes place between B.C. 605-530. The book describes several instances where Daniel and his friends experience a land and a life that is unfamiliar, hostile, and spiritually challenging. The major theme of Daniel is that God is the God of everything. Even when we feel like we are strangers in a strange land, when we feel like we don't belong to the culture around us, or we are led to behave

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.
 2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia[a] and put in the treasure house of his god.
 3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—
 4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.[b]
 5 The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

differently than it seems everyone else is, God is with us and for us and He continues to be in charge.

Starter Questions:

Have you ever had a nickname? How did you get it? Did you like it?

If you had to give up eating one food for 2 months, what would be the hardest thing for you to give up?

Have you ever experienced culture shock? Where were you and what was that experience like?

Opening Prayer

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

- Why were Daniel and his friends taken from their home, and where were they taken?
 -King Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans conquered Judah and ordered Ashpenaz to bring these young men back to Babylon with them to assimilate them to Chaldean culture – the people ruling over Babylonia.
- Upon arriving in Babylonia, the chief official “gave” these young men new names. What is the purpose of giving them Chaldean names?

6 Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego. 8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your[c] food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you." 11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

-This is an example of the Chaldean's forcing assimilation on their learned men. It indicates control, stripping away who they were and replacing it with something new and imposed.

- Have you ever had someone label you as something you felt or knew was untrue? Maybe you had a nickname that you didn't like, or maybe someone had you pegged a certain way and you knew that you didn't fit you? How did that make you feel? How did you respond?

-Give space here for people to share their own experiences. Some examples of this might look like name calling in childhood, or someone being identified as "cold" or "dumb" or "lazy" at times when that simply wasn't the case.

- Why did Daniel refuse to eat the "royal food and wine from the king's table"?

-He did not want to defile himself by eating the food from king's table because that would be disobedient to God.

- What did God do for Daniel to support his effort to refuse the food?

-God "caused the official to show favor and compassion on Daniel"

- Can you think of any moments in your life where you felt like God wanted you to do something different than what you had been doing, or what others around you were doing? Have you ever experienced Him helping you do things differently than others?

15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. 17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. 18 At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. 20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. 21 And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

-Give space for individuals to answer with some of their experiences here. This could look like not conforming to peer pressure, or being kind to someone who others were unkind to, or patient when others were being impatient. We believe that God wants for our good, and that He leads us away from temptation and delivers us from evil. Help your group identify some times when God has helped in times of temptation or pressure.

- When the chief official saw how Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah responded to their alternate diet, what was his reaction?
 - He was pleasantly surprised and ordered that the other men be given the same diet.
- Can you think of times in your life where your obedient or good behavior rubbed off on others? Can you name a time when someone else's obedient or good behavior rubbed off on you?
 - Give space for individual experiences here.
- Why do you think that Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah excelled in "every matter of wisdom and understanding"?
 - It seems likely that because the 4 of them exceeded all the magicians and enchanters in the entire kingdom that God was clearly showing them favor and granting them exceptional wisdom and understanding.
- Have you experienced God's favor recently? Have there been moments in your life where you see God making you a better version of yourself?

Notes:

-Individuals may express that they are wiser, kinder, more patient, or more faithful because of God)

Ministry Time Application:

Invite the Holy Spirit to show you places in your life where others might have labeled you as something you are not. Ask Him to reveal the truth to you of how He sees you as His creation. Ask Him to heal any hurts that might have been caused by those labels. Invite God to help lead you to forgive those people who may have labeled you these things.

Week 2



Daniel

Daniel 2:1-19, 24-27, 44-49

Tips:

There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Background and Context:

The apostle, Paul wrote this letter to the Roman church while he was in Corinth around A.D. 57. The church in Rome is living in the tension between Gentile and Jewish Christians, who are at odds regarding the adherence of the traditional Jewish laws by the newly converted Gentiles. In chapter 4 of Romans, Paul prohibits boasting by those following the Mosaic Law, for all are now under the inclusive law of “faith”. He points to Abraham, who when God called him was faithful, and was at the time uncircumcised, and thus the father of both Jew and Gentile. This equality under the law is fundamental to reconciliation within the Church.

1 In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. 2 So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers[a] to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, 3 he said to them, "I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.[b]" 4 Then the astrologers answered the king,[c] "May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it." 5 The king replied to the astrologers, "This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. 6 But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me." 7 Once more they replied, "Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it."

Starter Questions:

What's the hardest job/task you've even been asked to accomplish? How did it go?

What do you do to relieve stress? Exercise, deep breaths, watch TV... What is your go-to stress reliever?

Opening Prayer

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions-

- What caused King Nebuchadnezzar to pose this challenge to his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers?
 - He was having troubling dreams that were keeping him from sleeping. He was afraid! And he wanted to understand the dreams and what they meant.
- What are some characteristics about King Nebuchadnezzar we can gather from this text? What emotions do you see from him?
 - Some examples might include: Fearful/alarmed because of his dreams. Such fear might point to insecurity in his role as king. He was a skeptic of the ability of his own sorcerers and astrologers. He was severe in his demands of them, sentencing them to death for their inability to perform to his expectations.

8 Then the king answered, "I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: 9 If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me."

10 The astrologers answered the king, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. 11 What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans." 12 This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. 13 So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death. 14 When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact.

- When Daniel hears about Nebuchadnezzar's decree, what actions does he take?

-Daniel responded to the commander with "wisdom and tact" – that is he kept his cool and responded thoughtfully. Daniel, in faith that God would help him, asked for time with the king. Daniel asked his friends to pray for him, that God would reveal the king's dreams to Daniel. Daniel received revelation from God. Daniel praised God for the revelation.

- What does it say about Daniel's relationship and belief in God that he scheduled a meeting with Nebuchadnezzar before God revealed the vision to him?

-This order of events strongly suggests that Daniel had enough faith in God's protection and favor that he set up a meeting that would literally decide his life or death believing that God would give him the words to say before God had given him the words to say.)

- What does it say about Daniel's relationship with his friends that he asked them to pray for him?

-Daniel believed that the petition of his friends would matter to God. He trusted and relied on his friends to speak to God for him. He recognized that all of this was out of his hands, and he gave that away to God and to his friends.

- How do you feel about the ways that Daniel responded to Nebuchadnezzar's decree? Which parts

15 He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. 16 At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him. 17 Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 18 He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. 19 During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven... 24 Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him." 25 Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means." 26 The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"

of Daniel's response seem easy or intuitive to you?
Which parts seem hard or scary to you?

