



# **Daniel: Godly Living in a Pagan World**

**Six Bible studies to help you live faithfully**

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<p><b>Daniel: Godly Living in a Pagan World</b> – 6 studies to encourage us as we live in a world that has become harsh to God. It will make all the difference to keep our faith in tough times.</p>	<p><b>Paul’s first missionary journey</b> – 6 studies on the conversion and first journey of Paul. See Paul as he grows and learn what the life of the Christian was meant to be.</p>
<p><b>Power of Prayer</b> – 6 studies on the power and help that we receive in prayer. Follow the saints in their prayers and learn from them how valuable prayer can be for you.</p>	

## **Introduction**

Daniel is the story of Godly living in a pagan culture. Taken as a teenager, he and his friends assert their desire to remain faithful to the Lord even though they are captives in a foreign culture. His faith will influence the great kings of Babylon and Persia over a 65 year ministry. God will reveal the rise and fall of kingdoms as Daniel interprets dreams and a message on the wall. He will speak to Nebuchadnezzar and his grandson Belshazzar about the cost of pride for them and the kingdom. His witness will cause some of the most powerful men in the world to acknowledge the true God and give Him glory. Daniel's walk with the Lord brought him honor from powerful men and showed the true nature of the Lord to the kingdoms of the exile. Daniel loved the Lord so much that he could not live without the Lord. God was the source of Daniel's blessings and the one who gave him great opportunities to witness.

Most Christians have to live in a world that is becoming less and less Godly. We find conflict with ethics at our job and children's sports. Our question is often where to draw the line. If we turn to the Lord in prayer, we may find a crisis becoming an opportunity. We have to believe that God is such control that He can command the future. We have to believe that God's glory is more important than our comfort. The gods of the world can never be given an equal place with the Lord. If we believe that, we will be given opportunities to speak to the world for the Lord. We will find that we can influence even the most powerful in the world as we proclaim the truth about our Lord and give His messages to the world. It will be the strong in faith that God blesses and puts in positions where they can use to make His will known to those around them. Godly living in a pagan world can be powerful and make even evil men take notice of our God.

Your faith is your most precious asset in life. It will provide you with opportunities and wisdom that the world around you does not have. The character and values that come from faith will make you appealing to others. Realize that there will be a conflict between your faith and the world but that you can always turn to the Lord for answers. God will show you how to bring glory to His name so that others recognize the greatness of our God. Faith is not something that you put on when it is comfortable. It is a lifestyle that you live every day giving people a chance to come to know God through your life and character. Godly living in a pagan world is powerful for God will show Himself to the world through you. As you live a life like Daniel, God will be with you and help you so that you can do His ministry in difficult times.

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## **How to use this Bible study**

Each of the six chapters contains an introduction to help you get the big picture and is followed by thirteen questions to help you dig into the truth. The questions will help you understand what is going on and apply it to your own lives. The leader's guide provides answers for the questions that can be used in a Sunday Bible class or a small group. In a small group setting, you may find it helpful to copy the four-page leader's guide for each person. There are also student guides provided in the back of the book. In a large setting, it may be easier to copy those guides so that each of the members of the class has a student guide for personal use. Notice that there are also three questions at the end of each lesson that can either be discussed as you meet together or assigned for people to think about in the coming week.

My prayer is that you and the members of your group or class can grow through these studies. The answers in the leader's guide may challenge you to find deeper meaning and application for your lives. Life as a Christian can be difficult. It becomes even more difficult as we try to actively serve our Lord in ministry. The lessons that Jesus gave to help His disciples as they began the ministry of the new church are still important for us today. They can provide strength and help with our fears. As you study, realize that many of the questions have no single answer but are meant to help people find God's help in your trials. If you need to take more than one week per lesson, do so and enjoy the discussion and the learning.

## **Bibliography**

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The Enduring Word Bible Commentary  
The Expositor's Bible

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May the Lord bless you as you learn and grow in His grace.

# 1. Drawing the line

## Daniel 1:1-21

### Balancing faith and foreign culture

Imagine if Russia were to invade America in 2025 and take the brightest children from our wealthy families. In Russia, they would be educated and indoctrinated so that they could serve the Russian nation. Such is the picture at the beginning of the book of Daniel. He and other Jewish children from the royal family were taken and mixed with other captives to be assimilated into the Babylonian culture so that they could serve the Babylonian nation. Where do you draw the line between being part of the new culture and staying true to your Jewish faith and roots? Daniel and the others decided to stand firm on the Jewish food laws. Daniel is the story of their courage in staying faithful to the Lord and not giving in to the culture that surrounded them. It also shows the hand of the Lord working behind the scenes to help them keep their faith.

All of us have assimilated to some degree to our culture. Our thoughts, attitudes, and traditions all grow out of the culture in which we live. That is not all bad. However, what should we do when the culture opposes our faith and Christian values? What do we do when children's sports compete with Sunday worship? What do we do when the business we work for does shady things? While America is supposed to be a Christian nation, there are many places where it gets uncomfortable to live out our faith. Our challenge is not to live as hermits so that we can enjoy the benefits of our culture while keeping true to God's commands. Like Daniel, that often takes courage and requires that we figure out where to draw the line in our life. As we see in this first chapter, the Lord will help us in our struggle to be faithful and will bring rewards to those who do not abandon Him as they live out their lives.

Daniel's faith was his most precious asset in life. God gave him and his friends opportunities and wisdom that others did not have. Their character and values made them appealing to others. Their relationship with the Lord allowed them to call on the Lord in prayer and depend on God when things got rough. It is still valid for Christians today. Those who live in faith have an advantage that others can't match. When you understand the blessings that you have received from the Lord, you will not let anything get in the way of your bond with the Lord. Nothing is worth losing that advantage. It will not always be easy, but you can count on the Lord to help you when culture tries to keep you from the Lord. You mark your line in the sand and will not let the world cross and push you from the Lord. You stick to your convictions because you have decided that you will not lose the benefits of being a child of God.

#### **1. What challenges have you faced when you moved from one part of the country to another?**

In our mobile society, many of us have moved to different states or even across the country. We often face challenges of finding new doctors and mechanics for our car. We get used to new types of food and miss the favorite dishes that we had been used to in the old community. We are closer or further from family and so the character of holidays and birthdays change. Let the group discuss changes that they have had to face when they have moved.

#### **Read Daniel 1:1-21**

#### **2. Verse 3 What qualities did the king desire of the men that were chosen to be educated for Babylonian service?**

Nebuchadnezzar wanted the cream of the crop from the nobility of Judah. The young men were to have no defects and be smart and able to learn new information. They were to be quick to understand and ready to work for the Babylonian Kingdom. He was looking for people he could train and force to use their skills for the Babylonian nation. Having conquered the Jews, he wanted their best young men who would

be able to assimilate into his culture and bring their gifts for the benefit of his nation. While that would be a great opportunity, it would also have the consequence of snatching young men in their teens and taking them 500 miles away to a new land.

### **3. Verse 4-5 What methods did the king have for assimilating these young men into the Babylonian culture?**

The training would immerse Daniel and the others would in the culture, language, and literature of the Babylonian people. They would be given intensive education at the highest levels for three years. During this time, they would learn to speak and think like Babylonians. They would receive Babylonian names so that they would begin to identify themselves as Babylonian and not Jews. They would receive the best foods and wine from the king's table. All this would be daily reminders that they were dependent on the king and that they were training to be in his service. It is important to note that Daniel and the others did not have any problems with most of the training. They became the top of the class (verse 20), showing that they devoted themselves to their studies.

### **4. Verse 4-5. Why is it beneficial to learn new things and to assimilate into the culture where we live? What do we miss if we live rigorous sectarian lives that distance us from the culture of others around us?**

Many of the things in our culture are valuable as we prepare ourselves for the future. There are significant advances in science and technology that we can embrace and use every day. Good books are being written by non-Christians that contain valuable insights in the area of business and skills. We can enjoy fiction and movies by non-Christians to entertain us. If we separate ourselves from the culture and declare that anything that is not in the Bible or supported by the Bible should not be in our lives, we miss a lot of things that can make our lives better. As we shall see, we have to draw a line between the things that are good for us and the harmful stuff. Our faith will determine part of that line. Other items will just be things that are good or bad for us. Many of the blessings of the Lord are not explicitly connected with the Bible but will be beneficial anyway.

### **5. Verse 8. Where did Daniel draw the line with the Babylonian culture? Why do you think that he was willing to learn their language but not to eat their food?**

Throughout Jewish history, God's people found it hard to remain faithful to the Mosaic Law concerning dietetic restrictions. Their problem would have been that many items on the table (like pork) would have been unclean according to Jewish law. Other foods might have been first offered to the Babylonian gods or had not had the blood drained properly from them. The early Christian church (1 Cor. 10:25-28) would have the same problem. The council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:29) made the requirements of the new Christians concerning food offered to idols or meat not drained of its blood. Daniel and his friends wanted to keep God's law and remain loyal to the faith. They drew the line here because other things like education or the new names were not against the Old Testament law. The unclean foods seemed to go against the Lord's will.

### **6. In what ways do your beliefs clash with your community's practices? Where do you draw the line?**

Our challenges are not with food but often with time and sinful behavior. Children's sports and the work or hobby activities that adults participate in often keep us from Sunday worship with our Lord. Businesses may practice shady behavior that causes us to do morally dubious things. There are times that our children have to say no to extra-curricular activities, and we may need to find a different job where bosses don't expect us to lie to customers or participate in shady financial doings. Let the class talk about places they have to draw the line between culture and the Lord.

**7. Verse 12. What is Daniel's solution to this dilemma? What tone does He use with those in authority, and how does He respect their concerns?**

Daniel's solution was to simply let the nonbeliever test God's ways to see if they were best. He proposes an experiment where they would eat only kosher foods (like fruit, vegetables, and grains) and see how that affected them. The official feared that the king would be upset with him if the young men looked sickly or weak. Daniel was respectful of authority and made the test something fair and measured. He wisely chose to negotiate rather than rebel. Now we would call the foods that Daniel was advocating healthy, and so the fact that they looked better than the other youth would not be surprising. Daniel was not thinking healthy. He just wanted to follow God's commands.

**8. Verse 12. What can we learn from Daniel about dealing with clashes with our culture?**

Courtesy is often still the best way. Marches on Washington may be necessary to get an audience, but it is always better to teach others than have an angry protest. Explain to people why you are uncomfortable with their requirements. Can you offer to work longer other days so that you can have Sunday off to worship the Lord? Can you explain that what you are being asked to do is shady at best and that you fear that it will decrease profits by giving the business a bad reputation? Rudeness often gets us nothing. Explanations may help you find a simple solution that deals with the concerns or needs of others while allowing you to remain loyal to the Lord. Realize that there may be times that you have to withdraw and put the Lord first. We had a children's activity that started to infringe on Sunday morning, and our son had to withdraw from that group because it was evident that others did not see missing church regularly as a problem. Sometimes there is no easy answer.

**9. Verse 17. How did God honor the four men who were faithful to Him as they used the advantages that they were being?**

Daniel and his friends had walked a fine line. They learned all that they could from the schooling as they prepared to take their place in the service of the king. It allowed them to have years of service and tremendous influence in this new place. They graduated at the top of their class and received positions of power and authority. Yet, they also kept their faith. It became their most precious asset, for God gave opportunities and wisdom that others did not have. They had character and values that few could fault. They had a God who they could call upon in prayer and depend on when things got tough. God honored their devotion and faithfulness. God also gave Daniel a unique talent. The text says that he was able to understand visions and dreams. By remaining faithful to the Lord, they had the best of both worlds.

**10. Verse 17. How will a balance between faith and culture benefit the Christian who doesn't forget God?**

It may not always be easy, but we need to stand firm. If something doesn't feel right, we need to commit it to prayer to find out what the Lord wants from us. Some things like Daniel's schooling give us opportunities that we would not have if we did not avail ourselves of the blessings of our community. Those are things that we need to dive into and use to the best of our abilities. We will be able to serve the Lord better if we have learned the lessons of science, math, and literature. Other parts of our culture may cause us to pause and to consider their effect on us and those we know. We don't want to lose the moral compass that the Lord has given us. Friends and employers desire honest and trustworthy people who know the value of hard work and who seem to get along with others. Don't trade the blessings that come with faith for the dross that the world can offer in its place.

