



INTRANSITION GROUPZINE DANIEL BIBLE STUDY

A SIX-WEEK BIBLE STUDY FOR GRADUATING SENIORS
FROM INTRANSITION GROUPZINE

InTransition equips and prepares graduating seniors to transition to post-graduation life and make an impact for Christ in the world. Single life, finances, life-transitions, the will of God, a theology of work, evangelism in the real world: InTransition addresses all the critical issues of a successful transition from campus—a resource for the last and most neglected phase of campus discipleship.

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INTRODUCTION

The prophetic book of Daniel is the record of four Hebrews who were taken into captivity in Babylon after Nebuchadnezzar attacked Israel in 598 B.C. No older than college students at the beginning of their captivity, they were trained to serve in the palace of the king. “Ten times better than all the rest,” (Daniel 1:20) these four set themselves apart as different from the other captives and palace officials. Because of their *walks with the Lord*, their *relationships with others* in the palace, and their *excellent work*, they were able to draw praise to God—so much so that the wicked king of a pagan nation exclaimed, “How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation” (Daniel 4:3, NIV).

The book of Daniel was written to be a testimony to the sovereign, enduring glory of God. Since our lives are to be that too, there is much here we should learn. Since Daniel and his friends were able to make that glory known in an entirely secular environment, there is also much that those in the marketplace should be able to emulate.

Now, there are three ways you can make use of this material. The first is as a small-group Bible study. Let me suggest that you grab some other seniors who are headed for the marketplace and study it as a small group. You couldn’t find content more appropriate for your last semester. If this is how you choose to use it, then the article that follows will serve as the leader’s guide for the group’s facilitator. The Bible study questions follow the article; just make photocopies for everyone in the group. In addition to the leader’s guide, you’ll find an answer key in the “References” section in the back of this Groupzine.

You could also use it as a personal Bible study or devotional. Read the chapter in Daniel and answer the study questions yourself. When you’re done, read over the notes for that chapter in the Daniel article.

Or, last, simply read the article and ignore the questions. But if you really want to get the most out of it, when the article asks you to read the chapter in Daniel, read the chapter in Daniel.

It doesn’t matter how you choose to study about this amazing man from history, as long as you do, for his life and ministry provide a template for the spiritual impact we all desire in our place of work.

DANIEL

Wild ministry success
in a secular environment

By Tim Henderson

DANIEL 1: QUALIFIED TO SERVE

The book opens with a brief account of the Babylonian captivity. If you'd like to get a slightly broader context, read 2 Chronicles 36. The important thing to understand is that God was judging Judah, and allowing a wicked nation to subdue them, in response to years of sin and idolatry. This was warned of by the prophets repeatedly. Jeremiah predicted this coming judgment, and he also foretold that it would last for 70 years, at which time God would restore His people. It would be helpful for you to read Jeremiah 25:1-14 and 29:1-14 to see this.

Walk with God. It was the custom of Babylon to take the best young men from conquered nations and train them to serve in the palace. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were among those chosen. As part of the training process, the Babylonians attempted to give them each a new name, language, culture, and diet. All of this they submitted to except for one element—the diet.

It's curious why the diet, of all things, would be unacceptable to Daniel and his friends. The reason is this: the food from the king's table would have been offered to pagan idols. To eat this food would be to participate in idol worship—something a faithful Jew could not do. You could change Daniel's name, you could take away his language and make him read your books, but he would not participate in the worship of anyone but the one true God. His walk with God was preeminent.

Relationships. So, what did he do when informed of this unholy diet? Did he spit the wine in the king's face and call him an idolater? No. Tactfully, he asked for permission to not eat this food. He said, "Please." Daniel was building relationships. He was thinking long term. He was behaving in a way that would help him win favor with the people for whom, and with whom, he worked.

Then he made a proposition. "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." Daniel was making a pledge. He was saying in effect, "If you will allow us to obey God, we won't let you down. We will be the best servants in the entire palace." Because of the grace that God showed them, and because of their civility, the request was granted.

Excellence. At the conclusion of the trial, the verdict came in: "At the end of the ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food."

Not only were they better in health and appearance; they were also superior in wisdom and understanding. At the end of the three-year training cycle, they were found to be ten times better than anyone else. For three years they devoted themselves to learning a new language, studying new literature, and absorbing a new culture. They were the best workers in the palace. By virtue of the grace of God, and their own diligence, they were building a platform for ministry.