-Your group may struggle responding with wisdom and tact, having faith that God will show up, asking friends for prayer, listening to God, or praising God for what He has done. This can be a hard or vulnerable question, and feel free to ask this more rhetorically and let ministry time be open to identifying and addressing any of these matters.

- Which parts seem hard or scary to you?

-Your group may struggle responding with wisdom and tact, having faith that God will show up, asking friends for prayer, listening to God, or praising God for what He has done. This can be a hard or vulnerable question, and feel free to ask this more rhetorically and let ministry time be open to identifying and addressing any of these matters.

- How did King Nebuchadnezzar respond to Daniel recounting and interpreting his dream?

-He was in awe of Daniel and praised God, gave Daniel great gifts and appointed him ruler of Babylon and over all of its wise men.

- In what ways does God use our faith and our obedience to Him to inspire and amaze others, or bring those around us closer to Himself?

-Consistent and atypical behavior is often noticed by those around us, and particularly when God is doing big things in our lives, that influence the

27 Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about... 44b "The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." 46 Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. 47 The king said to Daniel, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery." 48 Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. 49 Moreover, at Daniel's request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

way the see and respond to God. Share ways that might look, such as being particularly honest or kind to others)

- What did Daniel request to Nebuchadnezzar?
 - That his friends be made administrators over the province of Babylon.
- When Daniel needed help, he asked his friends to pray with him. When he was successful, he included them in his success. What can we learn from Daniel about how he treats his friends? How can we help our friends in our successes?
 - By being thankful and generous to them. By speaking well of them and considering them in our own victories. And rejoicing with them in their victories.

Ministry Time Application:

When we spoke about Daniel's response to his life being in danger, what in that list of responses seemed hardest or scariest to you? Ask the Holy Spirit to identify those responses, understand some of the causes of them, and invite His help in your times of worry or struggle.

Week 3



Daniel 3

Daniel 3: 1-30

Tip: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through, so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Background and Context:

This week's scripture tells the story of what happens when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are forced to make a choice between obeying their king and obeying God. The three friends have been appointed administrators over the province of Babylon at the end of the previous chapter, but much like the nature of our modern jobs, a position of higher responsibility and visibility brings with it opportunities for convictions to be tested. In short, all provincial officials are summoned by Nebuchadnezzar to the dedication of an image that he has set up. Daniel was at the royal court, so it's likely he's absent from this story because the dedication of this image only involved the people of one particular

1 King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide,[a] and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. 2 He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. 3 So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it. 4 Then the herald loudly proclaimed, "Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: 5 As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. 6 Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace." 7 Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

province. The specific nature of the image and the ceremony are unclear, though the image was ten stories tall and must have been made of hundreds of pounds of gold. Whether the image was of the king or another god, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were being asked to worship something other than the Lord.

Starter Questions:

Have you ever had to make a choice between following God and following something or someone else?

-Typical answers may include choices made in a job environment, or maybe choices made as a result of peer pressure.

It's easy to say following God is always the right thing to do, but are there negative consequences to choosing his path?

-Choices can affect jobs, marriages, and other relationships; in this chapter of scripture, choosing to follow God comes with a very real risk of death.

Opening Prayer

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

- What does the king command his people to do at the ceremony he held?

8 At this time some astrologers[b] came forward and denounced the Jews. 9 They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May the king live forever! 10 Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, 11 and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. 12 But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up." 13 Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, 14 and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? 15 Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good...

-The people are commanded to fall down and worship the image of gold the king set up as soon as they hear music.

- What are the consequences for not obeying the king's commands?
 - Whoever did not fall down and worship was to immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.
- What is the king told about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego's response to his commands?
 - He is told that the men "neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up."
- What three things do the men tell the king when he summons them and commands them to worship his image?
 - They say they do not need to defend themselves before the king in this matter.
 - They acknowledge that God is able to save them from the furnace, if they are to be thrown in.
 - They assert that even if God doesn't save them, they aren't going to serve the king's gods or worship his image of gold.
- What does Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's response reveal about their beliefs?
 - They are so secure in their belief that their actions are right that they don't feel the need to explain or defend themselves to the most powerful man in Babylon.

But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us[c] from Your Majesty's hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual 20 and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.

21 So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace.

-They are confident enough in the power of God to tell the king it is possible for their Lord to save them from a seemingly hopeless situation.

-They are determined to serve God regardless of whether he decided to save their lives.

- How does the king react to what the three men tell him?

-He becomes furious. He has the men tied up and thrown into a furnace so hot that it kills the soldiers who throw the men in.

- What does the king see after throwing the men in the furnace?

-He sees four men, unbound and unharmed, walking around in the fire. He says the fourth man looks like "a son of the gods."

- How does the king respond to what he sees, and what does this say about his beliefs?

-The king orders the men out of the furnace, and calls them "servants of the Most High God." The king has been convinced of the power of the Lord.

- What condition are the men in when they came back out of the furnace?

-They are completely unharmed, to the extent that the smell of fire isn't even on them.

- Why do you think Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are able to oppose the king, rather than give in to the threat of losing their lives?

22 The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, 23 and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

24 Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." 25 He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

26 Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, 27 and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

-They believe in God's sovereignty, and his ability to deliver them from evil.

- Do you think it made a difference for the men to be standing up to the king alongside their friends.

-Following the path God has for you is always easier with support with others, which is why Christian community is vitally important.

- What effect does Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's actions have on those around them?

-Their conviction, and God's subsequent rescue, convinces the king of the power and supremacy of the Lord.

- Have you ever faced decisions like the one described in this chapter, even if the stakes weren't quite so high? What effect did your actions have on yourself and others?

Ministry Time Application

Explain that we believe God speaks to us through his Spirit, and that we'll be waiting on Him in silence for two minutes for any words or images he wants to give us. Tell the group to be thinking during that time of choices in their lives: past choices they've made that have brought them closer or further away from Jesus, present choices they may be facing, and how those choices affect how others see God through us. Have someone set a timer for two minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: "Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us."

28 Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.

29 Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way." 30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Wait for two minutes.

Encourage the group to share anything they feel they might have sensed from the Lord, making sure to mention that listening for Him is something we do better with practice, and group is a safe place to bring up things you sensed even if you think they're odd or silly, and not everything is going to end up being from the Lord and resonating with someone else.

After people who wanted to have shared, have the group break up in to groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls. If words or images were shared, encourage anyone who felt that message was for them to pray with the person who shared it.

Things to pray for:

Awareness of any choices God is calling you to make, and a view of the path he wants you to walk.

Strength to face any tough choices in your life with the belief that God is greater than any earthly consequence.

Week 4



Daniel

Daniel 4: 1-37

Tip: The starter questions are meant to get the group thinking and spark discussion, so don't rush through them or attempt to get a solid answer for each one. Don't be afraid to wait for a while to see who speaks, and remember, there are no wrong opinions.