**11. Verse 20. After three years, what is the result of their diligence to the Lord and their studies?**

It finally became graduation day as the three years were up. The king personally interviewed all of the youth trained for the last three years. The text mentions that the king was more impressed with them than any of the others. The four even surpassed some of the current counselors in the king's employ. He

declares that they are “ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.” The information is shared so that we can understand the stories in the book that follows. Having passed the exam, the young men enter the king’s service. It also shows the benefit of continuing to follow the Lord. God had given the young men such knowledge and understanding that even the king noticed their gifts.

### **12. How was God preparing Daniel for the future ministry that we see in the rest of the book?**

The final verse reminds us that the Lord blessed Daniel with a long life. He would serve four kings throughout this book of the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Persians. He would live till he was 90 and had served and had influence for about 70 years at very high levels in a pagan world. Each king would learn about the true God from Daniel, and several would worship or honor the true God because of Daniel and his witness. Daniel shows that you have to be in the world if you are going to impact it for the Lord. Those who are shown faithful will have God-given opportunities and blessings so that they can change the world around them. We need to have a balance between the world and our faith so that we can be God’s men and women to our world and show them what it means to be a child of God. It is not comfortable participating in the political arena in our society, but it gives us opportunities to bring the Lord’s influence and truth to our communities and our world.

### **13. How does the decision Daniel made change his future in life? How important is it to draw the line and refuse to go along with the culture?**

Daniel’s decision to draw the line in the area of kosher food and to not violate his faith allowed him to survive and thrive in a foreign culture. It gave him integrity that many others did not have. It brought him the admiration of the kings of this pagan nation. It was a tough choice, but God’s people make tough choices because they know that the will of the Lord is always what is best for their life and their future. Daniel balance faith with opportunities. We regularly have to do the same. We need to make the most of the opportunities that the Lord gives us in our culture. We learn, develop new skills, and make friendships that will provide us with a chance to serve the Lord throughout our lives. We must balance such opportunities with keeping our faith intact. To lose our Christian character or values in favor of individual opportunities will destroy us and our ability to impact our world. Grow in godliness, and the Lord will open doors throughout your life.

### **For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 Where do you face clashes between your faith and the expectations of those around you?

Deep 2 Where is God calling you to draw the line in your life so that you can live for Him? What help do you need from the Lord if you are going to be successful at keeping your faith?

Deep 3 What benefits do you see from following the Lord and not giving up your close relationship with God?



## **2. Dreams and Destinies**

**Dan. 2:17-47**

### **God is still in charge of our world and future**

Their prayers began as a plea for their lives in an unjust world. It became a revelation of the majesty of God and the control He has over the world and its future. Nebuchadnezzar threatens to kill all his counselors when they are unable to tell him his dream and what it means. Faced with death, Daniel and his friends turn to God in prayer, asking for mercy. God hears their prayer and reveals to them a message about a boundless God who is in control of the future. Kingdom after kingdom of men will rise and fall, but the kingdom of God will never be destroyed. It will last forever and conquer the nations of the world. Man is imperfect and limited. God is boundless and forever.

There will be times that the culture seems to be against the church. Christians are persecuted around the world and often put to death for their faith. In America, many mock God as weak and think that they are in control of their fate. They build their towers like the tower of Babel in Genesis 11, believing that they can reach the skies and become their gods only to be scattered by the flick of God's finger. Like Daniel, we must turn to our Lord, seeking answers. We will learn that God is in control of the world and will gain confidence that the future will not be controlled by the weak hands of men but by the power of the Almighty. God can do all things and will guide the future of the world.

When we find the world against us, we need to turn to the Lord for answers. Moreover, we must not just ask the Lord to save us but ask the Lord to bring glory to His name. Only when the world recognizes the power and the greatness of our God will things become better. Daniel changed the course of faith for all believers. Even the mighty Nebuchadnezzar gave honor to the true God (verse 47) before the whole kingdom. The Christian's task is not to improve the world by our power but to show that the Lord is in control. We want people to acknowledge our God. We can be part of the Kingdom of God that will conquer the world or be part of the many human kingdoms that will rise and fall because they only have the power of man.

#### **1. As you look back through history, what are some of the kingdoms that have risen and fallen? Why do you think that has recurred so many times?**

One can think of the Babylonian kingdom, the Greeks, and the Romans of ancient days. More recent examples would be the Nazi empire of Germany, The British and French nations in the great age of the monarchy, and even the Vikings of Scandinavia. All of those empires have risen and fallen after a time. One wonders if America will suffer the same fate at some point. If you look back at history, you will find that weak or selfish rulers, natural disasters, and wars or peasant uprisings have all had their hand in bringing down the great kingdoms of the world. Some have lasted a few years, like Nazi Germany. Others have endured for centuries like the Roman Empire. All have fallen because of the humans that comprised the nations or the nations that opposed them. If you have time, you might discuss what weakness is there in man that we can't create a unity that can last forever.

#### **Read Dan. 2:17-47**

#### **2. Verse 17. When faced with a crisis, what did Daniel and his friends ask from God? What does verse 21 hint was the mystery that God revealed?**

Throughout the book, we will see Daniel and his friends as men of prayer and great faith. In the text, they asked for the mercy of God concerning this mystery. They ask that the Lord would spare their lives but also that the Lord would reveal the secret that hidden in the dream. They knew that God was the God of heaven and thus higher than all the gods that the other counselors of the king worshipped. They also

believed that God cared about them and that this dream was God's revelation of His plans for the future. Realize that these men were not only seeking that the Lord spare their lives. They wanted to glorify God so that everyone knew how great a God He was. In chapter 3, we will see the three friends put the glory and honor of God over their own lives (Dan. 3: 12).

### **3. Verse 17. What does Daniel teach us about praying in the midst of crisis times in our lives?**

When faced with a crisis, Daniel gathers his friends together for prayer (v.18) after expressing confidence that God would provide the answers that were needed (v.16). We often complain about problems or make plans to take the problem head-on. Daniel teaches us to turn to the Lord in prayer and encourage others to do so as well. We are not able to understand the mysteries of the world that we face, but God can and will give answers to those who seek Him. (v.27-28). Prayer should be our first response in trouble, and that prayer should be one of confidence in God's power and His willingness to help us.

### **4. Verse 28. How does Daniel focus on the power of God in His answer to the king?**

The wise men of Babylon had argued that no man on earth could do what the king wanted (v. 10), and Daniel affirms that message. No man on earth knows the future of the world or can reveal the dreams that happen inside another person's head. Daniel will not let the king or anyone else think that the answer to this vision is from Daniel. He immediately points the king to the "God of Heaven" who is above all the man-made gods and the wisdom of men. He can solve the problems that we face and reveal the future that He alone knows. It must have been surprising to the king when Daniel not only knew the dream but also knew what the king was thinking that sparked the dream (v.29). It was just another way that Daniel pointed to the Lord as the one who makes all mysteries clear to men.

### **5. Verse 28. What does Daniel teach us about where to put our confidence when the world around us is falling apart?**

The message of Daniel is a comfort to us today. We have a great God who we can call on to provide for our needs and give us wisdom in our troubles. Things may look impossible to the human eye, but our God can do all things. He gives us understanding so that we are prepared for the future if we ask Him. He is listening when we have worries and fears like Nebuchadnezzar did in the text. Realize that the king was in the early years of his reign (Dan 2:1) and was probably wondering what his reign would look like in the years to come. When we have such doubts and fears, we know that we can call on the Lord for answers and help. He will provide assistance and comfort for us that the world can never give.

### **6. Verse 32. What do you notice about the makeup of the kingdom as you progress from the head to the feet? What does it say about the quality of those kingdoms as they grow stronger?**

The first kingdom is made of gold and is usually thought of to be the Babylonian kingdom presently reigning as the prominent world power. The silver represents the Medio-Persian kingdom that will take over during the end of Daniel's life. The bronze represents the Greeks with Alexander the Great, who created the largest empire in ancient times. Finally, the iron and clay represent the Roman Empire, who ruled the earth during the time of Jesus and St. Paul. Each kingdom grew stronger than nations before it. However, the metal representing each kingdom became less valuable as the kingdoms progressed. Looking at the statue, it would be evident that the countries will decline as time goes by. Strength alone does not improve the quality of the kingdom in God's eyes.

### **7. How has humankind declined as it grows stronger? What does the real value of humanity lie?**

For all our advances in science and technology, we have not made any significant progress in the areas of world peace or quality of life. Man is capable of violence on a scale that was not even possible in Daniel's day. It would be hard to think of an era of world peace like the one that occurred under the Roman empire where Paul and others could travel from country to country without worrying about national borders or

unified languages. We may have great wealth in America and a strong army and an abundance of weapons, but we are still living in a time of terrorism and divisions in our country and around the world. The real value of humanity comes from the Lord. Daniel has value to each king that he serves because they know that God is with him. Daniel's faith gives him qualities that the four kings value, and he receives promotions because he is someone that they can trust. Real significance comes from the Lord and not from the power of man.

**8. Verse 34. The strongest and last kingdom in the dream has a weakness. What is the vulnerability, and how does it show the weakness of man?**

Daniel tells the king that the final kingdom will be a mixture of iron and clay so that they will not be united and will be brittle. This description fits the Roman Empire perfectly. It was powerful with organizations and armies that could conquer the whole Mediterranean world. Yet it had an inherent weakness. It was filled with many nationalities that never thoroughly mixed. As humanity tries to rule the world, we have some of the same problems. No matter how strong the government, man will always have divisions. Countries can break treaties, and leaders may grab power at the expense of their subjects. The real strength of a man is not in himself. It is in our God. As the world relies on itself, it will fail. As we rely on God, we will have the unity and value that comes from God.

**9. Verse 44. Who is the fifth kingdom pictured as a rock, and what is its impact on others? What qualities does the text say this kingdom will have?**

Amid the fourth kingdom, God will create a new kingdom that is not ruled by man. It is the Christian church cut out, but not by human hands (v.34). Some think that Daniel is speaking of the second coming of Christ. I believe that he is predicting the rise of the church in the book of Acts. It is a church that will eventually overcome Rome and survive to this day while the Roman Empire has disappeared. The church of the Lord will never be destroyed and will not be conquered or absorbed by others as the first four kingdoms were. God will accomplish through the death and resurrection of Jesus what no earthly kingdom can do. He will create a church that is united throughout the world by its confession and by the love of Christ.

**10. Verse 44. How has the kingdom of God overcome the nations of the world? What makes this kingdom different than the others?**

While the other four empires and all the countries of the world often use force to overcome others, the kingdom of God uses the love and truth of Jesus. As you read the book of Acts, the church grew because of the power of God. People came to faith and built a relationship with God that was so strong that they would be willing to die rather than abandon the Lord. There was also a unity that came as the church brought together people from many nations and races. Unlike the countries of the world, the gospel message changes lives. God forgives the past, provides for us in the present, and gives hope for the future. The kingdom of God is different than the others since it is based on the work of Jesus.

**11. Verse 47. What is the reaction of the king to Daniel's interpretation of his dream?**

It must have been an amazing sight as a Jewish teenager explained the mysteries of God and the future of the Babylonian kingdom to the king. The king fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor (v.46). He then confessed that the God of the Jews was great and wise. While that doesn't mean that he converted to the Jewish faith, it is an acknowledgment that before the whole nation that the God of the Jews is a true God who is worthy of honor and praise. Sadly, Nebuchadnezzar would soon forget the lesson that he had learned (Dan 3-4) and have to be reminded again of God's preeminence. It is a good lesson for us all that we must humble ourselves before God and give Him glory, for there is no one like Him in all of history.