Notice that there was no easily identifiable ministry taking place—not yet, anyway. Daniel was laying a foundation for a lifetime of ministry. He had read the prophecies; he knew they would be there for 70 years. And so he was living out the three basic realities upon which his ministry would be built. (1) He was committed to walking with God. (2) He was committed to building relationships. (3) He was committed to excellence in all that was asked of him.

For the rest of the book, those three themes will come up over and over again. Together, they converged to form a foundation for ministry, but first, they were valuable by themselves:

We walk with God because He is worthy of our lives. We were made for Him.

We pursue relationships because all people were made in His image and bear His glory. God made us for relationships with other people.

We work hard because all work has dignity and was part of the created order before the Fall. We are to work "unto the Lord."

As we'd expect, obedience to God produces a host of benefits and blessings, not the least of which are opportunities to spread His glory far and wide. The focus of Daniel's ministry was to see the praises of God declared throughout the earth. As we will see, through patient incremental steps, this was achieved at a level Daniel couldn't have dreamed of or imagined.

The same goal ought to be in your heart and mine, for we are "a people belonging to Him, that we may declare the praises of Him who called us out of darkness into His wonderful light." In your workplace, as you commit to (1) walking with God, (2) building relationships, and (3) pursuing excellence in all that is asked of you, opportunities will arise to make His praises known.

In this chapter and in the next five, I hope you'll be able to see those three elements in the life of Daniel and think through how to develop them in your own life as well.

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DANIEL 2: REVEALER OF MYSTERIES

Like last time, go ahead and read Daniel 2 and then pick this back up. The original is better than my commentary.

As chapter 2 opens, King Nebuchadnezzar has awoken from a frightening dream, and he wants to know what it means. So he summons those who claim to be able to reveal such things, and he demands that they not only tell him the meaning of the dream but also recount its content. It's a good move on his part because he suspects that those officials fawning upon him are charlatans, and indeed they are. Before hearing their interpretations, which are unverifiable, he wants to know if they really do have the ability to discern mysteries, and they'll need to tell him what he dreamed to prove it. Clearly, they don't have that ability, so they stutter and stammer and stall for time.

Nebuchadnezzar, in characteristic rage and excess, demands that all the wise men be killed. Guess who's included among the wise men? Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The ironic thing is that they never would have been in this predicament if they hadn't been so successful in chapter 1. But because they trusted God and were trying to live for His glory, they found themselves in a situation where they were absolutely dependent on Him. If we are constantly safe and never at risk, we should really wonder whether we are living by faith and pursuing God. He calls us into places of danger so we'll learn to trust Him. Are you following?

Daniel and his friends do all they can: they plead to God for mercy and ask for His help. There is nothing they can do to save themselves. Their hope is in God. In response God does something that is bizarre. He gives Daniel the same dream that the king had. Can you imagine? That kind of thing just doesn't happen. But it did.

Daniel 2 identifies three reasons why God does this unprecedented thing: (1) to save the lives of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and the other wise men (verse 18); (2) to reveal the glory of God (verses 20-23, 47); and (3) so that Nebuchadnezzar will know and understand the meaning of the dream (verse 30).

The dream concerns Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom and the three earthly kingdoms that will follow it. With each passing kingdom comes diminished glory but increased strength. Sometime during the fourth and final kingdom, another kingdom will come and destroy all the others, fill the earth, and endure forever. Only this one isn't of human origin; it is the kingdom of the Messiah.

Do you have any idea which kingdoms are being described? In chapter 7, Daniel himself has a dream in which the same four kingdoms are depicted. Only this time they aren't beautiful statues, as Nebuchadnezzar saw them, but rather vicious, devouring beasts. It's interesting how God's perspective differs from ours. Compare the two and see if that helps you connect these visions to their historical fulfillments. I'm not going to tell you the answers, so if you can't figure it out and are curious, check out a good commentary or Study Bible. It's pretty fascinating.

Pop quiz: What are the three elements from chapter 1 that I suggested are the foundation of Daniel's ministry? Remember? Scan through chapter 2 and look for those being lived out. Where do you see Daniel's commitment to walk with God? What is he doing to develop relationships? How is the seriousness with which he approaches his work evident?

Since our goal with this study is to learn how we can have an impact in a secular culture, it's important to take the time to study how Daniel accomplished all that he did. In chapter 2 alone there are several occurrences for each. You'll probably internalize the information better if you find it yourself, so I won't give you a cheat sheet. Go take a look. Mark them in your margins. Jot them down.