Background and Context:

This week's scripture is taken from the fourth chapter of Daniel, which is actually a royal proclamation given by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Proclamations like this one were typically written on a stone or slab and put in a prominent place, or else copies were made to be distributed. It's unusual for a king to be as vulnerable as Nebuchadnezzar is here, especially considering he tells a story of his weakness. He was a powerful and affluent king, as was evidenced by his possessions. His palace was luxurious, and the palace gardens were eventually named as one of the seven wonders of the world. Yet Nebuchadnezzar's proclamation shows us that no

King Nebuchadnezzar,
 To the nations and peoples of
 every language, who live in all
 the earth: May you prosper
 greatly! 2 It is my pleasure to
 tell you about the miraculous
 signs and wonders that the
 Most High God has performed
 for me. 3 How great are his
 signs, how mighty his wonders!
 His kingdom is an eternal
 kingdom; his dominion endures
 from generation to generation.
 4 I, Nebuchad-
 nezzar, was at home in my
 palace, contented and
 prosperous. 5 I had a dream
 that made me afraid. As I was
 lying in bed, the images and
 visions that passed through my
 mind terrified me. 6 So I
 commanded that all the wise
 men of Babylon be brought
 before me to interpret the
 dream for me. 7 When the
 magicians, enchanters,
 astrologers and diviners
 came, I told them the dream,
 but they could not interpret it
 for me. 8 Finally, Daniel came
 into my presence and I told
 him the dream. (He is called
 Belteshazzar, after the name of
 my god, and the spirit of the
 holy gods is in him.) I said, 9
 "Belteshazzar, chief of the
 magicians, I know that the
 spirit of the holy gods is in
 you, and no mystery is too
 difficult for you. Here is my
 dream; interpret it for me.

amount of earthly wealth or influence can make us
 immune to God's education and discipline.

Starter Questions:

Have there been times in your life when your pride has
 gotten you in trouble?

Have you ever disregarded someone's warning or advice
 and regretted it later? Why?

Opening Prayer

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through
 the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read
 twice!

Discussion Questions:

- Why is King Nebuchadnezzar making a proclamation?
 - Verse 2: "It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me."
- What does the king say about the nature of God?
 - Verse 3: "How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation."
- Why does the king call Daniel to interpret his dream?
 - None of the other wise men of Babylon can interpret the dream, and the king knows from

10 These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous. 11 The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. 12 Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed. 13 "In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger,[c] coming down from heaven. 14 He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. 15 But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field. "'Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. 16 Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times[d] pass by for him.

past experience that Daniel can. Similarly, when God empowers us to be successful in our endeavors, we may be called upon to further demonstrate his power in us.

- What does the messenger from heaven command to be done to the tree in the king's dream?

-The tree is to be cut down and its branches trimmed, and the stump and its roots are to remain in the ground.

- What is the reason given in the king's dream for the tree to be treated as commanded?

-Verse 17 says, "so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men."

- How does Daniel react after hearing about the king's dream?

-Verse 19 says he is greatly perplexed and his thoughts terrify him.

- What does Daniel's reaction say about his attitude toward the king?

-Even though Daniel is living as a captive in a city ruled by a king who doesn't love God, he cares enough about the king to be terrified by what might happen to him.

- What does Daniel's reaction say about how we should serve God?

17 "The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.'18 "This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you." Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, "Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you." Belteshazzar answered, "My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! 20 The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, 21 with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds-

22 Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth

-Daniel shows us that we can serve God and still care deeply about nonbelievers.

- What is Daniel's interpretation of the king's dream? In other words, what is going to happen to the king?

-The king will be driven away from people, live with animals, eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven until he acknowledges the sovereignty of the Lord, at which point his kingdom will be restored to him.

- What advice does Daniel give to the king?

-Verse 27: "Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

- Does the king follow Daniel's advice? How do the king's actions affect the dream being fulfilled?

-The king doesn't follow Daniel's advice. He turns into a beast when he's dwelling on his own glory and majesty, and his kingdom is restored to him when he acknowledges God's true place above all else.

- You've probably not been warned of things to come by mysterious dreams, but does God still give warnings today? How?

-Most commonly, God may speak to us through sermons, scripture, and the advice of Christian community, all of which can keep us on the right path.

23 "Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.'²⁴ "This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: 25 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.

26 The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.

27 Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue." 28 All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar.

- We're fortunate that God doesn't make a habit of doing to us what he did to Nebuchadnezzar, but are there modern-day consequences to not heeding his guidance?

-Your relationships and health can definitely suffer if you don't treat yourself and others in the way that God wants you to. Since we are designed to thrive when we follow him and give him full authority in our lives, any step away from that can be damaging.

Ministry Time Application

Explain that we believe God speaks to us through his Spirit, and that we'll be waiting on Him in silence for two minutes for any words or images he wants to give us. Tell the group to be thinking during that time of any guidance the Lord may have given or currently be giving them, and of how their pride may have hindered or currently be hindering them from following that guidance. Have someone set a timer for two minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: "Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us."

Wait for two minutes.

Encourage the group to share anything they feel they might have sensed from the Lord, making sure to mention that listening for Him is something we do better with practice, and group is a safe place to bring up

29 Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, 30 he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" 31 Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. 32 You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes." 33 Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. 34 At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

things you sensed even if you think they're odd or silly, and not everything is going to end up being from the Lord and resonating with someone else.

After people who wanted to have shared, have the group break up in to groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls. If words or images were shared, encourage anyone who felt that message was for them to pray with the person who shared it.

Things to pray for:

A better sense of anything that God may be calling you to do.

The wisdom to recognize sinful pride in your life, and the strength to overcome it.

35 All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" 36 At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. 37 Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Week 5



Daniel 5

Daniel 5: 1-30

Tip: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Background and Context:

When we pick up the book of Daniel in chapter five, Belshazzar is acting as king of Babylonia. The previous chapter in Daniel ended with Nebuchadnezzar as king. It is estimated that thirty years have passed from the end of chapter four to the beginning of chapter five. In that time, Nebuchadnezzar dies and Babylonia is ruled by a handful of different people before getting to Belshazzar. In the midst of those leadership changes, many battles and wars have been taking place, most often between Babylonia and Persia. We pick up with King Belshazzar throwing a great banquet for his noblemen. In the days just prior to this banquet, the Persians have been overtaking cities on their way to

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. 2 While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father[a] had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. 3 So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. 4 As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone. 5 Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. 6 His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking. 7 The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers[b] and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." 8 Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant.