**12. How do we bring glory to the Lord in times of crisis?**

Daniel brought God before the nation by speaking the truth and living his faith. The world fumbles and fails with it forgets the true God. God's people should not be silent but should step out in confidence in good times and bad to share what they know and believe about God. If we hide our faith, we do not let the glory of God to shine. People around us need to know about the Lord. Throughout the book of Daniel, Daniel would give God glory before the kings he served (2:45, 4:27, 5:22, and 6:21). In most cases, the kings would honor God because of the words and faith of Daniel. We must live as part of the fifth kingdom and boldly tell people the truth from our God. Like Daniel, God will be with us, and the message of the scripture will impact the people around us.

### **13. During a crisis, why is it better to seek God's glory than to just seek his deliverance from pain and problems?**

Asking for our delivery from crisis helps us and helps us only for a short time. Seeking the glory of the Lord can change our community and our world for years to come. Daniel and his friends may have begun with a prayer for their deliverance, but the prayer contained a desire to know God's will and reveal God's truth to all. The prayer of Daniel in verses 20-23 praises God for who He is and not for sparing Daniel from death. It is a hymn praising God for His wisdom and might. It is a prayer thanking the Lord that He is in control of the whole world and of the future itself. God's glory will always be the best for us and the world. Our prayers that "His will be done" and that it be done through me are powerful, for they open up opportunities that no man can give us. The rest of the book of Daniel will show us what can happen when we seek God's will and plan instead of just asking God to help us when things go wrong. It will be a fantastic journey for Daniel, and it can be the same for us.

#### **For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What have you learned about prayer and God's answers to our prayers?

Deep 2 Why is it meaningful and comforting that God has control of the future and controls the nations of the world?

Deep 3 How can you seek to give God glory in your world, and what effect would you like to see from your witness to God's majesty and might?

### **3. There is no other God** **Daniel 3:1-30** **It is about God and not about us**

Whether we are saved or not is not the issue. It is about worshipping God only in our life. As the story progresses, it is perhaps twenty years since the events of chapter 2. The three young men are now administrators in the kingdom of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar has built a statue, and all are to worship it. Our three young men have to make a critical decision of life and death. Will they give in the pressure of the culture, or will they remain faithful to the Lord? What we see is an immovable faith and a confession to the Lord that is one of the greatest in the scripture. They were not ready to abandon God regardless of whether God rescued them from the fire or not. The temptation was just to bow down even if you didn't believe in the statue, yet they would not give in to the culture and turn their backs on God.

We often gravitate toward the popular activities of our culture. That is fine until they clash with our faith walk with the Lord. Like the three men, we have to ask ourselves if we will give in to popular culture because we want to belong or because we are afraid of the threats made if we do not give in. Usually, it is not a matter of life and death like the three men faced. No one asks us to deny God when they want us to play sports on Sunday or lie to a client at our workplace. They just want those "gods" to be given equal place with the true God. Do we have such a love for God that nothing should diminish His place in our life? Are we willing to make the sacrifice of never playing that sport as a kid or seeking a different job with less pay so that we can work for an honest employer? If God is our God, we have to put Him first without any guarantee that God will make things work out to our satisfaction.

Our world, like King Nebuchadnezzar, is often both arrogant and ignorant. They see our God as being nothing. Our only response must be one of faith. For the three men, faith is not based on how things are going in our life. Faith is based on the worth of God. They would rather die than lose the Lord in their lives. Perhaps God would show His power and let the world see that He was indeed God. It would be a witness to the other Jews and the nation of Babylon. Maybe God would allow them to die, and they would be with God in heaven. God is still God, whether He rescues us or makes things work out immediately for us. The actions of the three men challenge our faith and commitment to God. Will we refuse to let the culture we live in erode our faith, or will we stand firm with God and trust Him with our future?

#### **1. Have you ever had a burn on your skin or a bad sunburn? How did that feel? What would you do to avoid having to go through that experience again?**

I have never been burned, but perhaps you have been. Many of us have had a bad sunburn at the beach or a day at the amusement park. The pain is real, and it may last for days. You are tender to the touch and may find it hard to sleep or find a comfortable place to sit. It has taught me to be generous and diligent in my use of sunscreen when I am out in the sun for long periods. Let the group discuss their experiences. If someone has been burned in a fire, consider what the healing process was for their burns.

#### **Read Daniel 3:1-30**

#### **2. Verse 5. What command of the king causes conflict for the three Jews?**

Some commentators believe that it may have been as much as 20 years since the events of the last chapter. If so, the statue that Nebuchadnezzar builds may roughly coincide with the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The figure is a monument to the king's pride, and one would have seen the gleam of the 90-foot statue for miles in the desert plain surrounding Babylon. Everyone was to bow down and worship the image when the music played. It becomes a test of the faith of our trio. One wonders if God permits this test as a way

to help them grow in faith. He will use their faith to show His power to the nation of Babylon. That doesn't make the test comfortable. It makes the test powerful for the trio and the nation.

**3. Verse 5 How does our culture challenge our faith? What does that say about how our culture feels about our God?**

The test that the three Jewish men faced was not unusual. We face trials all the time to our faith. Usually, they are not life and death. They are more attempts to erode our relationship with God. Our kid's sports or our workplace wants us to forget church and support them on a Sunday. Family activities or hobbies will make life busy so that we have little time to serve the Lord or limited time for bible study with others. No one says in these instances that you can't be a Christian, but your faith is compromised, and God is not put first. Again and again, the culture says that God is not that important and that God will surely understand if you put other activities at the same level as God. They don't think God is important and expect that you will share their values.

**4. Verse 12. How did the three men respond to the king's requirements? Why would others point out their response to the king?**

The three men didn't protest the king or speak against him. They just quietly didn't bow down to the pagan statue. Perhaps, they were at the back of the assembly or moved off to the side. It was evident that Nebuchadnezzar didn't see them until others told him about their actions. They could have pretended to worship or excused themselves by assuring themselves that this was a political event like one who gives honor to the flag. They did neither. They realized that this was an insult to God and would not participate. The astrologers were Chaldean nobles who may have been jealous that these Jews were elevated to such high positions just as several were jealous of Daniel years later (Dan. 6). Their attack may have simply been an attempt to rid themselves of these foreigners.

**5. Verse 12. What do we often wrestle with when our culture wants us to defy the Lord? How do others around you feel about your decision?**

We wrestle with events that keep us from worship. We fight with the busy lives that prevent us from taking time for Bible study and prayer as well as from helping those around us who need God's care. We wrestle with the times that the world wants us to go with the crowd and do something that we know is not right. Satan has many ways to erode our faith. It is easy to excuse ourselves by saying that everyone else is doing it or that there will be a price to pay if we do not give in to the crowd. If we do stand up for what we believe, others who do not share our faith may find it hard to understand and either ostracize us or criticize our actions. We have to follow our conscience and the will of God. We can't look to others who are not Christian for guidance because they often do not know why it is vital for us to remain faithful to God.

**6. Verse 16. The king thinks that he can persuade the three men to obey his commands. How do the three respond to the king?**

The three men did not see any reason to defend their actions. The future was in God's hands and not the hands of the king. Their answer is surprising after 20 years in captivity and with the destruction of Jerusalem. They were saying that the king had defeated Jerusalem, but he had not defeated God. They were casting their lot with God, confident that God was still in charge. As we saw in chapter 1, these men were going to be different than the people around them. To their way of thinking, They must obey God no matter what the outcome. They saw that their future was better off in God's hands than in the hands of the king. It was the Lord who was responsible for their success, and they would continue to depend on Him.

**7. How do you respond to the world when it tries to pressure you to give in and to compromise your beliefs?**

It may be difficult for us, but we need to believe that the future is in God's control. There will be many who will think that they have the power over the future, but, like Nebuchadnezzar, they will not last for long. We have to trust that God has a plan for the future and be willing to follow Him. That plan may involve sacrifices and difficulties, but the problems that we will have by turning our backs on the Lord will always be more numerous. As we will see, we can't depend on God to give us an easy way out. We have to believe in the character of God. He is always the one to follow. We don't want to give others the idea that we follow God only when it is convenient. We have to follow Him all the time if we're going to have help in our times of trouble.

**8. Verse 18. What do the three Jews realize about their decision? What is more important to them than life itself?**

Sometimes God doesn't save His people. There are stories of martyrs in the Bible like Paul or Peter. There were several of the prophets who died for their faith. The three men knew that God might allow them to die so that other Jews could see how strong their faith was. They could not guarantee what God would do. They knew that deliverance was possible since God was infinitely more powerful than the king, but it was not guaranteed. They were not about to turn their backs on a God who had blessed them so much already, and so they wanted to give God glory. To deny God by worshipping the image would bring disrespect to God. To be willing to die, if necessary, would show others how great God was. They would worship God with their lives and place the future in God's hands. He could decide how to bring the most glory to His name.

**9. Verse 18. If there is no guarantee that God will save us, why is it still essential to confess God and resist the world?**

Our actions are to be about God's glory and not ourselves. People around us are watching and learning about God from us. If we miss Sundays for sports or work, it shows others that God is not important. If we are willing to lie, be angry, or swear to fit into our work or our friends, it says that sin is not serious. A lot of people around us have never read the Bible. Their impression of God is what they learn from us. If we are willing to make sacrifices for God or work hard to be a person of character, people have greater respect for God. Just because God doesn't do what is best for us does not mean that God is less loving. Sometimes it just means that God has a better plan, and we would be better off if we trusted God and followed His path.

**10. Verse 27. How did God reward their faith? How complete is God's protection for them?**

They stood by God, and God stood by them. Many think that this would have been a furnace that smelted ore to make iron or bronze. The soldiers who got close enough to throw the three into the fire died, but the three of them were untouched by even the smell of the fire was on them. God sent one of His angels to stand with them and give them courage. As they came out of the furnace, it was as if they had never been in the fire at all. Nebuchadnezzar and the others crowded around them to examine them and see how it was possible. The arrogant king was humbled and called God "the Most High God". It doesn't mean that the king was a believer just that he learned to acknowledge the power of the God of the Jews.

**11. How do miracles in our lives bring glory to God? Are the miracles about God or us?**

Sometimes God does miraculously help us. As we see in the miracles of Jesus, it may be that He has compassion for us, but there is a greater reason for miracles to happen. They happen so that others might recognize Jesus and have salvation. Grandma has her cancer cured, and so she gives God credit. She tells everyone about the mercy of Jesus, even those in the family that have fallen from the faith. A family narrowly escapes the terrorists who are killing Christians in their region, and people see how God can overcome impossible odds. In the ministry of Jesus, people were attracted by the miracles and stayed to

hear the message. Miracles should not just be about us. They should be used by us to show the love and power of our God so that others might come to faith and believe in our Almighty God.

**12. Verse 28. How does Nebuchadnezzar respond to the miracle? How should the miracle have impacted him and other Babylonians?**

The king praised God at this great demonstration of God's power. The three men had put their trust in the Lord, and God had delivered them. It was a witness that God was so precious to them that they would rather lose their lives than lose their relationship with God. Nebuchadnezzar had to admire their loyalty. Did any of his people have such dedication to the gods of his people? It may have been uncomfortable that they defied him, but their commitment and their values drew his respect. He lavishes gifts on them and pronounces that no one should say anything critical about the Jewish God, or they would suffer the consequences. The miracle brought respect to God among the king and the people.

**13. Why must faith confront culture when it says that God is not important? What is the danger in the erosion of our belief as we compromise to the world?**

When we let culture erode the teachings and commands of God, faith soon disappears. Like the frog who is thrown in the water, which is then slowly heated up, we are boiled and dead before we realize what has happened. Compromise slowly takes the church away from the truth and makes us useless to ourselves and God. We become like the church of Laodicea (Rev. 3:14f), who was neither hot nor cold. We think that we are doing well when the Lord tells us to repent. Our comfort is not the issue. Our life is to be about giving glory to the Lord so that others may see our faith, courage, and values and see how great and loving our God is to us. Let them know the truth so that they may cling to God for themselves.

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What do you admire most about the three men in the text? How difficult would it have been for you to make the same decision?