Finally, observe the effect that is produced. A pagan, wicked king exclaims, "Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery" (Daniel 2:47, NIV). It's not a declaration of faith in God, (as we'll see in the next chapter) but it is evidence that he is beginning to see the God of Israel in a different light. Ministry in the marketplace is often slow and incremental. Daniel and his friends are patient. Over the course of their lives, God will use them to do extraordinary things. And he'll do the same with you. But your first steps need to be to walk with God, develop relationships, and pursue excellence in all your responsibilities.

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DANIEL 3: YOU'RE FIRED!

Please read Daniel 3 and then read below.

Daniel 3 is an extended prophecy foretelling God's judgment against Edom. In it we see how Daniel called that nation to repentance.

Actually it isn't. It doesn't have anything to do with Edom whatsoever. If you just read Daniel 3, you know that. But if you didn't, how do you know that everything else I am saying isn't pure garbage? Read the text first and then come back here.

The Overview. In chapter 2 Nebuchadnezzar had a dream about a statue that represented four kingdoms, which would rule the world until the Messiah would come and destroy them all. The head of that statue was gold and represented Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom—Babylon. Daniel explained that the rest of the statue represented future kingdoms that would arise to rule the land of Babylon. In chapter 3 Nebuchadnezzar builds his own statue—gold from head to toe. It is an act of defiance and a statement that his kingdom will last forever, never to be overthrown.

He requires that all government officials come to pay homage and worship the image, under penalty of death. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (here called by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) refuse. As he tends to do, Nebuchadnezzar flips out and demands their obedience, threatening to burn them to death if they don't comply. If he didn't have the authority to follow through, it would almost be comical what a grumpy guy he is.

In the climax of the episode, the three make their stand and say, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3:18). These guys are total studs. They are good, obedient, hard workers. They are civil and courteous in relationships. But they will not compromise. Only God is worthy of worship, and they will not bow down to an idol, even if it means death. When push comes to shove, their relationship with God trumps all other considerations.

Nebuchadnezzar loses it and orders that they be thrown into the furnace. Only, instead of being burned to death, they are greeted in the flames by our Lord Himself, and their bonds are loosed. Incredulous, Nebuchadnezzar calls them out of the flames, and the three emerge, not even smelling like smoke. For the second time, Nebuchadnezzar is forced to acknowledge the might and glory of God and offer Him praise. In an ironic flip-flop, he decrees that if anyone speaks against the God of Israel, he'll be cut to pieces and his house will be turned into rubble. Same wrath, different trigger. Nebuchadnezzar just needs to relax a little.

Why all the repetition? One interesting feature of this chapter is the repetition of long lists. Three times we are told of the "satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all other provincial officials." Four times we are reminded of the cacophony produced by the "sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and all kinds of music." There is also a detailed description of their garments, "robes, trousers, turbans, and other clothes." Any guess why they didn't use a little shorthand? What is being communicated by the lengthy descriptions and repetitions? The answer is...uh, I think I'll let you wrestle with it.

What's a theophany? The most fascinating thing in this scene is the appearance of our Lord in the fire. The three experienced what is called a "theophany," or appearance of God. Several times in the Old Testament the pre-incarnate Christ appears to His people. Can you imagine? So great was their faithfulness under extreme conditions that God Himself joined them in the flames. Awesome! For other theophanies, see Genesis 18:1-33; 28:10-17; and Judges 6:1-23.

One step at a time. Finally, observe the second step in winning the heart of Nebuchadnezzar. He was impressed by the recounting of his dream. He was astounded by their survival in the fire. But is he a believer? Not yet. Kings don't bow easily to the true King of kings. Ministry takes time. Patient, incremental progress is required.

The point. Our main goal here is to help you see that the commitment to work hard for your employer is not absolute. You may be asked to do something that is immoral. That's never right. Our sin never honors God, even if our motive is to earn future opportunities for ministry. It's impossible that the fulfillment of the Great Commission could be dependent on us disobeying Scripture. Pursue relationships. Be excellent. But don't ever let those things (or anything else) interfere with an obedient walk with our Lord.

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DANIEL 4: INTERPRETER OF DREAMS

Imagine your job is to get Osama Bin Laden to issue a proclamation about Jesus Christ to every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth in which he declares, “I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: ‘What have you done?’ I praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble” (compare Daniel 4:34-35, 37).

How would you do it?