Babylon. Time will reveal that this banquet represents the last gathering held in Babylon before the city is overtaken by the Medes and the Persians.

Starter Questions:

Have you ever gone to a fancy dinner and felt out of place, or like you didn't know what to do with all of the silverware?

Did you try to make due on your own, or did you ask for someone's help?

In any given situation, what methods do you use to decide when it's appropriate to go with the crowd and when it's better to stand firm in what you know?

Opening Prayer

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

- During King Belshazzar's banquet, he asks for specific cups to be brought to him to be used by his guests. Where does the text say these cups came from?

-The Temple/House of God in Jerusalem

- Though we don't see it directly spelled out here, does anyone recognize any issues or reasons why King

9 So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

10 The queen,[c] hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "May the king live forever!" she said.

"Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale! 11 There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King

Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. 12 He did this because Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

13 So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? 14 I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom.

Belshazzar and his guests shouldn't be using these cups taken from the Temple of God?

-These are stolen cups taken from the Temple.

They were meant to be used only by priests in the act of worshipping God through the appropriate ceremonial rituals. Utilizing the cups in the way Belshazzar and his guests do is dishonoring and disobedient to God.

- What other activity is Belshazzar and his guests conducting as they misuse the cups from the Temple?

- "...Praising their idols of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone."

- Sometime in the middle of the banquet, Belshazzar and his guests are stopped in their tracks and become frightened by an odd occurrence. What exactly do they see?

-A disembodied human hand writing on the plaster wall in the king's palace.

- What is King Belshazzar's reaction upon seeing the hand writing a message on the wall?

-He became pale, frightened, weak, etc. He called for the help of his enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers to be brought before him.

- For some reason, Belshazzar is unable to read the message that was written. He calls for his wise men to come help him, offering specific gifts to the person who is able to decipher the message. What gifts did Belshazzar offer as a reward?

15 The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. 16 Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom." 17 Then Daniel answered the king, "You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means. 18 "Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. 19 Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. 20 But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory.

-Whoever can interpret the message would be dressed in purple robes of royal honor, given a gold chain to wear around their neck, and would be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

- Do these gifts give insight into Belshazzar's state of being, or the seriousness with which he is considering this message?

-These gifts are expensive – items that would have typically been reserved for royalty. They demonstrate his desperation to find out what the message says.

- Despite their best efforts and Belshazzar's desperation, his wise men are unable to interpret the message. This throws the whole party into a panic. The Queen (or Queen mother in some translations) hears of this panic, and has an idea. Who does she suggest they call?

-Daniel

- Looking to the text, what is Daniel's reputation? What is he known for?

-He has holy insight/divine knowledge/ understanding/wisdom. He was made chief over all the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and fortune-tellers of Babylon during King Nebuchadnezzar's reign. He can interpret dreams, explain riddles, solves difficult problems.

- Daniel is brought before Belshazzar and is able to interpret the message, but begins by giving a brief account of Nebuchadnezzar's life. How did Nebuchadnezzar relate to God during his lifetime?

21 He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.

22 "But you, Belshazzar, his son,[d] have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. 23 Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. 24 Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription,

25 "This is the inscription that was written:

mene, mene, tekel, parsin

26 "Here is what these words mean: Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. 27 Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

-God made Nebuchadnezzar powerful, but he became arrogant and destructive. Because of his arrogance, he was stripped of his authority and driven from society. God demonstrated to him that it is only the Most High God who rules over the kingdoms of the world and appoints anyone he desires to rule over them.

- Is this information about Nebuchadnezzar's life special insight that only Daniel had?

-No, verse 22 states, "You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself."

- Daniel wasn't in the room at the beginning of the banquet, yet from verse 23 we see that he is able to recount that Belshazzar and his guests were drinking from the cups stolen from God's Temple. This gives us a preview of the type of "divine insight" that Daniel is known for, but what does this section of verses (vs. 22-23) demonstrate to us about Daniel's character?

-Daniel is a man who is willing to deliver hard truths out of obedience to God.

-Daniel doesn't soften his message out of fear of offending Belshazzar – showing a sense of boldness and commitment to coming under God's authority over anyone else's authority

-In a culture rampant with idol worship, Daniel upholds that only the one true God "gives breath and controls destiny." All other gods are useless, neither hearing or seeing or knowing anything at all.

28 Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

29 Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians,[h] was slain, 31 and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

- Earlier in the text, it was mentioned that the banquet guests were praising their “idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.” Do idols take on a different form today? What types of idols do we encounter in today’s culture?

-You may want to offer a working definition of “idols” to your group for clarity. Something along the lines of – An item or relationship or activity that distracts from God or has taken the place of God in one’s life.

-As for types of idols we encounter today, a variety of answers are appropriate here. Some examples may be television, social media, food, money, relationships, status, etc.

- Would anyone be willing to share examples of idols that they recognize in their own life?

-Give space for people to respond, but be prepared to offer an example of your own to encourage others to feel comfortable sharing.

- Despite the prevalence of idol worship around him, Daniel remained faithful to God. What are some practical ways we can resist the temptation to let other things distract us and remain faithful to God? OR What are some ways we can remain faithful to our Christ-centered convictions when others around us may disagree?

-Consistent prayer and time studying the Bible will help with both recognizing weak areas and fortifying our resolve to remain faithful to God. Regularly checking our own perceptions against

the standard of scripture to ensure that we are taking on the mind of Christ, not assuming that our own ideas naturally line up with God's. Engaging in conversations with Christian community about hard topics or places of tension between the church and culture can be a source of clarity or encouragement. Accountability partnerships can also be helpful.

Ministry Time Application

Option 1: One-On-One Time

Pair up with a partner and share about areas of your life that came to mind when we discussed idols or distractions that can draw our attention away from the Lord. Pray about those items shared specifically, but also discuss ways to encourage one another or offer accountability.

Option 2: Engaging with Others Well

Living in a culture brimming with widely varying viewpoints, it can be challenging to engage with others well on topics where disagreement is present. Yet, as followers of Jesus we are called to both be firm in our convictions and gracious in our responses. Pair up with a partner and take some time to discuss what that looks like, how we should behave as representatives of Christ, and what are some ways to do that better in daily life. Spend time praying for one another, asking for wisdom on how to engage with others in a Christ-like way. You may find it helpful to spend time meditating on the instructions outlined in James 1:19 to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry."

Week 6



Daniel 6

Daniel 6: 1-23

Tip: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to use.

Background and Context:

Daniel gained favor with King Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian ruler reigning over Jerusalem, by being able to interpret the king's dream after praying that God give him the wisdom to do so. He served on the royal court and continued to interpret visions under Nebuchadnezzar's successor, who made Daniel the third-highest ruler in the kingdom just before Darius the Mede took rule. Chapter 6 picks up Daniel's story as King Darius is restructuring the leadership of the empire.