Deep 2 Where do you find the culture around you clashing with your faith? What are your choices as you move forward in life?

Deep 3 If you knew that God would not rescue from suffering, how would it affect your decision you're your faith in God?



## **4. Live humbly and acknowledge God**

### **Daniel 4:19-37**

### **God punishes the proud and works through the humble**

Pride rears its head at times when we are doing well only to bring us to our knees when things go wrong. Nebuchadnezzar is walking on the heights of Babylon, a magnificent city that he has built with his own hands. It was the place of the majestic “hanging gardens” and defensive walls around the city, making it seem impregnable. Sadly, the lessons learned in chapters 2 and 3 were gone. He had begun to think of himself as a god. The Lord Almighty warns the king in a dream that his pride will be his downfall. Nebuchadnezzar calls on Daniel to interpret the dream, and Daniel painfully tells the king to renounce his pride or face the consequences. This text is the story of the danger of pride and the king’s realization of God’s sovereignty over everything.

Men still play God. Listen to the news, and you will hear politicians and businessmen and women talking like they control their destiny. They believe that they can solve the problems of the world by creating programs and technology that can make this world a heaven on earth. They act like they don’t need the true God. Most of them suffer humiliation when their dreams don’t come to reality. Sadly, few learn painful lessons when life goes wrong. Like Daniel, we may find ourselves in a position to tell friends and relatives to renounce their pride. We certainly should spend time in prayer, acknowledging that the Lord is in control and asking Him to guide the future instead of leaving it in the hands who play god every day in our world. Only the true God can save us from the many who would try to control our lives and the world because they think they have made what good things that the world contains.

Good things come from the hands of God. We should rejoice when life is good as it was in ancient Babylon. We should also thank the Lord for the many blessings that He has brought in those good times. Daniel sees what the king has forgotten. He realizes that all the good things in the world have come from the hand of an Almighty God. When we take credit for the good things in life without giving God credit for the resources or skills that we have been given, we put ourselves in danger of a fall. The fall may be a punishment from God or just the consequences of pride gone wrong. As we see such pride in others, we need to warn them. The pride and arrogance of others can be a danger to those who they govern. Indeed, the pride of Nebuchadnezzar affected the whole kingdom. The arrogance of leaders can hurt countries and all who live in those nations.

#### **1. How would you share a piece of bad news with a friend?**

It is a task that few of us enjoy doing. You have to tell someone that a relative has died or is very ill. You have to tell someone that they didn’t get the job that they wanted or that their girlfriend is cheating on them. None of those are great scenarios, yet you feel like you need to tell them and not keep them in the dark. Hopefully, you are kind and spring the news on them in a gentle way. If possible, you might add a note of hope. The rule of thumb I have tried to use is to tell someone the way that I would want to have someone tell me. Let the group discuss times that they have had to be the bearer of bad news.

#### **Read Daniel 4:19-37**

#### **2. Verse 22. How is the reign of Nebuchadnezzar described in the dream? How do you think the king felt about all that he had accomplished (see v. 30)?**

The king’s reign is described as majestic and powerful. He was indeed the greatest monarch of the Babylonian Empire. He had won battles with the Assyrians and the Egyptians. His kingdom stretched up the Euphrates River valley and down the coast of the Mediterranean to the edge of Egypt. His capital of Babylon was over 2000 acres in size and filled with a large palace and great public works. The hanging

gardens of Babylon, which are considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World, are often attributed to Nebuchadnezzar as well. In verse 30, you see the pride that the king felt about his accomplishments. It would be this pride that caused him considerable trouble.

**3. Verse 22. Who do you give praise to when life is going well? Are you more likely to give thanks to God or to ask Him for help?**

Pride often comes before a fall. Back in chapter 2, the king had learned that God was in charge of the world and that only God's kingdom would not be destroyed (2:44). That dream was probably decades before this time in the king's life, and it is apparent that he had forgotten the warning. We know that we should praise God in prayer when things are going well. Sometimes we do. Often we are more likely to pat ourselves on the back or call it luck. Let the group discuss who they would thank and how often their prayers include prayers of thanksgiving as well as supplications.

**4. Verse 25. What is the punishment that Nebuchadnezzar will face for his arrogance? How is it the opposite of what he is at the time of the dream?**

The king, who is so high and mighty, will descend to the level of the animals. He will eat grass like animals and live outside like animals. God will humble the proud king, who God blessed with so much. Pride can have the effect of making us all act like animals. We get as "stubborn as a mule" or as "vain as a peacock." We may not become animals as the king did, but we sure act like them. True dignity and honor comes when we acknowledge God and live under His kingdom. The only blessing for the king is that this will be temporary and God will restore him to his throne (4:26)

**5. Verse 25. Why does God punish the proud and arrogant? See verse 17 for help.**

God lays the purpose of the curse out for us in verse 17. God wants the world to know that He alone is God over all the kingdoms of men. One of the most challenging lessons to learn is that God is supreme. The king has seen that in the dream of chapter 2 and the actions of God in chapter 3, but he has still not learned it. He still believes that all of the success of his kingdom is due to his brilliance and skill. Throughout the book of Daniel, God shows himself to be the one in charge. He will depose King Belshazzar in chapter 5 and keep teaching lessons to both Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus in other chapters. Reflect as a group on how the Lord chastises leaders and people today when they forget God is in charge.

**6. Verse 27. What was Daniel's advice for the king? What was Daniel hoping that would happen if the king followed his advice?**

In verse 27, Daniel urges the king to turn from his pride and humble himself before the Lord. Daniel delivers both the meaning of the dream and, perhaps, a way to avoid the punishment. Daniel's words show wisdom even though this king had a violent temper (Dan. 2:12 and 3:19), which could have easily resulted in Daniel's death. Daniel is urging the king to repent and avoid the punishment that the Lord is ready to inflict. While Nebuchadnezzar seems to believe that Daniel speaks the truth, he does nothing about it. The king does not repent or acknowledge the Lord until after he has gone through this ordeal. His pride seems to be so great that he may have thought that he was above the punishment of God.

**7. Why is Daniel's advice still the message that Christians should proclaim to the world? What is the danger if the world and its leaders don't listen?**

Many people are caught in their pride and feel like they are above the law and the Lord. The church has a responsibility to proclaim that God is sovereign by our words and actions. As we acknowledge the Lord, we show God's power to the world around us that pride has trapped. The danger of their ego is that it can be their downfall. I think of Hitler, who seemed to have all of Europe in his hands at one point and who ends up dying in a bunker in Berlin as the war falls apart. Proud people in the world have victory for a time, but real success will come only to those who acknowledge the Lord and follow Him.

**8. Verse 29. How does God show grace in the text? How did the king treat this time of grace?**

The key is in verse 29. It is twelve months later when judgment comes upon the king. God gave the king a full year to repent of his sin. God wanted him to see what Daniel had seen at the time of the dream and warned the king of (v.27). Now the king voiced his pride as he looked over the city, possibly from the top of his palace looking at the famous “hanging gardens” and the remarkable view of the capital. The king’s pride was so great that he refused to change. The judgment was swift as the voice from heaven proclaimed that the time of God’s decree had come. One tries to imagine how things would have been different if the king had taken God’s word to heart.

**9. Verse 31. How does pride lead to a fall? What do you expect will happen to someone and those who are close to them when someone ignores God?**

Look through history, and you can see again and again how the mighty often fall because they think that they are too big to be overcome. It was valid for Hitler in the world war. It has been accurate for many presidents and generals. One wonders if the king listened for a time and changed his ways right after the warning. He is as proud as ever twelve months later. We should pray for the leaders of our nation when we see their pride and stubbornness. Our temptation is to picket them, but we really should pray. The decisions that they make will affect us and those we love. If they make some disastrous decisions because of their pride, they can cause the nation great harm. In contrast, Daniel continues to follow the Lord and has an opportunity to help the country by his warnings and witness to one king after another. Leaders may have pride, but our humility can make a difference.

**10. Verse 34. What leads to the king’s restoration? What does he say that shows that he now understands the message of the dream?**

The recovery was always a possibility. (v.26) The king lifts his eyes to heaven, and God gives him back his sanity. His upward gaze suggests both faith and submission as he looks to Lord and not to himself. The time of suffering had gotten his attention. The years have given him the chance to ponder Daniel’s warning and God’s dream. The words of Daniel were now bearing fruit. The king’s message of praise is an expression of worship. He seems to understand that even his kingdom of Babylon will fall at some point, but the kingdom of God contained everything on heaven and earth and would last till the end of time. It was pride that had brought him punishment; it was submission and surrender that brought him relief and sanity.

**11. Is restoration still possible when someone arrogantly denies the power of the Lord? What makes such recovery possible?**

Rehabilitation is always a possibility for the proud of our day. When a person repents, God honors those who honor Him (1 Sam 2:30). The problem is that people often make excuses, blame others, or just try to hide from the truth. When they do so, they continue to face the factors that cause destruction. When the proud admit that they have sinned, they begin the process of restoration even when there are consequences for the wrong that they did. That is true for leaders in business and government. It is also true among many of our friends, family, and business coworkers. Pride has a way of destroying people. Humble repentance can break the cycle of destruction and begin the process of healing and restoration. In the text, the nobles sought him out to restore him to his position. People will seek out the humble and give them second chances as well.

**12. Verse 37. How has this experience changed the king? How had the patient ministry of Daniel made this possible?**

At first, the king considered himself the greatest of men and the author of all his kingdom’s good. The discipline has given him a different viewpoint. He knows that man is nothing without God. His rule is

limited, but God's kingdom includes everything and will never end. The king acknowledged the sovereignty of God, which he had learned the hard way. The patient witness of Daniel through words and actions demonstrated that to this king and others over and over. Daniel knew that God was in charge and so he did not want to violate God's food laws (Dan. 1: 8) or give up his daily time with the Lord in prayer (Dan. 6:10). He consistently spoke of the power of the Lord, leading kings to praise God on several occasions (Dan. 2:47, 4:34f, and 6:26f). God was able to use Daniel's words and actions to show the dominion of God.

**13. How does Daniel show us how to live humbly in a pagan world? How will we change our world if we do so?**

The kings that Daniel served were among the greatest that the world has ever seen. Their power and majesty didn't change the way that Daniel lived before his God. He knew that the true God was greater than kings like Nebuchadnezzar so that he lived and worshipped God no matter what the kings did or said. Daniel was willing to learn (chapter 1) but gained the respect of the kings who called on him in challenging times because they could trust his words and knew that Daniel was humble. He was a man living in a pagan world who did not let that world control his character or his actions. As we live in a pagan world, we must continue to realize that God is in control of our lives and of our planet. We must not compromise our faith or character. Only then can we witness for the Lord to those who stumble with pride. It is essential to share God's truth so that a few might be humble and repent before they drag down themselves and the world.

**For now or later - taking the next step.**

Deep 1 When was the last time that you declared that God created and still preserves the world with someone?

Deep 2 When have you enjoyed God's restoration after you caused yourself pain by being selfish or arrogant?

Deep 3 What area in your life do you need to acknowledge God's gifts and let God control?

## 5. Forgetting God's lessons

### Daniel 5:1-31

#### Life is better when you learn from other's mistakes

Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar and coregent of Babylonia with his father. While his father is away leading the army, Belshazzar celebrates with a drunken orgy displaying the splendor of his kingdom with a thousand of his nobles. Never mind that the Persians surround the city. He feels he is safe behind the walls and orders the vessels of the Jewish temple to be used for his feast. It is an act of arrogance and disrespect for the true God. God responds by writing the judgment of the king on the wall letting the drunken fool know that he will pay for his disrespect of God with his life. He should have remembered the warning that God gave Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4. After being forced to live like a wild animal, Nebuchadnezzar regains his senses and praises the "Most High" (Dan. 4:34). Forgetting that lesson will cost Belshazzar his life.