In Daniel 4, that impossible scenario occurs. Daniel has faithfully served in the king’s palace for years when God, by a supernatural act of judgment and mercy, opens Nebuchadnezzar’s eyes to see His power and sovereignty. After a humiliating interval of insanity, Nebuchadnezzar is restored. He arises to write a letter to all the inhabitants of the earth in which he gives honor and praise to God. That ancient letter, which has been preserved for over 2,500 years, is the fourth chapter of Daniel.

Why don’t you read it and then come back here for some comments?

Nebuchadnezzar opens his letter with praise to the “Most High God.” This is a significant break from his past descriptions. If you look back at chapter 2, you’ll find he talks about “Daniel’s God.” In chapter 3, he is impressed by the “God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.” But in chapter 4, he no longer sees Yahweh as the provincial God of some captured Jews. He is the Most High God, who rules over all.

As Nebuchadnezzar recounts his experiences that led to this change of understanding, he again tells us of a dream that no one could interpret. In that dream a glorious tree is cut down, bound, and abandoned. The tree is really a man, and judgment is decreed against him so that “the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes” (Daniel 4:17). That God is sovereign over men, women, and nations is the central idea of Daniel. The Babylonian conquest of Israel was by no means a conquest of Israel’s God. Far from it. That conquest was decreed by God Himself, who “gives kingdoms to anyone he wishes.” The focus of Daniel’s life and ministry was to show the glory and majesty of God. So is yours.

The dream is really a nightmare, and no one can ease his terror, so Nebuchadnezzar calls upon his trusted adviser—Daniel. As Daniel hears the dream, he, too, is terrified and greatly perplexed. His discomfiture is not likely caused by an inability to understand the dream but rather by the difficulty in communicating such an unhappy message to the king.

Notice the gentleness and affection Daniel shows to the king. Throughout the dialogue he delivers a harsh truth with enormous grace. He compromises neither truth nor grace. It is apparent that Daniel is concerned for the king. In verse 19 he wishes, “If only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!” In verse 27, he pleads with Nebuchadnezzar to repent so that his prosperity might continue. This is extraordinary when you consider that it was Nebuchadnezzar who took Daniel and his people into captivity. Like Daniel, as we are communicating the difficult truths of the gospel, even to our enemies, our motive must be love.

Daniel explains the truth of the dream’s meaning. Nebuchadnezzar is about to lose everything: his kingdom, his relationships, even his sanity. This is an act of judgment for his wicked arrogance. These things will not be restored until he acknowledges that God is the ruler of all.

A full year later, when no judgment has fallen and the terror of that night has faded, Nebuchadnezzar observes his kingdom and says, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?” (Daniel 4:30). Instantly, a voice speaks from heaven declaring his guilt, and the judgment begins.

For seven “times” (probably years), he lives in a state of driving insanity, like an animal. Only when he raises his eyes toward heaven is his sanity restored. Commentators differ on what happened at this point, but I think he became a true believer in God. He is a new man who finally understands his place before God. In an act of supreme grace, God opens his eyes to see the depth of his need and God’s sufficiency to meet that need. So he praises, exalts, and glorifies the King of heaven before all the world. It is a remarkable change, but it is not unlike what God does in the hearts of women and men all over the world every day.

Review the first few chapters and notice how this has occurred. It all started with four college-age believers who weren’t just different—they were better. They walked intimately with God, they made good decisions to build relationships and treat people in a civil manner, and they were devoted to excellence in all their responsibilities.

Over the course of several years, God brought numerous opportunities before them. These were difficult and looked like challenges, but as the four continued to trust God, build relationships, and pursue excellence, they not only survived but thrived. And people’s lives were slowly changed. Incrementally, from the first dream of a statue, to the episode in the fiery furnace, to the dream of the tree, Nebuchadnezzar’s eyes were opened. That’s how ministry happens. If you will understand these principles and apply them patiently, over time you, too, can have a successful ministry in a secular environment.

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DANIEL 5: HANDWRITING THAT NO ONE COULD READ

Please read Daniel 5.

Wasn't that great? I'm so glad God inspired and preserved this record of Daniel's time in Babylon.

Chapter 5 opens with a new administration ruling in Babylon. King Belshazzar is the reigning viceroy, second in command under King Nabonidus. We know from other sources that Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. and that the events of this chapter occurred in 539 B.C. At least 23 years, and probably more, have elapsed since the close of chapter 4. In that interval Daniel has largely been forgotten.

Belshazzar is having a party, and in an act of drunken foolishness he decides that he would like to toast the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone, using the goblets taken from the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. Bad call.