1. It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, 2 with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. 3 Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. 4 At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. 5 Finally these men said, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God." 6 So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: "May King Darius live forever! 7 The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den.

Note: "satraps" is a term used to describe rulers over provinces in Darius' empire, and are similar to today's governors.

Starter Questions:

Have you ever been singled out at work or school because of your faith? Can you share the story of what happened and how you responded?

Opening Prayer

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

- What position did the king plan to give Daniel?
 - King Darius planned to put Daniel in charge of the whole kingdom, ruling over the administrators who had control over the 120 satraps.
- What made Daniel qualified for this promotion?
 - He possessed "exceptional qualities" [v. 3] as a leader and government official.
- When the other leaders became jealous of Daniel's promotion, how did they respond?
 - They tried to find a flaw in his character that could get him removed from power.

8 Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” 9 So King Darius put the decree in writing. 10 Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. 11 Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. 12 So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?” The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.” 13 Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.”

- What did the other leaders discover about Daniel’s character?
 - They couldn’t find any flaw and determined that he was “trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent” [v. 4].
- When the other leader’s couldn’t find anything to condemn Daniel, they plotted to convince the king to create a law that would get Daniel in trouble. What did the law require, and what were the consequences?
 - The law stated that everyone in the kingdom must treat the king as a god for 30 days and worship him only, and that anyone who disobeyed would be thrown into a den of lions, which guaranteed an instant death.
- What did Daniel do when he learned about this new law?
 - He continued praying to the God of Israel, as he had always done [v. 10]. Do you think you would have reacted the same way in a similar situation?
- How did the king react when he learned that Daniel had technically broken the law and would be thrown into the lion’s den?
 - He was distressed and made every effort to find a way to save him [v. 14].
- Daniel was such an upstanding man and so devoted to God (as demonstrated by his practice of praying three times a day) that not only did his fellow leaders notice, but the king respected him for it. If you work or go to

14 When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

15 Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, "Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can be changed."

16 So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions' den. The king said to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!"

17 A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel's situation might not be changed.

18 Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

19 At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions' den.

school in a secular environment, do you think your peers and leaders can tell that you are a Christian?

- Reread verses 16-20. How does the king refer to Daniel and his relationship to his God? (King Darius calls Daniel a "servant of the living God" [v. 20] and describes him as one who serves God continually.)

Based on how the king speaks of Daniel, it is clear that Daniel's faith made an impact on those around him. What are some practical ways that we can be living testimonies to God in our workplace and schools, as Daniel was to the king and others in the government in which he served?

-Answers might include being honest, setting a Godly example, sharing one's faith, etc.

- What happens to Daniel at the end of the story?

-Daniel survives being left overnight in a sealed den full of lions and is drawn out without a scratch.

- How and why does Daniel survive?

-He is found innocent in God's eyes, and an angel was sent to close the mouths of the lions.

- Daniel lived out his faith both in the workplace and in private, despite the hardships that came up against him. What does this say about his character, and how can we learn from his example?

-Daniel's actions showed his integrity and devotion to God. His example teaches us remaining faithful through adversity can have a

20 When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice,

"Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?"

21 Daniel answered, "May the king live forever! 22 My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty."

23 The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

lasting impact on those around us and our own futures.

Ministry Time Application

Daniel was singled out and persecuted for being faithful to God. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:12 that "everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." It is practically a guarantee that if we follow God continually, as Daniel did, we will face some level of persecution in our own lives. But it is important to remember what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:11-12:

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

For ministry time this week, break into smaller groups and share any experiences where you may have experienced persecution for your faith. Discuss how you might become better at being a witness for Christ in your workplace or school. Conclude by praying together for both those being persecuted and those doing the prosecuting, as well as for strength, wisdom and increased faith to act as a witness to those around you.

Week 7



Daniel 7

Daniel 7: 1-28

Tip: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to discuss.

Background and Context:

Chronologically, chapter seven (Daniel's prophetic dream), takes place before chapter's 5 & 6. This portion of Daniel begins a thematic shift from narrative (stories about what Daniel and his friends did and participated in) to the prophetic. Daniel has multiple dreams and visions that explain the events that will soon take place and some that take place hundreds of years in the future. Although seeing and explaining future events is an element of prophecy, the fuller purpose and understanding of prophecy has more to do with how the people of God are to behave in light of the truth of God.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying in bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream.

2 Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. 3 Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.

4 "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a human being, and the mind of a human was given to it.

5 "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!'

6 "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule.

Prophecy itself is insight given from God in order to persuade and inform his people. God delivers prophecy in a variety of ways including dreams/visions, audible words, strong impressions from the Spirit, etc. The recording of prophecy in scripture can be done by simple declaration such as, "The word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination... Their visions are false!'" Ezekiel 13:1ff. Or similar in Jeremiah 46:25ff we see it declared "The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says: 'I am about to bring punishment on Amon god of Thebes, on Pharaoh, on Egypt and her gods and her kings, and on those who rely on Pharaoh. I will hand them over to those who seek their lives, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers.'"

Other times we see a prophecy recorded and written in a certain style or genre known as "apocalyptic genre".

This genre of ancient writing has recognizable patterns (i.e. animal or beast imagery, cosmic and astrological phenomena, weather imagery, etc.) that relate to concrete realities, people, and places. As one would read "narrative genre" distinct from "poetry" and poetry distinct from "wisdom literature", so too one should read "prophetic visions" in a distinct way. The purpose of our study will primarily focus on why God is bringing about these events, what that says about his character, and who we should be as followers of God

7 "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast—terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. 8 "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully. 9 "As I looked," thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. 10 A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. 11 "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire.

Starter Questions:

Is there anyone here who likes movie trailers, teasers on the back of novels, or leafing through the table of contents before buying a book? Why do you enjoy these things?

-a chance to see ahead, a chance to evaluate the gist of something before you purchase, a sneak peak so that one can prepare or avoid.

Why do think we feel more at ease or more comfortable when we know what is coming?

What about your life? Would you like to see who you will be in ten years based on the patterns you are currently engaged in? Why or why not?

If you could only guarantee one thing for your future, whether it be a character trait or situation, what would you want to guarantee?

Opening Prayer

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

Have a volunteer read Daniel 7: 1-8

- If you were to use only a few words to describe this first part of the dream/vision, what few words would you chose?

-scary, terrifying, bizarre, confusing, etc.

12 (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.)