Edmund Burke once said, "Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it." We know that simple truth when we do stupid things over and over. We consistently forget to use a hot pad when we pick something out of the oven or forget to fill our gas tank when we are under a quarter tank of gas. We keep having trouble because we never learn from our mistakes. That is true in spiritual matters. We know a man who destroyed his family with an affair. We hear of a woman who ran off the road after a night of drinking. We have the opportunity to learn from their lives so that hopefully we don't have the same problem in our lives. We need to learn from the lessons of others. We can avoid sins that destroyed their lives and emulate the practices like bible study or caring for their family that brought them blessings. Fools are destined to repeat failures. The wise learn from the lives of others.

The wise have the joy of learning without the pain. A lot of people try to excuse themselves when they fail by saying that they didn't know any better. Sometimes that is true, but often they suffer because they didn't believe that the problems of others should be a warning to them. God wants us to succeed, and so He has filled scriptures with the lessons of saints and sinners. If you desire to see the effects of adultery, look at the story of David in 1 Samuel. If you want to see how murder affects a person, you can look at Cain in Genesis. The Bible contains examples of Godly living like Daniel or Nehemiah as well as good people who do dumb things like Abraham or Peter. Life is better when you learn from the examples of others. You let them have the pain while you gain, and your days are better for it.

#### **1. Have you ever had a time that you saw the "handwriting on the wall"? What did it say, and how did you feel when you got the news?**

There have been times when I saw the handwriting on the wall and wanted something that I knew that I was not going to get at church or in my home. Either the leaders of my church or my wife did not agree that I was or it was pointless to argue my case. Sometimes, I was Ok with it. Other times I was very disappointed that I was not going to get what I thought was the best solution. Let the class talk about times that it was apparent that they were not getting what they wished. Let them talk about what the phrase "handwriting on the wall" means to them.

#### **Read Daniel 5:1-31**

#### **2. Verses 3-4. What did Belshazzar and his guests do that was a great insult to the Lord?**

Nebuchadnezzar had taken the gold and silver vessels from the temple in Jerusalem about 50 years earlier as trophies of his conquest. The goblets were brought to the feast and used to toast pagan gods of gold and silver. This celebration was a deliberate defiance of God's authority (verses 22-24) and a proclamation that the gods of Babylon were greater than the true God. That Belshazzar probably used holy objects of

other nations as well as those of Israel did not change the matter. He may have meant to bolster the confidence of the people by proclaiming that their Gods had shown themselves superior in battle since the army of Medio- Persia was outside the walls of the city at that hour.

**3. Verses 3-4 What are some of the proud or arrogant things that you have seen people do today?**

Most of us know someone who has destroyed their family by alcohol or an affair. Often they claim that they have a right to do those things and that it won't hurt their families. I have known people who have rejected the Lord after a family member dies, or the church refuses to condone a sinful action in which they are engaged. If you look in scripture, you can see David trying to hide his sin with Bathsheba and thinking that because he is the king that he can get away with it. We see Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) believe that they can lie to God and the church. Examples of sin destroying people are all around us. We can ignore those examples or learn from them. What we do can mean we endure pain to learn or miss some pain because we learn from others.

**4. Verse 5. How did God respond to Belshazzar's pride? How do the king and his guest react to the message?**

Excavations of the ancient ruins of Babylon have shown a throne room 170 by 56 feet with walls washed with gypsum. In these walls were written the four words "mene, mene, tekel, parsin by the fingers of a hand that appeared out of thin air. The king who had been so confident a few moments ago now turned pale and filled with terror. It must have been humiliating to the king to lose it before all the dignitaries of his kingdom. He immediately wanted to know what the message meant. Even though it was clear what the four words were since they were written in common Aramaic, he was unsure what the message meant. The four words from God had turned his pride into a panic.

**5. Verse 17. What does Daniel's rejection of the king's rewards say about his character? Why must he tell the king what the message means?**

Even though Daniel does the king's business (Dan. 8:1, 27), it doesn't seem that this king knows him personally. It is the queen mother (verse 10) who remembers what Daniel had done for Nebuchadnezzar and has confidence that Daniel can help her son. Daniel seems to refuse the gifts so that no one thinks that they can buy God's services. He also wants no obligations to a king that the message says will lose his kingdom to the Medes and Persians (verse 28). Daniel's purpose seems to be a spokesman for God. If God wrote the message was written, but no one interpreted it, how would people know that the judgment coming that day was from God? Daniel's message let everyone know the end of the Babylonian kingdom was done by the hand of God. The statue in chapter 2 was about to change from one kingdom to the next, as God had foretold.

**6. Verse 17. What is our duty to others we love when we see them arrogant about their sins? What can we learn from Daniel about how to confront them?**

God often calls us to be His witness when others are arrogant about their sins or ignorant about God's commands. God wants no one to suffer the pain that can come from divorce, alcohol, greed, or a host of other sins. As His servants, we should warn them when we see the truth that others miss. This witness is especially important for those whom we love. Daniel shows us that we can use the examples of people that they know who fell into a similar sin. We can talk about someone whose life has been wracked by divorce to someone who is in adultery or someone who was in an accident because of alcohol. We can use the example of others to warn them about what may happen to them. We also need to be humble as Daniel was. Our witness is not a chance for personal gain. It is a chance to help someone who is in need.

**7. Verse 20. What is the lesson that Daniel says the king had forgotten? What had pride cost Nebuchadnezzar, and how was he restored?**

The story of Nebuchadnezzar reduced to live and act like an animal would have been widely known by those in the king's court. According to Babylonian texts, Belshazzar served a high position in the government only two years after Nebuchadnezzar's death. If that is true, Belshazzar would have been a teenager or young adult when God was punishing his grandfather. He saw what had happened first hand and heard his grandfather's proclamation (Dan. 4:34-35). The almighty God ruled over everything and did not take human pride lightly. Pride had cost Nebuchadnezzar his sanity, and healing would only come when he acknowledged God as the ruler of all. His grandson had forgotten that simple lesson, and it would cost him dearly.

**8. Verse 20. What scripture or life lessons should we pay attention to as we live out our lives?**

Those who study the Bible or open up their eyes to human existence see the lessons of sin all the time. We see how David thought that he could hide his adultery and murder only to be punished by God. We see how Jonah felt that he could walk away from God's commands by going far away. The lessons of scripture are abundant. The Bible shares the weaknesses of saints so that we can learn from their shortcomings and their triumphs. Unlike other historical books, the Bible shows God's people in full transparency so that we can learn from them. If our eyes are open, we can learn from the sins and strengths of others around us. We can see the politician who lies regularly and the quiet saint who is always willing to help their neighbor. Look at the outcome of their activities and avoid actions that lead to harm. Cling to those that bring blessings.

**9. Verse 22. What is Daniel's charge from God against Belshazzar?**

Daniel brings a stinging rebuke starting with the words, "but you, his son." Nebuchadnezzar had repented, but Belshazzar had not learned. With his enemy at the gate, the monarch holds a drunken party for 1000 of his nobles. By using the vessels of the true God to worship the gods of Babylon, he is guilty of idolatry and pride. He forgot the lessons that his grandfather learned and magnified the sin by acting like he was a god who was in control of his future. He worshipped the creation instead of the creator who had shown Himself through Daniel on several occasions. Belshazzar did not honor the God who holds his life and kingdom in his hands.

**10. What is the price that people pay for forgetting the lessons of life and scripture?**

Those who forget God are doomed to be at the mercy of Satan and the power of evil. Think about the hold that lust, greed, or drugs can have on a person. Nothing is more important than having more of those things. People forget the consequences that those sins bring and fail to see the effect that those problems cause on their life. Slowly they crash and burn as evil controls them, and they slowly drift away from the Lord. Belshazzar will die on the day of the message from God. Many who dabble with sin will have a slow death that you can see as people who once seemed to have everything soon have little of their former glory. God will not be mocked. If you forget God and His lessons, you will pay the price.

**11. Verse 26. What does Daniel say is the meaning of the inscription on the wall? Why do you think that people couldn't read the message before?**

The words were simple and in a language that everyone there understood. Translated, they would have said, "Numbered, numbered, weighed, and divided." The problem was not being able to read the words but rather know what those words meant. Daniel puts those words in God's context, explaining that God has numbered the king's days. God has weighed his life and found it wanting. His kingdom will be dissolved and given to the people of the Medes and Persians. It is undoubtedly not what the king wants to hear, but it is evident that Belshazzar accepts that the meaning is correct. The last two verses of this chapter record the conquering of the city and the death of this monarch. History tells us that the date was October 12, 539 BC.

### **12. Do people always get a second chance when they ignore God's warnings?**

Our temptation is to think that God should always give second chances when people sin. Nebuchadnezzar seems to have gotten one in chapter 4. His grandson doesn't seem to get one in chapter 5. The lesson is that sometimes there is no second chance. One night of drinking can lead to a fatal car crash. A single word of anger can lead to a relationship that will never heal. People cry that the Lord should save them. The messages are all around us. God is giving warnings, but we often don't listen. Abraham says plainly to the rich man in Jesus' parable, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead." (Luke 16:31) Sometimes, people's hearts are so hard that more chances will accomplish nothing.

### **13. How is life better when we learn from the mistakes of others?**

Belshazzar should have learned from the lessons of his grandfather. Nebuchadnezzar had paid the price, but that was long ago. It was easy to forget, and now the grandson will pay the price. If there is anything that strikes me about this text, it is that you have to keep learning the lessons. Continue in the scripture so that the Lord has the chance to teach you the again and again. Just look at the faith of the people listed in Hebrews 11, and the blessings faith brought to them. Look at some of the villains and some of the saints who gave in to sin and foolish acts. See the price that they paid and repent of your sins. God wants you to succeed in life. He will show you the truth so that you know how life should be. Our Lord will also forgive and restore. God did it for Nebuchadnezzar, and He will help you when you fail. Living is better when you learn from the mistakes of others. Just know that God will help you learn from your own mistakes when you repent so that sins don't destroy you like Belshazzar.

#### **For now or later - taking the next step.**

Deep 1 If you were struggling with a problem in life, who would you seek out for advice? How bad would it have to get before you seek out other's advice?

Deep 2 When someone asks you for advice, how honest are you when it is apparent that sin or foolishness has caught them?

Deep 3 How have you benefited from the lessons of others? Can you give an example?



## **6 Living with an advantage**

### **Daniel 6: 1-24**

#### **Love God so much that you can't live without Him.**

Daniel loved God so much that he didn't want to live without Him. He had the chance to show the world how much He loved God, and God loves His people. Ironically, the problem begins because Daniel is so honest and loyal that the new monarch wants to set Daniel above all the other administrators of the kingdom. Jealousy takes hold of the other administrators, and they devise a plan to attack Daniel by outlawing the worship of our Lord. Daniel ignores the law and continues to pray to God even though he surely knows that he will be caught. He chooses God over life because he has no desire to live even a single day without the Lord. The king throws Daniel in the lion's den for his "crime," and the Lord works a miracle by sparing Daniel's life. The king marvels and witnesses to the majesty and power of God. Daniel's devotion to God changes the king and the kingdom.

How much do you love God? Would you be willing to give up the advantages that you have in the Lord for even a day? Sometimes, I think that we take for granted the benefits that we have as Christians. We have forgiveness from the cross, and we have a God who listens to our prayers and helps us. Christian friends surround us with values and are willing to assist us in life. Like those around Daniel, people often get jealous of the advantages that we have in Christ. They want to try to take away the gifts that we have in Christ. They will schedule work, activities, or hobbies on Sunday morning so you can't worship. They will try to make us adopt their destructive values so that we fit in with them at work and play. They even promise trinkets of blessings if we follow them and leave God. Those with a strong faith who refuse their offers will find the world making it difficult as we choose the Lord over other things.

I am not sure that Daniel was ever confident that the Lord would save him in the lion's den. At 80 or so years old, I don't think he cared. He just didn't want to live whatever years he had left without his Lord. God had been with him and given him success in a foreign land. God had shaped his character so that even foreign kings admired him and listened to him. He didn't want to be without God for even a moment, and we shouldn't either. Faith is not something you put on when it is comfortable. It is a lifestyle that you live every day. God brings blessings to His people and helps them to be people that others will admire and be jealous of their lifestyle. He gives us a character that stands out and provides for us every day. To leave God and bow to the world and its gods means self-destruction and a loss of everything that God continues to give. Those who love God so much that they can't live without Him are the most fortunate people in the world.