As his guests drink to the praise of empty idols, a hand appears and writes in a script Belshazzar cannot understand, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin." He is terrified. Though he has no idea what the writing says, he's still sober enough to realize that when a disembodied hand appears and writes on your palace wall, the message probably isn't good.

Once again the charlatans who advise the king are at a loss to explain the meaning. Fortunately, the queen knows about Daniel and suggests that he could give an interpretation. Daniel is summoned and offered lavish gifts and authority if he will only explain the mystery to the king. Declining the rewards, he agrees to interpret for the king.

He explains the meanings of the words and also the messages of judgment they carry. God has numbered the days of Belshazzar's reign (and tonight he's on the last number). Belshazzar has been weighed and found wanting, and the kingdom is being given to the Medes and Persians. That night Belshazzar dies and the prophecy is fulfilled.

There are three lessons in this chapter that I hope you'll take note of.

God's ambassadors. God is often speaking to nonbelievers, but they need someone who is a friend of God to help them understand it. This is the third time that God has given a message to someone and then used Daniel to make the message clear. Daniel explained the dream about the statues in chapter 2, he explained the dream about the tree in chapter 4, and now he is explaining the handwriting on the wall. This isn't because God is unable to make Himself clear without help, but it is because God wants to use us as His ambassadors. He gives us the unspeakable privilege of playing a role in God's eternal purposes. What could possibly be more exciting?

There are trials in people's lives, events in our culture, and even movies in our theaters that carry messages from God. We, the friends of God, need to interpret these messages to the people around us. We are the ambassadors.

John Eldredge has observed that every story that anyone loves takes its life from the gospel. Stories of rescue and redemption, of a beloved who is pursued by her lover, or of sacrifice for someone cherished are all taken straight from the gospel. Help your people see that they can come alongside their friends and interpret their longings, the things with which they struggle, and even the movies they watch.

God's holiness. God is serious about sin. We often trivialize His holiness and think our sin goes unnoticed. Yet God is jealous for His honor and will not be mocked. We need to be a holy people living upright lives, and we need to be deeply concerned about those around us who aren't. God's judgment is real and the stakes are high. Are you participating in unholiness by the TV shows you watch or the clothes you wear (and coincidentally the stores you advertise)? We should be thoughtful about what part of our culture we go along with and what parts we avoid. What about the people around you? If they were to die tonight, what would happen to them? Are you mindful that they walk over hell on a rotten covering that could give way at any moment? Everything is at stake.

God's prerogative. Success in ministry is based on our faithful obedience, not the results we see. Obviously, our desire is to see people turn in faith and believe the gospel. Sometimes, however, successful ministry results in judgment, not mercy. Our job is to tell the truth and to be gracious in that communication. We should do everything we can to show the beauty of the gospel, but it's God's job to move in people's hearts as He sees fit. In His mercy He has saved billions, including you and me, and for that we give Him praise. But He is also just in punishing those who rebel and refuse to give Him worship.

In ministry we will see both of these outcomes. In 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 Paul says, "Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?"

The answer to that question is that none of us is equal to it. God, however, gives us the grace to be His ambassadors as we are filled with His Spirit. One excellent definition of successful witnessing is "taking the initiative, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to share Christ and leaving the results to God." It may be helpful for you to memorize that definition and understand that you will experience a variety of outcomes in ministry. Your success is based on your faithful obedience, not on the results you see.

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DANIEL 6: AT HOME IN THE LION'S DEN

Please read Daniel 6 before you proceed.

The last verse of chapter 5 signified the conquest of Babylon by Darius the Mede. Just as God raised Babylon up to punish Israel, now He used the Medes to destroy Babylon. In the third administration (and second nation) of Daniel's tenure, he again distinguished himself so greatly that Darius desired to set him over the entire kingdom.

Daniel had been deported to Babylon in 605 B.C. Darius took over the kingdom in 539 B.C. For 66 years he's been a captive and is now probably in his early 80s. He is still pursuing excellence in all he does and is thereby gaining opportunities for influence. As we'll see shortly, he is also as committed to walking with God as he ever was. He is not, however, doing well at developing relationships with his colleagues.

In verse 4 we can see the obvious hostility from his colleagues; in fact, the whole chapter is predicated on their hatred of him. They were incensed that a Jew would be placed over the whole kingdom. It is likely that at one time or another you will have coworkers who don't appreciate your faith. If you remember this study (as we hope you will), you may recall the three foundations for ministry in the marketplace: an intimate walk with God, relationships with coworkers, and a commitment to excellent work. But what do you do when you can't have all three? What do you do when your relationship with God causes people to hate you?