13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man,[a] coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. 15 "I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. 16 I approached one of those standing there and asked him the meaning of all this. "So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: 17 'The four great beasts are four kings that will rise from the earth. 18 But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever.'

- As you read back over those verses what are some similarities and differences between the four beasts?

-ferocious, dangerous, some type of violence is associated with it, etc.

In the ancient world, especially with the Jewish people, the sea was often associated with hell, darkness, death, and, particularly, chaos. This was undoubtedly due to the helplessness that ancient peoples felt at sea during storms, the threat of drowning, the "forever darkness" that swallows up its victims, and so on. Many of the ancient religions focused on two primary god-regions of the thunderous heavens and chaotic seas. Given that these beasts came up out of the sea one can assume that chaos will result with each.

Have a different volunteer read Daniel 7:9-18

- Contrast the four kingdoms in verses 1-8 and the kingdom ruled by the "Ancient of Days" (a name for the true God in Jewish literature).

-The kingdoms in 1-7 rule from chaos, come from the sea, destruction is their path, they are all temporary, they are all stripped of their authority and power eventually. The kingdom of the Ancient of Days rules from heaven, dominion and possession of the kingdom is received by the saints, the kingdom is permanent, the kingdom is contrasted by a worshipful environment for all peoples.

In verse 1 we read that Daniel had this vision during the reign of Belshazzar who was ruling Babylon. The vision regarding the lion with plucked 'eagles wings in verse 4

19 "Then I wanted to know the meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws—the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. 20 I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell—the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. 21 As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. 23 "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. 24 The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings.

was undoubtedly about the fall of Belshazzar (remember this chapter chronologically happened before chapter 5) and the rise of Darius and the Medo-Persian Empire in verse 5. Most scholars well trained in apocalyptic writing view the off-balance Bear as the off-balance Medo-Persians. The Medo-Persians were "off-balance" in that the Persian forces were the overwhelming force militarily and culturally of the two parts. In fact, it would later be known simply as the Persian Empire.

- What feelings and emotions do you think were going through Daniel's heart and mind knowing what was going to happen to his king and the nation in which he lived?

-sadness, vindication, worry, etc.

- Why do you think God gave this vision of things to come to Daniel?

-he was a righteous man, he was obedient to God, he was humble, he was dedicated to God - Daniel 6:10)

- What hope might this vision give to God's people, the Israelites, living in Babylonian Exile? In what ways may the word have brought sorrow?

-The people might feel happiness knowing that their violent captors will be overturned. They may feel sorrow knowing that they would not receive their inheritance until three more kingdoms had risen and collapsed.

Most scholars believe that most of the contents of this prophetic vision, specifically the first three beasts, were fulfilled just as God revealed to Daniel. Babylon, soon

25 He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time.[b]26 ""But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. 27 Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.'28 "This is the end of the matter. I, Daniel, was deeply troubled by my thoughts, and my face turned pale, but I kept the matter to myself."

after this vision, was humbled and defeated by the Medo-Persian Empire. This empire came to a close with the rise of Greece who would quickly be ruled by four generals after Alexander the Great died. Which leads us to the final beast of the vision.

Have a different volunteer read Daniel 7:19-28

In these verses Daniel asks for clarification and explanation on the fourth kingdom that is to come. The angel explains that the horns (typically meant to represent power, strength and authority) are kings within that kingdom. This part of the vision is the subject of much speculation amongst Biblical scholars. Some see this vision as an explanation of Rome during the time of Christ and the early church. Others see it as still yet to happen. While still others think it a combination of the two! While Vineyard Columbus believes that Jesus will return one day to finalize his reign as King in what is called "The Second Coming", the church does not take a firm stance on the details of these verses. What is important to know is why God revealed these things.

- Why do you think God would reveal future events to Daniel and his people?
 - to let them know he is God, that he is not surprised or unaware of the events of our lives, to show them he has a plan.
- Why is it comforting to know that God knows your future?
 - we know that he has a plan for us, that regardless of our circumstances we can trust he is working toward his Everlasting Kingdom.

Notes:

Ministry Time Application

Lots of people believe that history simply unfolds at random with us being swept away in the tide. We have to ask ourselves what it means to be a person who believes that history itself, even our own history, is working toward an end where Jesus directly rules forever. Daniel played a significant role and served God, the people of Israel, the people and kings of Babylon, the people and king of Persia for decades. He was uncompromising in his obedience to God, but at the same time thrived and served people who wanted nothing to do with the true God.

What kind of people do we want to be? What kind of participant in God's unfolding plan do we want to be? What about your current character could stand some adjustment in order to participate like Daniel did?

Let's be silent and set a timer for two minutes and ask God to reveal through pictures, images, or even impressions regarding who we want to be as we participate with God in his plans for the future. Ask God if there is a role you can step into in order to thrive and serve. If Daniel is the model, we serve God, serve his people, and serve the world around us.

Wait for two minutes. Ask if anyone got any pictures that may be helpful for someone else (or even yourself). If anyone resonates with any of the images, pictures, or impressions, have those people pray together. (If it is mixed sex, invite someone else to pray along with them.) Pairing up and asking your partner to pray for you regarding what/who you want to be in the future is a great way to serve one another.

Week 8



Daniel 9

Daniel 9: 1-19

Tip: There are more questions than your group will be able to get through so feel free to pick and choose which ones you would like to discuss.

Background and Context:

At the time of Daniel's prayer, the Jews (God's people) were in captivity. The Babylonians had overtaken their land and the livelihood of those who followed God was in turmoil. They were regarded as exiles and the leaders of their land did not worship their God. Daniel was a great politician and had found incredible favor within the Babylonian empire, but did not allow any perceived success to hinder his devotion to the Lord and his fervent desire to obey and follow Him. Daniel may have been viewed highly by the authorities that had different beliefs than him, but he was certainly, at least inwardly, a stranger in a strange land.

Bible Verses:

In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes[a] (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian[b] kingdom— 2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. 3 So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. 4 I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: “Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments, 5 we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. 6 We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. 7 “Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame—the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you.

Starter Questions:

What is a typical way that you deal with a long or stressful day, or some difficult or frustrating circumstance?

-It could be a good habit such as prayer, spending time in community with friends, exercising, or even slowing down to rest. It could be something else, like eating ice cream, binge-watching Netflix, drinking some wine, or nonstop scrolling of Facebook or Instagram. It could be a mix!

What’s a pet peeve of yours that most of us may not know about?

-Drivers not using their turn signals, people clicking pens incessantly, someone chewing with their mouth open, etc.

Opening Prayer

Scripture: Have two or three volunteers read through the Bible passage out loud. It may help to have it read twice!