#### **1. What would you lose if worshipping or praying in public was illegal?**

I think of the advantages that I have because I am a Christian. There is a comfort that comes when I worship the Lord. There are friendships that I have made in the Christian church. There is also learning that we have in the sermon and the bible class when we worship on Sunday morning. All of those would be lost if I didn't have the chance to worship with the Lord. Praying in secret, hoping that no one caught me wouldn't seem to be as powerful to me as praying with others. Let the group talk about what they lose when they miss church for a week or two because of a snowstorm or because they have to work. That may give them an idea of what is missing if they could no longer worship because it was illegal.

#### **Read Daniel 6: 1-24**

#### **2. Verses 3-4. How has Daniel's walk with God shaped his life? How do Daniel's virtues cause jealousy in others?**

By the time of chapter 6, Daniel has been serving as a public servant for over sixty years. His walk with the Lord has given him a reputation as being honest and loyal. People probably knew that Daniel was the one with the wisdom to read the warning given to the last Babylonian ruler (Dan. 5). Darius, the Persian, is a wise ruler who may have called Daniel out of semi-retirement to appoint him as one of three principal administrators over the whole kingdom. His exceptional qualities lead Darius to plan to put Daniel over the entire kingdom. This news upsets the other administrators who may have feared Daniel's honesty or were jealous because he was a Jew. They likely feared that his elevation would bring to light any illegal activity that they were doing. Getting rid of Daniel may have been an act of self-preservation.

### **3. Verses 3-4. How does a lengthy walk with God change a Christian? What benefits does faith bring to our lives and the lives of others?**

Those who have walked faithfully with the Lord for a long time become more like God. Imagine being in your eighties like Daniel, and no one was able to find a time when you lied or were lazy in any way. Today, a mature Christian is often someone who is admired by their children and their friends. They are people who often impact others with their kindness and honesty daily. People learn to trust you and want to know what you think about their lives and their projects. Yes, there will be people who mock you for your faith, but even more, people will admire how Christ has helped you to build a strong family and want to have you as a friend because they can count on you as a friend. People like Daniel are a blessing to all those around them. If we are fortunate to be someone like Daniel, we will be one of the most blessed people in the world.

### **4. Verse 7. What is the plan that Daniel's enemies conceive to get rid of him?**

Having found no fault in Daniel (v.5), they decide that Daniel's faith is his one weakness. In coming to the king, they avoid any reference to Daniel in their plea. They come to the king as a large group with a simple idea that they sell as a way to unify the new Persian kingdom. Have everyone bow to the king so that the loyal Babylonians would become loyal Persians. Daniel's character and faith are so strong and so public that the other administrators seem confident that he will not obey such an edit. They even come up with the punishment of death in the lion's den so that there is no way that Daniel can escape. The plan appealed to the king's vanity, and a large number of administrators present implied that all the leaders endorsed the plan.

### **5. Verse 7. How does Satan attack Christians today? In what ways does evil attack our faith?**

Jealousy is still a way that Satan attacks Christians. When a Christian is honest and loyal at work, it is bound to make others look bad. It may be words from a coworker that tells us not to work so hard or lies spread about us to make us look bad. In recent years, the Christian family is under attack as the media promote alternate styles of living. The world tries to plan activities for Sunday mornings so that a Christian finds it harder to go to Sunday worship or attempts to lure us to greed or lust by making it look reasonable and attractive. Satan wants to pull us away from the Lord and His values. He tries to make us want to be like the world, even though that will cause us a great deal of pain.

### **6. Verse 10. How does Daniel react to the decree? What does it show about Daniel's values?**

The trap was set for Daniel, and he didn't change a thing. He knew that the decree was signed, and yet he didn't alter his lifestyle or try to hide his faithfulness to the Lord. I guess that he wanted time with the Lord more than anything in life. I picture him laying a copy of the mandate on the ground before him as he prayed to the Lord, asking for the Lord's help in dealing with this edit. He didn't even care if others saw him. He left his windows open as he prayed toward Jerusalem. It may have been that he was an older man who had lived for so long with the Lord that he found it impossible to give up the Lord who had made him who he was. God had raised him from a captive to the second in command of the kingdom. He

realized that without God, he was nothing. Better to die a few years early than to spend a single day without the Lord.

### **7. How do our priorities in life show whether we highly value God?**

There is an old question that goes like this, “If you were to be put on trial for being a Christian, what evidence would they be able to bring?” They might point to our weekly worship, our service to the community and others in the church, or even our time of Bible study and prayer. When those things are a priority in life, we have put the Lord first as Daniel did. Those priorities also set the path for you in life. Your behavior is changed, and your stress levels go down because you depend on the Lord. You may not be able to see the faith that is on a person’s heart, but you can see the impact of that faith on a person’s life. Their priorities and lifestyle will show their connection to God.

### **8. Verse 13. What charge do Daniel’s enemies bring against him? Why do you think the king is so distressed?**

Notice how the enemies bring the charge against Daniel. The text gives the impression that it didn’t take long for Daniel to ignore the decree. It may have even been the first or second day. At first, Daniel’s enemies do not mention his name but just bring up the fact that someone has not kept the decree (v.12). It is only after the king affirms that the order must stand that they tell him that Daniel, who is “one of the exiles from Judah,” is the one who has disobeyed. The king’s displeasure does not seem to be against Daniel. He appears to be upset at himself for having allowed these men to trick him. He was losing a loyal administrator about whom he thought highly. The king tries to find ways to save Daniel, but the plan was seemingly foolproof, and the king gives the order for Daniel’s execution.

### **9. Verse 13. Daniel knew about the decree before he knelt to pray. He could have made a deal with the king before he broke the law. Why should we not compromise our devotion to God to save ourselves?**

Compromise is often trying to have two gods. What would Daniel have been willing to give up to save himself? Would he have stopped praying for a week or asked to go on a long trip so that he was away from the palace for the next month? Both options would have been turning his back on God. Many Christians try to make compromises. They will miss half of the Sunday worship services for children’s sports. They will participate in greed or lying at work, telling themselves that this will be the only time. The truth is that there is no such thing as compromise. “You shall have no other gods before me.” Exodus 20:3 lays out God’s desire pretty clearly. If God was to be first in Daniel’s life, he needed to obey God and not the decree.

### **10. Verse 22. What does Daniel say to the king when God delivers him from the lion’s den? Why is it important to give glory to God?**

I think that it is important that Daniel honors the king (v.21) and then gives God glory. Daniel shows himself to be noble. He doesn’t ask for God’s punishment on the king. He shows himself to be loyal to the king, who will not wrong the king now. His actions put him in direct contrast to the enemies who had plotted to deceive the king. It convicts those who had plotted against Daniel. They received the punishment that they wanted Daniel to receive. Daniel also reminds everyone that this is a miracle from God. Daniel had placed himself in God’s hands, and God delivered him. It would seem that God sent an angel to be a companion to Daniel through the night so that Daniel could rest easy with the lions nearby. His witness to God elevates God in the eyes of all who were there. A miracle had happened, and Daniel gave glory to God so that others might give glory to God as well. His words cause the king to give glory to God, as well. (v.26-27)

**11. What should our goal be when we face persecution? What change can God create in the world in difficult times?**

Our first thought when trouble comes is our comfort. Daniel's first thought seems to be to give glory to the Lord. Daniel puts the Lord before himself because he recognizes that the Lord is more important. He prayed when he could have tried to save himself (v.10). Daniel refuses the gifts the king wants to give in chapter 5 and tells a king that the sovereign Lord has decided that God has numbered the king's days. He also warns Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4 to repent so that God might spare him from judgment. Our goal should always be to give God glory. How will our illness or problem give others a chance to see the greatness of God? What is God's timing, so that He receives the highest glory? We can think of ourselves and ask God to serve us, or we can think of God and let Him use our blessing and troubles to make a difference in our world.

**12. Verse 26. What has the miracle shown the king? How has Daniel's commitment to God been a witness to the king and the kingdom?**

It would seem that a revelation came over Darius. Joy had replaced the despair that he was feeling because he had been tricked into executing the one person the king thought he could trust. At this moment, the king has seen the power and sovereignty of the true God. Daniel's God could save His people whenever He wanted to. He has a kingdom that will never end. He even urges people to stand in fear of the God of Daniel. That doesn't mean that Darius became a believer. It does mean that the king understood that you don't mess with the true God. Amazingly, the Jewish people had become lukewarm in their faith by this time while both Darius and Nebuchadnezzar sing the praise of God. Daniel's example of faith brought honor to God from kings and the people of a foreign nation.

**13. What does the world gain if God's people commit to him rather than giving in to the world?**

If Daniel had compromised his faith and either worshipped the king or just stopped worshipping God, Darius and the Persians would never have had an opportunity to see the power and dominion of the true God. He would have only been another conquered god to them. We don't have to protest when the world or our culture thinks little of our God. We just have to continue to worship Him boldly and openly so that our actions witness to the greatness and love of our God. People will come and ask us why we pray or keep the Godly character of Daniel. At those times, we give glory to God and let God use that to change lives. God's people often fail the world by leading people to think that we believe God is not important. We have a tremendous advantage in our faith. When we practice our faith, we allow others to have that advantage with us.

**For now or later - taking the next step.**

Deep 1 What would you miss if you suddenly could not pray or go to worship at your congregation?

Deep 2 Where do you feel your faith vulnerable in today's culture? In what ways is the culture making it harder to be a Christian?

Deep 3 What would your family or friends lose if you stopped practicing your faith and lived like the culture instead of Christ?

**1. Drawing the line**  
**Daniel 1:1-21**  
**Balancing faith and foreign culture**

Imagine if Russia were to invade America in 2025 and take the brightest children from our wealthy families. In Russia, they would be educated and indoctrinated so that they could serve the Russian nation. Such is the picture at the beginning of the book of Daniel. He and other Jewish children from the royal family were taken and mixed with other captives to be assimilated into the Babylonian culture so that they could serve the Babylonian nation. Where do you draw the line between being part of the new culture and staying true to your Jewish faith and roots? Daniel and the others decided to stand firm on the Jewish food laws. Daniel is the story of their courage in staying faithful to the Lord and not giving in to the culture that surrounded them. It also shows the hand of the Lord working behind the scenes to help them keep their faith.

All of us have assimilated to some degree to our culture. Our thoughts, attitudes, and traditions all grow out of the culture in which we live. That is not all bad. However, what should we do when the culture opposes our faith and Christian values? What do we do when children's sports compete with Sunday worship? What do we do when the business we work for does shady things? While America is supposed to be a Christian nation, there are many places where it gets uncomfortable to live out our faith. Our challenge is not to live as hermits so that we can enjoy the benefits of our culture while keeping true to God's commands. Like Daniel, that often takes courage and requires that we figure out where to draw the line in our life. As we see in this first chapter, the Lord will help us in our struggle to be faithful and will bring rewards to those who do not abandon Him as they live out their lives.

Daniel's faith was his most precious asset in life. God gave him and his friends opportunities and wisdom that others did not have. Their character and values made them appealing to others. Their relationship with the Lord allowed them to call on the Lord in prayer and depend on God when things got rough. It is still valid for Christians today. Those who live in faith have an advantage that others can't match. When you understand the blessings that you have received from the Lord, you will not let anything get in the way of your bond with the Lord. Nothing is worth losing that advantage. It will not always be easy, but you can count on the Lord to help you when culture tries to keep you from the Lord. You mark your line in the sand and will not let the world cross and push you from the Lord. You stick to your convictions because you have decided that you will not lose the benefits of being a child of God.