Daniel understood that those three values are not equal. Just as walking with God trumped obedience to an employer in chapter 3, so here we see that it also trumps relationships. Daniel is not willing to compromise to curry favor with anyone. He's not trying to pick a fight, but neither will he back down when God's honor is on the line.

The other administrators and satraps couldn't stand to have Daniel ruling the kingdom, so they sought to bring charges against him. But they couldn't. As they searched through his life, they found neither corruption nor negligence. He was above reproach. They realized that the only way to trap him would be to pit his obedience to God against his obedience to the government.

They tricked Darius into passing an immutable law that would forbid praying to anyone other than him for 30 days. From Darius's perspective, this was a way to unify the kingdom and secure his authority over it. Foolishly, he agreed, not realizing the implications for Daniel. Daniel now had to choose between praying to his Lord, whom he had served his entire life, and praying to a man who could neither hear his requests nor grant them. I doubt it was a difficult decision.

He went home and prayed toward Jerusalem. Chapter 9 gives some insight into what he was likely praying about as his heart yearned for the restoration of that great city.

Daniel is discovered praying, and it is reported to Darius, who is greatly distressed. He is unable to change the law, which requires any violators to be thrown into a lions' den. Reluctantly, Darius orders the punishment, and his parting words to Daniel are "May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!" (Daniel 6:16).

I'd love to see a split-screen video replay of that night. In the top half we'd see Darius pacing in the bedroom of his palace. He's unable to sleep, eat, or take entertainment. He has no peace and is haunted by what he has just done. On the bottom half would be Daniel, sound asleep in the company of lions and angels. In 80 years of adventures and danger, he has learned to trust God.

At the first light of dawn, the anxious king hurries to the lions' den and cries out, "Has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?" (Daniel 6:20). And he has! Because he trusted in God, Daniel was rescued.

As a result, another letter is drafted and sent throughout the world declaring the praises of God. Twice, because Daniel and his friends are willing to place their relationship with God above all else, they are rescued from certain death. And twice the result is praise, glory, and honor to God being declared throughout the earth. Everywhere Daniel goes, God receives glory. May the same be said in connection with you and me.

As we place our relationship with God above everything else, develop relationships with those around us, and pursue excellence, we can trust that God will vindicate His glory through our lives. What greater privilege could there be?

REFLECTION

Wasn't Daniel a stud? If you are thinking about trying to have a ministry in your job modeled after him, then why not teach others to do the same?

What follows are six Bible studies on Daniel designed to help you teach in a small group what you have just read here. This semester, if you are leading a Bible study of older students who want to have a ministry in the marketplace, this could be a great curriculum for you to use.

You could also begin praying now that God would put two or three other believers in your office once you graduate and get a job. This series could be a six-week vision-imparting study to lead with other Christians at your workplace. As you motivate and equip them, together you could reach your coworkers for Christ.

The preceding article tells you much of what you would need to know to lead the study, but specific answers to the questions are available in the "Reference" section at the end of this Groupzine.

(This article and these studies are adapted from Cru.Comm, a Campus Crusade for Christ Bible study curriculum available at CenterfieldProductions.com.)

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BIBLE STUDY DANIEL 1: QUALIFIED TO SERVE

READ DANIEL 1

1. Imagine your job is to get Osama Bin Laden to issue a proclamation about Jesus Christ to every man woman and child on the face of the earth. How would you do it?

Daniel is a prophetic book about four believers who lived out their faith in some extremely difficult situations. It's important to understand the context in which they lived.

READ 2 CHRONICLES 36:5-21.

2. Why did God cast His people into captivity?

3. How did the surrounding nations probably interpret Israel's demise?

4. What do you think this would do to the reputation of God? What then would you expect to be the main goal of a faithful believer during this time?

5. What is God's reputation on your campus? What should the focus of your life be?

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are selected for an elite training program, so they can serve King Nebuchadnezzar. This involves a strict regimen of Babylonian language, literature, and diet. It even involves a name change. Daniel and his friends submit to all of this, except the diet.

6. Why, of all things, would this be unacceptable to them?

7. What is more important to them than obedience to the king? What things are you being asked to do that you have had to take a stand against?

8. How does Daniel approach his superiors once he has resolved not to defile himself with the king's food? How would others characterize your demeanor?

9. What pledge does the foursome make in an effort to be excused from eating the king's food? Could you make this pledge?

10. At the end of the three years of training, they were found to be "ten times better" than all the rest" (Daniel 1:20). What did that require?