Discussion Questions:

- Daniel certainly had many things pressing for his time and attention. Here we see plainly one thing, and not so plainly another, that Daniel carved out devoted time for. What are those two things, and why are they so significant?

-(1) Prayer and (2) reading of scripture.

8 We and our kings, our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame, Lord, because we have sinned against you. 9 The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against him; 10 we have not obeyed the Lord our God or kept the laws he gave us through his servants the prophets. 11 All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. "Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you. 12 You have fulfilled the words spoken against us and against our rulers by bringing on us great disaster. Under the whole heaven nothing has ever been done like what has been done to Jerusalem. 13 Just as it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come on us, yet we have not sought the favor of the Lord our God by turning from our sins and giving attention to your truth. 14 The Lord did not hesitate to bring the disaster on us, for the Lord our God is righteous in everything he does; yet we have not obeyed him.

-The state of Jerusalem and God's people Israel was so desolate that resigning to apathy or bitterness was common and understandable. But Daniel committed himself to trusting God, to searching the scriptures for truth, and believed God was active even in the chaos.

-Daniel was familiar with God's nature. This prayer of Daniel's is actually perceived to be just prior to the release of the Jews from captivity. Daniel's understanding of the words of Jeremiah was so clear that he believed the time was near that God would deliver them, so his prayer was that much more timely and earnest, pleading God to deliver as He promised.

- Can we see similarities in the world we live in today, and particularly the current state of our country?

-We live in a world that is more and more aggressively disassociating itself with the God of the bible, and certainly with the Messiah Jesus. Moral adherence to the teachings of Jesus and God's Law are looked at scornfully, and even mocked.

- Can we relate to Daniel's actions? How can we learn from and apply them?

-Like Daniel, we can see our current climate as an opportunity to draw nearer to God and become more and more like Jesus in our actions, words, and devotion to God.

-Instead of being driven to anger or bitterness or strife, we can devote ourselves to understanding

15 "Now, Lord our God, who brought your people out of Egypt with a mighty hand and who made for yourself a name that endures to this day, we have sinned, we have done wrong. 16 Lord, in keeping with all your righteous acts, turn away your anger and your wrath from Jerusalem, your city, your holy hill. Our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors have made Jerusalem and your people an object of scorn to all those around us. 17 "Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. 18 Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy. 19 Lord, listen! Lord, forgive! Lord, hear and act! For your sake, my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name."

scripture more deeply, and bring our hearts to God in prayer.

- Before we go further and look at Daniel's prayer more specifically – has anyone ever been taught how to pray? Could you share with us how?
 - The Lord's Prayer, basic "God is great, God is good" meal time prayer, the Vineyard 5-Step prayer model, etc.
- How does Daniel begin to pray?
 - By fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes
 - This was common in that time, to express bodily the desperation for God to intervene as more important than any other desire.
- Have we ever desired something so much from God that we fasted for it, or at least were so consumed by it that we found ourselves not concerned with anything else?
 - Family member's health, job situation, a financial need, a friend's salvation, etc.
- How could "fasting, in sackcloth and ashes" look for us today?
 - Carving out particular time, without everyday pleasures (TV, phone, music, coffee, etc.), to really devote to praying. Using a personal day from work to take to pray for something significant.
- Daniel's prayer has a sort of cadence to it. In this particular instance, he begins by addressing God directly, reaffirming who He is. Daniel doesn't

Tips: As a leader, your role is to be a discussion facilitator, not a professor; the idea isn't simply to give the group information, but to allow everyone to learn from the scripture and from each other. It's okay to spend more time on some questions than on others depending on how the group is responding.

necessarily need to do this for God's sake – God knows who He is. Why then do you think he begins this way?

-To affect some remembrance of God's holiness and mercy, so that Daniel can pray with God's nature as the overarching theme. Maybe he does it to declare, in the midst of the terrible situation he finds himself in, that God is still who He says He is and will do what He says He will do.

- What is the benefit of beginning to pray this way?
 - We are so quick to begin our laundry list of needs that we blow right by meditating on who God is, remembering His love and mercy, and even His justice. It helps to center us and pray more clearly, instead of anxiously and neurotically.
- Do we begin our prayers this way? Why or why not? Should we?
 - Let's take a few moments to scan over the rest of the passage. See if you can find any instance of the pronoun "I" within Daniel's prayer.
 - Instead of focusing solely on himself, Daniel actively seeks solidarity, oneness with all of God's people. He addresses "our" sins, and confesses that "we" have turned away. There is not one instance where Daniel focuses on himself. The only time he even makes mention of himself is when he asks God to "hear the prayers and petitions of your servant."
- Why is this so significant? What strikes you about Daniel's focus in his prayer?

Notes:

-Remember, as we said at the beginning, there is virtually no ill word spoken of Daniel in all of scripture. Even so, Daniel understands that God's people are one, and no one is exempt from the commands and judgments (as well as the mercies) of God. His focus on the "we" instead of the "me" communicates his humility and his understanding that God is in love with all His people, not just the "good" ones. All who follow God are connected to one family, one body, and therefore we rejoice and suffer together.

-You can say something similar as the leader, if this is true for you: If I am honest, and I think if most people in the world who pray are honest, we would not say that this is how we typically pray. Unfortunately, I am more concerned with my wellbeing, my spiritual state, and my immediate needs than I am with the state of the larger community, family, neighborhood, Church, etc. This realization is not meant to induce any sort of shame or discouragement, but to open our eyes to a different way to relate to God, to connect with our current realities, and to be more open and honest with him. Certainly there are many places in scripture (the Psalms, the Gospels) where prayers are more personal, but it's good to lift our eyes sometimes away from ourselves and to the rest of the world.

- As we look through Daniel's prayer, what does he say is the cause or reason for the shame and desolation of God's people?

Notes:

-Not God's anger or malcontent, nor His impulses to do whatever He pleases, but the sins, straying, wickedness, and rebellion of the people of God are the cause for the chaos and present circumstances. Daniel says many times that God has kept His word and has brought trouble upon His people because they disobeyed and went their own way – He is righteous and just for doing so.

- What does Daniel declare as the main reason for God intervening and saving His people?

-“For your sake, Lord...”

-“...the city that bears your Name.”

-“We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy.”

-God is compelled to act, to intervene, to draw near, and to save His people because that's just who He is. It's because of Him that there is any kind of mercy to ask for. He is full of both love and mercy, and jealousy and justice. God is always working, whether we like the tactics or not, to draw us in, to bring us deeper, and to compel us to reach for Him as He reaches down to us, just like Daniel did in his prayer.