**1. What challenges have you faced when you moved from one part of the country to another?**

**Read Daniel 1:1-21**

**2. Verse 3 What qualities did the king desire of the men that were chosen to be educated for Babylonian service?**

**3. Verse 4-5 What methods did the king have for assimilating these young men into the Babylonian culture?**

- 4. Verse 4-5. Why is it beneficial to learn new things and to assimilate into the culture where we live? What do we miss if we live rigorous sectarian lives that distance us from the culture of others around us?**
  
- 5. Verse 8. Where did Daniel draw the line with the Babylonian culture? Why do you think that he was willing to learn their language but not to eat their food?**
  
- 6. In what ways do your beliefs clash with your community's practices? Where do you draw the line?**
  
- 7. Verse 12. What is Daniel's solution to this dilemma? What tone does He use with those in authority, and how does He respect their concerns?**
  
- 8. Verse 12. What can we learn from Daniel about dealing with clashes with our culture?**
  
- 9. Verse 17. How did God honor the four men who were faithful to Him as they used the advantages that they were being?**
  
- 10. Verse 17. How will a balance between faith and culture benefit the Christian who doesn't forget God?**
  
- 11. Verse 20. After three years, what is the result of their diligence to the Lord and their studies?**
  
- 12. How was God preparing Daniel for the future ministry that we see in the rest of the book?**
  
- 13. How does the decision Daniel made change his future in life? How important is it to draw the line and refuse to go along with the culture?**

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 Where do you face clashes between your faith and the expectations of those around you?

Deep 2 Where is God calling you to draw the line in your life so that you can live for Him? What help do you need from the Lord if you are going to be successful at keeping your faith?

Deep 3 What benefits do you see from following the Lord and not giving up your close relationship with God?

**2. Dreams and Destinies**  
**Dan. 2:17-47**  
**God is still in charge of our world and future**

Their prayers began as a plea for their lives in an unjust world. It became a revelation of the majesty of God and the control He has over the world and its future. Nebuchadnezzar threatens to kill all his counselors when they are unable to tell him his dream and what it means. Faced with death, Daniel and his friends turn to God in prayer, asking for mercy. God hears their prayer and reveals to them a message about a boundless God who is in control of the future. Kingdom after kingdom of men will rise and fall, but the kingdom of God will never be destroyed. It will last forever and conquer the nations of the world. Man is imperfect and limited. God is boundless and forever.

There will be times that the culture seems to be against the church. Christians are persecuted around the world and often put to death for their faith. In America, many mock God as weak and think that they are in control of their fate. They build their towers like the tower of Babel in Genesis 11, believing that they can reach the skies and become their gods only to be scattered by the flick of God's finger. Like Daniel, we must turn to our Lord, seeking answers. We will learn that God is in control of the world and will gain confidence that the future will not be controlled by the weak hands of men but by the power of the Almighty. God can do all things and will guide the future of the world.

When we find the world against us, we need to turn to the Lord for answers. Moreover, we must not just ask the Lord to save us but ask the Lord to bring glory to His name. Only when the world recognizes the power and the greatness of our God will things become better. Daniel changed the course of faith for all believers. Even the mighty Nebuchadnezzar gave honor to the true God (verse 47) before the whole kingdom. The Christian's task is not to improve the world by our power but to show that the Lord is in control. We want people to acknowledge our God. We can be part of the Kingdom of God that will conquer the world or be part of the many human kingdoms that will rise and fall because they only have the power of man.

**1. As you look back through history, what are some of the kingdoms that have risen and fallen? Why do you think that has recurred so many times?**

**Read Dan. 2:17-47**

**2. Verse 17. When faced with a crisis, what did Daniel and his friends ask from God? What does verse 21 hint was the mystery that God revealed?**

**3. Verse 17. What does Daniel teach us about praying in the midst of crisis times in our lives?**

**4. Verse 28. How does Daniel focus on the power of God in His answer to the king?**

**5. Verse 28. What does Daniel teach us about where to put our confidence when the world around us is falling apart?**

- 6. Verse 32. What do you notice about the makeup of the kingdom as you progress from the head to the feet? What does it say about the quality of those kingdoms as they grow stronger?**
  
- 7. How has humankind declined as it grows stronger? What does the real value of humanity lie?**
  
- 8. Verse 34. The strongest and last kingdom in the dream has a weakness. What is the vulnerability, and how does it show the weakness of man?**
  
- 9. Verse 44. Who is the fifth kingdom pictured as a rock, and what is its impact on others? What qualities does the text say this kingdom will have?**
  
- 10. Verse 44. How has the kingdom of God overcome the nations of the world? What makes this kingdom different than the others?**
  
- 11. Verse 47. What is the reaction of the king to Daniel's interpretation of his dream?**
  
- 12. How do we bring glory to the Lord in times of crisis?**
  
- 13. During a crisis, why is it better to seek God's glory than to just seek his deliverance from pain and problems?**

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What have you learned about prayer and God's answers to our prayers?

Deep 2 Why is it meaningful and comforting that God has control of the future and controls the nations of the world?

Deep 3 How can you seek to give God glory in your world, and what effect would you like to see from your witness to God's majesty and might?



**3. There is no other God**  
**Daniel 3:1-30**  
**It is about God and not about us**

Whether we are saved or not is not the issue. It is about worshipping God only in our life. As the story progresses, it is perhaps twenty years since the events of chapter 2. The three young men are now administrators in the kingdom of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar has built a statue, and all are to worship it. Our three young men have to make a critical decision of life and death. Will they give in the pressure of the culture, or will they remain faithful to the Lord? What we see is an immovable faith and a confession to the Lord that is one of the greatest in the scripture. They were not ready to abandon God regardless of whether God rescued them from the fire or not. The temptation was just to bow down even if you didn't believe in the statue, yet they would not give in to the culture and turn their backs on God.

We often gravitate toward the popular activities of our culture. That is fine until they clash with our faith walk with the Lord. Like the three men, we have to ask ourselves if we will give in to popular culture because we want to belong or because we are afraid of the threats made if we do not give in. Usually, it is not a matter of life and death like the three men faced. No one asks us to deny God when they want us to play sports on Sunday or lie to a client at our workplace. They just want those "gods" to be given equal place with the true God. Do we have such a love for God that nothing should diminish His place in our life? Are we willing to make the sacrifice of never playing that sport as a kid or seeking a different job with less pay so that we can work for an honest employer? If God is our God, we have to put Him first without any guarantee that God will make things work out to our satisfaction.

Our world, like King Nebuchadnezzar, is often both arrogant and ignorant. They see our God as being nothing. Our only response must be one of faith. For the three men, faith is not based on how things are going in our life. Faith is based on the worth of God. They would rather die than lose the Lord in their lives. Perhaps God would show His power and let the world see that He was indeed God. It would be a witness to the other Jews and the nation of Babylon. Maybe God would allow them to die, and they would be with God in heaven. God is still God, whether He rescues us or makes things work out immediately for us. The actions of the three men challenge our faith and commitment to God. Will we refuse to let the culture we live in erode our faith, or will we stand firm with God and trust Him with our future?

**1. Have you ever had a burn on your skin or a bad sunburn? How did that feel? What would you do to avoid having to go through that experience again?**

**Read Daniel 3:1-30**

**2. Verse 5. What command of the king causes conflict for the three Jews?**

**3. Verse 5 How does our culture challenge our faith? What does that say about how our culture feels about our God?**

**4. Verse 12. How did the three men respond to the king's requirements? Why would others point out their response to the king?**

5. Verse 12. What do we often wrestle with when our culture wants us to defy the Lord? How do others around you feel about your decision?
6. Verse 16. The king thinks that he can persuade the three men to obey his commands. How do the three respond to the king?
7. How do you respond to the world when it tries to pressure you to give in and to compromise your beliefs?
8. Verse 18. What do the three Jews realize about their decision? What is more important to them than life itself?
9. Verse 18. If there is no guarantee that God will save us, why is it still essential to confess God and resist the world?
10. Verse 27. How did God reward their faith? How complete is God's protection for them?
11. How do miracles in our lives bring glory to God? Are the miracles about God or us?
12. Verse 28. How does Nebuchadnezzar respond to the miracle? How should the miracle have impacted him and other Babylonians?
13. Why must faith confront culture when it says that God is not important? What is the danger in the erosion of our belief as we compromise to the world?

**For now or later - taking the next step**

Deep 1 What do you admire most about the three men in the text? How difficult would it have been for you to make the same decision?

Deep 2 Where do you find the culture around you clashing with your faith? What are your choices as you move forward in life?

Deep 3 If you knew that God would not rescue from suffering, how would it affect your decision you're your faith in God?

**4. Live humbly and acknowledge God**  
**Daniel 4:19-37**  
**God punishes the proud and works through the humble**

Pride rears its head at times when we are doing well only to bring us to our knees when things go wrong. Nebuchadnezzar is walking on the heights of Babylon, a magnificent city that he has built with his own hands. It was the place of the majestic “hanging gardens” and defensive walls around the city, making it seem impregnable. Sadly, the lessons learned in chapters 2 and 3 were gone. He had begun to think of himself as a god. The Lord Almighty warns the king in a dream that his pride will be his downfall. Nebuchadnezzar calls on Daniel to interpret the dream, and Daniel painfully tells the king to renounce his pride or face the consequences. This text is the story of the danger of pride and the king’s realization of God’s sovereignty over everything.

Men still play God. Listen to the news, and you will hear politicians and businessmen and women talking like they control their destiny. They believe that they can solve the problems of the world by creating programs and technology that can make this world a heaven on earth. They act like they don’t need the true God. Most of them suffer humiliation when their dreams don’t come to reality. Sadly, few learn painful lessons when life goes wrong. Like Daniel, we may find ourselves in a position to tell friends and relatives to renounce their pride. We certainly should spend time in prayer, acknowledging that the Lord is in control and asking Him to guide the future instead of leaving it in the hands who play god every day in our world. Only the true God can save us from the many who would try to control our lives and the world because they think they have made what good things that the world contains.

Good things come from the hands of God. We should rejoice when life is good as it was in ancient Babylon. We should also thank the Lord for the many blessings that He has brought in those good times. Daniel sees what the king has forgotten. He realizes that all the good things in the world have come from the hand of an Almighty God. When we take credit for the good things in life without giving God credit for the resources or skills that we have been given, we put ourselves in danger of a fall. The fall may be a punishment from God or just the consequences of pride gone wrong. As we see such pride in others, we need to warn them. The pride and arrogance of others can be a danger to those who they govern. Indeed, the pride of Nebuchadnezzar affected the whole kingdom. The arrogance of leaders can hurt countries and all who live in those nations.

**1. How would you share a piece of bad news with a friend?**

**Read Daniel 4:19-37**

**2. Verse 22. How is the reign of Nebuchadnezzar described in the dream? How do you think the king felt about all that he had accomplished (see v. 30)?**

**3. Verse 22. Who do you give praise to when life is going well? Are you more likely to give thanks to God or to ask Him for help?**

**4. Verse 25. What is the punishment that Nebuchadnezzar will face for his arrogance? How is it the opposite of what he is at the time of the dream?**

5. Verse 25. Why does God punish the proud and arrogant? See verse 17 for help.
6. Verse 27. What was Daniel's advice for the king? What was Daniel hoping that would happen if the king followed his advice?
7. Why is Daniel's advice still the message that Christians should proclaim to the world? What is the danger if the world and its leaders don't listen?
8. Verse 29. How does God show grace in the text? How did the king treat this time of grace?
9. Verse 31. How does pride lead to a fall? What do you expect will happen to someone and those who are close to them when someone ignores God?
10. Verse 34. What leads to the king's restoration? What does he say that shows that he now understands the message of the dream?
11. Is restoration still possible when someone arrogantly denies the power of the Lord? What makes such recovery possible?
12. Verse 37. How has this experience changed the king? How had the patient ministry of Daniel made this possible?
13. How does Daniel show us how to live humbly in a pagan world? How will we change our world if we do so?

**For now or later - taking the next step.**

Deep 1 When was the last time that you declared that God created and still preserves the world with someone?

Deep 2 When have you enjoyed God's restoration after you caused yourself pain by being selfish or arrogant?

Deep 3 What area in your life do you need to acknowledge God's gifts and let God control?