11. What do you think motivated their behavior?

12. A significant predictor of work ethic in the marketplace is work ethic in school. How much effort are you putting into your class work? What does this communicate to those around you?

13. If their goal really was to declare the glory of God, why do you think there is no indication that Daniel or his friends spoke about Him during this training time?

14. What appear to be the three pillars in the lives of Daniel and his friends on which their ministry will be built?

BIBLE STUDY DANIEL 2: REVEALER OF MYSTERIES

1. Last week we saw how Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah focused on three major areas, which built them a ministry platform. As we follow the story in chapter 2, be on the lookout for these three commitments in their lives. But first, can you remember what those three commitments were?

READ VERSES 1-13

2. Why do you think it's so important to Nebuchadnezzar to understand this dream?

3. Why does he demand that they recount the dream itself as well as explain its meaning?

4. Why were Daniel and his friends included in the execution order?

5. How did they get to be there?

6. Does this make you wonder if they were outside of God's will? Why or why not?

7. Do difficult circumstances make you wonder whether you are out of God's will? Why does God do this?

READ VERSES 14-28

8. How does Daniel respond?

9. Do you think God still gives incredible answers to prayers like that?

10. Why did He do it for Daniel?

READ VERSES 29-45

11. According to Daniel, the four parts of the statue represent four human kingdoms. Which historical kingdoms do you think they correspond to?

12. In the preceding verses, what do you notice about Daniel's walk with the Lord?

13. What do you observe about his relationships with others in the palace?

14. What can you glean about his attitude toward work?

15. Which of these three areas did you focus on this week? How did it go?

16. Finally, notice the effect that the four are beginning to have on Nebuchadnezzar. What do you think he means in verse 47? Is he a worshiper of God?

DANIEL

Wild ministry success
in a secular environment

BIBLE STUDY DANIEL 3: YOU'RE FIRED!

1. Last week we learned the content and meaning of King Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream. What do you think was his favorite part?

TAKE A LOOK AT WHAT HE DOES IN DANIEL 3. READ VERSES 1-3.

2. How does the dream in chapter 2 connect with this statue in chapter 3? What's different? Why?

3. One of the features of this chapter is the repetition of detailed lists. Why does the author provide the full list of those who were summoned twice?

READ DANIEL 3:4-7.

Nebuchadnezzar demands worship of this image as proof of loyalty to his kingdom and requires all officials to bow down to it.

4. Again there is repetition concerning the litany of instruments used. Why?

5. As employees, what should Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah do?

READ ROMANS 13:1-6.

6. Are there any exceptions to the command in Romans 13 to obey all governing authorities? If so, how do you discern this?

7. What situations have you been in where you had to choose between obeying God and obeying an authority?

8. What kind of tricky situations do you imagine you could find yourself in at work?

9. What are you willing to risk in order to obey God?

READ DANIEL 3:8-18.

The three clearly show how they rank obedience to God and obedience to Nebuchadnezzar. They are good, hardworking, faithful servants of the king. But they will not dishonor God by giving worship to anything else. Imagine their courage as they make their statement in verses 17-18.

10. What do you think they expected to happen to them?

READ DANIEL 3:19-27.

11. Why does the author detail their garments?

12. Who is the fourth figure in the fire?

READ DANIEL 3:28-30.

13. What impact does their rescue make on King Nebuchadnezzar? Is he now a worshiper of God?

BIBLE STUDY DANIEL 4: INTERPRETER OF DREAMS
SCAN CHAPTER 4.

1. If you are familiar with the epistles of the New Testament, you might recognize the format of chapter 4. What does this appear to be?

2. What is the occasion that prompts its writing?

READ DANIEL 4:1-3.

3. What title does Nebuchadnezzar use for God? What did he call Him in chapters 2 and 3? Why is this change significant?

READ DANIEL 4:18.

4. What is the dream about?

5. Why is Nebuchadnezzar terrified?

6. Halfway through verse 15, the dream becomes more literal. What purpose is given for the judgment?

7. What was happening in the real world that necessitated this?

8. How does this give focus to the purpose of your life?

READ DANIEL 4:19-27.

9. Why is Daniel terrified?

10. As he speaks with the king, how would you describe his demeanor?

11. How well do you do in communicating love to those you are sharing the gospel with?

READ DANIEL 4:28-33.

12. Nebuchadnezzar was warned of this judgment but still fell into it. Why?

13. When have you forgotten what you know God has said?

READ DANIEL 4:34-37.