Ministry Time Application

Idea 1: Take a few quiet moments (2-3 minutes) to reflect. Ask the Lord if there is anything in your life that you are unhappy with, that is difficult, or that you wish was different? OR, ask God if there is anything in your life that you need to confess and ask forgiveness for.

This will require humility, but we know God is a

gracious Father and will have grace for us. Allow those things to come up. Don't suppress them. Nothing is too small or too big.

*It may help to recommend writing them down.

- Once the 2-3 minutes are up, break down into smaller groups to discuss these things and pray for one another.

Idea 2: If your group worships together with song, this could be a good opportunity to respond with a follow-up song that declares (a) God's mercy and love, (b) our hope in Him, or (c) a song of confession and forgiveness.

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Ministry Time

Summaries



Ministry Time

Series: Strangers in a Strange Land

Read through all of the Ministry Time ideas for each week before you begin teaching through the series. This will help you plan and pray for stronger impact! Blessings!

Week 1:

Invite the Holy Spirit to show you places in your life where others might have labeled you as something you are not. Ask Him to reveal the truth to you of how He sees you as His creation. Ask Him to heal any hurts that might have been caused by those labels. Invite God to help lead you to forgive those people who may have labeled you these things.

Week 2:

When we spoke about Daniel's response to his life being in danger, what in that list of responses seemed hardest or scariest to you? Ask the Holy Spirit to identify those responses, understand some of the causes of them, and invite His help in your times of worry or struggle.

Week 3:

Explain that we believe God speaks to us through his Spirit, and that we'll be waiting on Him in silence for two minutes for any words or images he wants to give us. Tell the group to be thinking during that time of choices in their lives: past choices they've made that have brought them closer or further away from Jesus, present choices they may be facing, and how those choices affect how others see God through us. Have someone set a timer for two minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come.

Example: “Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us.”

Wait for two minutes.

Encourage the group to share anything they feel they might have sensed from the Lord, making sure to mention that listening for Him is something we do better with practice, and group is a safe place to bring up things you sensed even if you think they’re odd or silly, and not everything is going to end up being from the Lord and resonating with someone else.

After people who wanted to have shared, have the group break up in to groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls. If words or images were shared, encourage anyone who felt that message was for them to pray with the person who shared it.

Things to pray for:

Awareness of any choices God is calling you to make, and a view of the path he wants you to walk.

Strength to face any tough choices in your life with the belief that God is greater than any earthly consequence..

Week 4:

Explain that we believe God speaks to us through his Spirit, and that we’ll be waiting on Him in silence for two minutes for any words or images he wants to give us. Tell the group to be thinking during that time of any guidance the Lord may have given or currently be giving them, and of how their pride may have hindered or currently be hindering them from following that

guidance. Have someone set a timer for two minutes, and start the timer after you open in brief prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come. Example: “Holy Spirit, come now and fill the hearts and minds of people in this room with the truth you want to speak to us.”

Wait for two minutes.

Encourage the group to share anything they feel they might have sensed from the Lord, making sure to mention that listening for Him is something we do better with practice, and group is a safe place to bring up things you sensed even if you think they’re odd or silly, and not everything is going to end up being from the Lord and resonating with someone else.

After people who wanted to have shared, have the group break up in to groups of two or three, guys with guys and girls with girls. If words or images were shared, encourage anyone who felt that message was for them to pray with the person who shared it.

Things to pray for:

A better sense of anything that God may be calling you to do.

The wisdom to recognize sinful pride in your life, and the strength to overcome it..

Week 5:

Option 1: One-On-One Time

Pair up with a partner and share about areas of your life that came to mind when we discussed idols or distractions that can draw our attention away from the Lord. Pray about those items shared specifically, but also

discuss ways to encourage one another or offer accountability.

Option 2: Engaging with Others Well

Living in a culture brimming with widely varying viewpoints, it can be challenging to engage with others well on topics where disagreement is present. Yet, as followers of Jesus we are called to both be firm in our convictions and gracious in our responses. Pair up with a partner and take some time to discuss what that looks like, how we should behave as representatives of Christ, and what are some ways to do that better in daily life. Spend time praying for one another, asking for wisdom on how to engage with others in a Christ-like way. You may find it helpful to spend time meditating on the instructions outlined in James 1:19 to be “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.”

Week 6:

Daniel was singled out and persecuted for being faithful to God. Paul tells us in 2 Timothy 3:12 that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” It is practically a guarantee that if we follow God continually, as Daniel did, we will face some level of persecution in our own lives. But it is important to remember what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:11-12:

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

For ministry time this week, break into smaller groups and share any experiences where you may have experienced persecution for your faith. Discuss how you might become better at being a witness for Christ in your workplace or school. Conclude by praying together for both those being persecuted and those doing the prosecuting, as well as for strength, wisdom and increased faith to act as a witness to those around you.

Week 7:

Lots of people believe that history simply unfolds at random with us being swept away in the tide. We have to ask ourselves what it means to be a person who believes that history itself, even our own history, is working toward an end where Jesus directly rules forever. Daniel played a significant role and served God, the people of Israel, the people and kings of Babylon, the people and king of Persia for decades. He was uncompromising in his obedience to God, but at the same time thrived and served people who wanted nothing to do with the true God.

What kind of people do we want to be? What kind of participant in God's unfolding plan do we want to be? What about your current character could stand some adjustment in order to participate like Daniel did?

Let's be silent and set a timer for two minutes and ask God to reveal through pictures, images, or even impressions regarding who we want to be as we participate with God in his plans for the future. Ask

God if there is a role you can step into in order to thrive and serve. If Daniel is the model, we serve God, serve his people, and serve the world around us.

Wait for two minutes. Ask if anyone got any pictures that may be helpful for someone else (or even yourself). If anyone resonates with any of the images, pictures, or impressions, have those people pray together. (If it is mixed sex, invite someone else to pray along with them.) Pairing up and asking your partner to pray for you regarding what/who you want to be in the future is a great way to serve one another.

Week 8:

Idea 1 Take a few quiet moments (2-3 minutes) to reflect. Ask the Lord if there is anything in your life that you are unhappy with, that is difficult, or that you wish was different? OR, ask God if there is anything in your life that you need to confess and ask forgiveness for. This will require humility, but we know God is a gracious Father and will have grace for us. Allow those things to come up. Don't suppress them. Nothing is too small or too big.

*It may help to recommend writing them down.

Idea 2 Once the 2-3 minutes are up, break down into smaller groups to discuss these things and pray for one another.

If your group worships together with song, this could be a good opportunity to respond with a follow-up song that declares (a) God's mercy and love, (b) our hope in Him, or (c) a song of confession and forgiveness.