## **5. Forgetting God's lessons**

### **Daniel 5:1-31**

#### **Life is better when you learn from other's mistakes**

Belshazzar was the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar and coregent of Babylonia with his father. While his father is away leading the army, Belshazzar celebrates with a drunken orgy displaying the splendor of his kingdom with a thousand of his nobles. Never mind that the Persians surround the city. He feels he is safe behind the walls and orders the vessels of the Jewish temple to be used for his feast. It is an act of arrogance and disrespect for the true God. God responds by writing the judgment of the king on the wall letting the drunken fool know that he will pay for his disrespect of God with his life. He should have remembered the warning that God gave Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 4. After being forced to live like a wild animal, Nebuchadnezzar regains his senses and praises the "Most High" (Dan. 4:34). Forgetting that lesson will cost Belshazzar his life.

Edmund Burke once said, "Those who don't know history are destined to repeat it." We know that simple truth when we do stupid things over and over. We consistently forget to use a hot pad when we pick something out of the oven or forget to fill our gas tank when we are under a quarter tank of gas. We keep having trouble because we never learn from our mistakes. That is true in spiritual matters. We know a man who destroyed his family with an affair. We hear of a woman who ran off the road after a night of drinking. We have the opportunity to learn from their lives so that hopefully we don't have the same problem in our lives. We need to learn from the lessons of others. We can avoid sins that destroyed their lives and emulate the practices like bible study or caring for their family that brought them blessings. Fools are destined to repeat failures. The wise learn from the lives of others.

The wise have the joy of learning without the pain. A lot of people try to excuse themselves when they fail by saying that they didn't know any better. Sometimes that is true, but often they suffer because they didn't believe that the problems of others should be a warning to them. God wants us to succeed, and so He has filled scriptures with the lessons of saints and sinners. If you desire to see the effects of adultery, look at the story of David in 1 Samuel. If you want to see how murder affects a person, you can look at Cain in Genesis. The Bible contains examples of Godly living like Daniel or Nehemiah as well as good people who do dumb things like Abraham or Peter. Life is better when you learn from the examples of others. You let them have the pain while you gain, and your days are better for it.

1. Have you ever had a time that you saw the "handwriting on the wall"? What did it say, and how did you feel when you got the news?

#### **Read Daniel 5:1-31**

2. Verses 3-4. What did Belshazzar and his guests do that was a great insult to the Lord?

3. Verses 3-4 What are some of the proud or arrogant things that you have seen people do today?

4. Verse 5. How did God respond to Belshazzar's pride? How do the king and his guest react to the message?

5. Verse 17. What does Daniel's rejection of the king's rewards say about his character? Why must he tell the king what the message means?
6. Verse 17. What is our duty to others we love when we see them arrogant about their sins? What can we learn from Daniel about how to confront them?
7. Verse 20. What is the lesson that Daniel says the king had forgotten? What had pride cost Nebuchadnezzar, and how was he restored?
8. Verse 20. What scripture or life lessons should we pay attention to as we live out our lives?
9. Verse 22. What is Daniel's charge from God against Belshazzar?
10. What is the price that people pay for forgetting the lessons of life and scripture?
11. Verse 26. What does Daniel say is the meaning of the inscription on the wall? Why do you think that people couldn't read the message before?
12. Do people always get a second chance when they ignore God's warnings?
13. How is life better when we learn from the mistakes of others?

**For now or later - taking the next step.**

Deep 1 If you were struggling with a problem in life, who would you seek out for advice? How bad would it have to get before you seek out other's advice?

Deep 2 When someone asks you for advice, how honest are you when it is apparent that sin or foolishness has caught them?

Deep 3 How have you benefited from the lessons of others? Can you give an example?

## **6 Living with an advantage**

### **Daniel 6: 1-24**

#### **Love God so much that you can't live without Him.**

Daniel loved God so much that he didn't want to live without Him. He had the chance to show the world how much He loved God, and God loves His people. Ironically, the problem begins because Daniel is so honest and loyal that the new monarch wants to set Daniel above all the other administrators of the kingdom. Jealousy takes hold of the other administrators, and they devise a plan to attack Daniel by outlawing the worship of our Lord. Daniel ignores the law and continues to pray to God even though he surely knows that he will be caught. He chooses God over life because he has no desire to live even a single day without the Lord. The king throws Daniel in the lion's den for his "crime," and the Lord works a miracle by sparing Daniel's life. The king marvels and witnesses to the majesty and power of God. Daniel's devotion to God changes the king and the kingdom.

How much do you love God? Would you be willing to give up the advantages that you have in the Lord for even a day? Sometimes, I think that we take for granted the benefits that we have as Christians. We have forgiveness from the cross, and we have a God who listens to our prayers and helps us. Christian friends surround us with values and are willing to assist us in life. Like those around Daniel, people often get jealous of the advantages that we have in Christ. They want to try to take away the gifts that we have in Christ. They will schedule work, activities, or hobbies on Sunday morning so you can't worship. They will try to make us adopt their destructive values so that we fit in with them at work and play. They even promise trinkets of blessings if we follow them and leave God. Those with a strong faith who refuse their offers will find the world making it difficult as we choose the Lord over other things.

I am not sure that Daniel was ever confident that the Lord would save him in the lion's den. At 80 or so years old, I don't think he cared. He just didn't want to live whatever years he had left without his Lord. God had been with him and given him success in a foreign land. God had shaped his character so that even foreign kings admired him and listened to him. He didn't want to be without God for even a moment, and we shouldn't either. Faith is not something you put on when it is comfortable. It is a lifestyle that you live every day. God brings blessings to His people and helps them to be people that others will admire and be jealous of their lifestyle. He gives us a character that stands out and provides for us every day. To leave God and bow to the world and its gods means self-destruction and a loss of everything that God continues to give. Those who love God so much that they can't live without Him are the most fortunate people in the world.

#### **1. What would you lose if worshipping or praying in public was illegal?**

#### **Read Daniel 6: 1-24**

#### **2. Verses 3-4. How has Daniel's walk with God shaped his life? How do Daniel's virtues cause jealousy in others?**

#### **3. Verses 3-4. How does a lengthy walk with God change a Christian? What benefits does faith bring to our lives and the lives of others?**

4. Verse 7. What is the plan that Daniel's enemies conceive to get rid of him?
5. Verse 7. How does Satan attack Christians today? In what ways does evil attack our faith?
6. Verse 10. How does Daniel react to the decree? What does it show about Daniel's values?
7. How do our priorities in life show whether we highly value God?
8. Verse 13. What charge do Daniel's enemies bring against him? Why do you think the king is so distressed?
9. Verse 13. Daniel knew about the decree before he knelt to pray. He could have made a deal with the king before he broke the law. Why should we not compromise our devotion to God to save ourselves?
10. Verse 22. What does Daniel say to the king when God delivers him from the lion's den? Why is it important to give glory to God?
11. What should our goal be when we face persecution? What change can God create in the world in difficult times?
12. Verse 26. What has the miracle shown the king? How has Daniel's commitment to God been a witness to the king and the kingdom?
13. What does the world gain if God's people commit to him rather than giving in to the world?

**For now or later - taking the next step.**

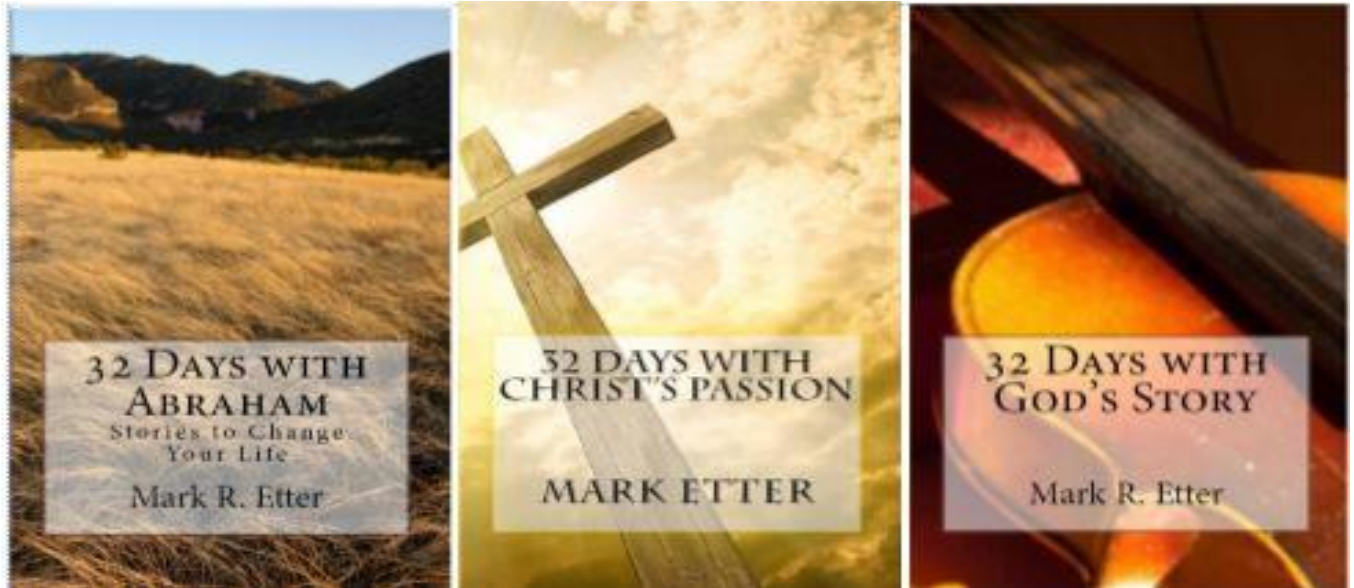
Deep 1 What would you miss if you suddenly could not pray or go to worship at your congregation?

Deep 2 Where do you feel your faith vulnerable in today's culture? In what ways is the culture making it harder to be a Christian?

Deep 3 What would your family or friends lose if you stopped practicing your faith and lived like the culture instead of Christ?



## Also Available from Rev. Mark Etter



**32 devotions to grow your faith and 12 reproducible Bible studies to share in your church or small group available on Amazon in softcover or Kindle**

These three books are designed to be a tool that brings you closer to Christ. Each book has 32 devotions with depth to help you dig below the surface and understand the context. Each devotion is based on a single story and lays out the events in an organized way to help you comprehend the deeper meanings in the passage and then apply them to your life. Each book also includes twelve bible studies that are meant to be shared. You can copy the student guides for your church or small group bible studies. The student guides are formatted for easy reproduction. Each Bible study is connected to one of the devotions and to a leader's guide so that you can feel confident leading others to understand God's word. The hope is that you enjoy the book with its devotions and studies and let the Holy Spirit change your life through them. God is ready to sit down with you through these studies and change your life.

### **About the author**

Rev. Mark Etter has been a pastor for over thirty-five years and is currently the pastor of Bethany Lutheran Church in Erlanger, KY. Rev. Etter has published several books of Adult Bible studies and numerous devotions and youth studies with Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis. He has been active in the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod as an LWML counselor, evangelism chairman, coach for pastors, and circuit counselor. He and his wife, Joan, have three grown children and two grandchildren.

## Did you know?

*Here are seven questions that are answered in this study. The page and question number in this study are given after each question.*

- 1.** Where did Daniel draw the line with the Babylonian culture? Why do you think that he was willing to learn their language but not to eat their food? (Page 6, Question 5)
- 2.** What does Daniel teach us about praying in the midst of crisis times in our lives? (Page 10, Question 3)
- 3.** What do Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego realize about their decision not to bow down to the statue? What is more important to them than life itself? (Page 15, Question 8)
- 4.** Why must faith confront culture when it says that God is not important? What is the danger in the erosion of our belief as we compromise to the world? (Page 16, Question 13)
- 5.** Why does God punish the proud and arrogant? (Page 18, Question 5)
- 6.** Do people always get a second chance when they ignore God's warnings? (Page 24, Question 12)
- 7.** How does a lengthy walk with God change a Christian? What benefits does faith bring to our lives and the lives of others? (Page 26, Question 3)

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