14. Do you think Nebuchadnezzar will be in heaven?

REVIEW THE FIRST FOUR CHAPTERS OF DANIEL.

15. This incredible result did not come quickly but was the culminating effect of years of patient ministry. What were some of the turning points that brought Nebuchadnezzar to this expression of faith?

16. What can you emulate from the life of Daniel that can set you up to be an effective minister of the gospel?

DANIEL

Wild ministry success
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BIBLE STUDY DANIEL 5: HANDWRITING THAT NO ONE COULD READ

1. Much has changed since chapter 4. Scan chapter 5, looking for clues about the new setting. What do you see?

2. Who is Belshazzar?

READ DANIEL 5:1-6.

3. In verse 5, a hand appears and writes a message on the wall. What has Belshazzar done to provoke this?

READ DANIEL 5:7-17.

4. This passage is reminiscent of events in chapters 2 and 4. What unifies these three episodes?

5. Why is Daniel needed to give an interpretation?

6. How can you play a similar role today?

READ DANIEL 5:18-24.

7. Daniel gives a review of history, which Belshazzar knows but has chosen to ignore. Why does Daniel do this?

8. When is this appropriate? When is it not?

READ DANIEL 5:25-31.

9. Daniel reads and explains the three terms that were written on the wall. Each word has two meanings, which are probably in the footnotes of your Bible. What are they?

10. What unifies one set of meanings for the words? Why do you think God chose to use them?

11. What is the essence of the overall message?

12. How mindful is your campus of the holiness of God? What can you do to help them be aware of His righteous judgment?

13. How mindful are you of His holiness? Where have you compromised?

14. Was this episode a success or failure in the ministry of Daniel?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16.

15. What does the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ smell like?

16. What outcomes should we expect in ministry?

BIBLE STUDY DANIEL 6: AT HOME IN THE LION'S DEN

READ DANIEL 6:1-5.

1. In chapter 2, God foretold that a new kingdom would arise and replace Babylonia. That “silver kingdom” is Medo-Persia, which conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. That new kingdom is now in power in chapter 6. How old would this make Daniel?

2. Young or old, it's the same Daniel. He's excellent in every way. What role does Darius want him to fulfill?

3. Why does this make the other administrators so angry?

4. Have you ever been in a situation where you were hated even though you'd done no wrong? How did you respond?

READ ROMANS 12:17-20.

5. What does it mean to do right in the eyes of everybody?

6. What two clauses does Paul use to modify “Live at peace with everyone”? What does this indicate?

7. What do you do when you can't both walk with God and please the people around you?

8. The other officials couldn't find any legitimate charges against Daniel. What could a private investigator (or your roommate, old girlfriend/boyfriend, little brother) dig up on you?

READ DANIEL 6:6-15.

10. Daniel, of course, goes home and, as was his custom, prays toward Jerusalem. What do you think he's praying about? (Scan chapter 9 for insight into this.)

READ DANIEL 6:16-23.

Notice how Darius describes God when he addresses Daniel in verses 16 and 20. How great it must be to have people say that about you!

11. Don't miss the irony in this passage. What kind of night does Darius have? How about Daniel? What is the critical difference that makes this so backward from what you'd expect?

READ DANIEL 6:24-28.

12. What, for the second time, is the result of Daniel's great faith?

13. What do you dream God will do through your life?

14. Despite all that's been said about ministry, what are the primary reasons we walk with God? Develop relationships? Pursue excellence?

15. What do you need to do now, before graduating, to set your life on the right course?

DANIEL STUDY

ANSWER KEY

(All numbered questions not appearing are simply questions for discussion; you're not looking for a correct answer.)

DANIEL 1

2. As judgment for their sin, idolatry, and rebellion.
3. They likely observed that the God of Israel was weak and unable to defend against the gods of Babylon.
4. It would appear to diminish His glory. Believers, who should be jealous for His glory.
5. We are to declare the praises of God throughout the earth. See 1 Peter 2:9.
6. The food would have been offered to pagan idols; thus, to eat it was to participate in idolatry.
7. Faithfulness to God.
8. He is polite and tactful.
9. We'll be better than the rest.
10. Diligence, hard work, study, sacrifice.
11. They were preparing for ministry and earning a position of influence where they could bring glory to God.
13. It was time to prepare and lay the foundation.
14. Walking with God, developing relationships, and pursuing excellence.

DANIEL 2

1. Walk, relationships, and work.
2. He's scared. Easily agitated—quick to threaten to cut you to pieces.
3. To prove that they are able to discern mysteries. He suspects they are scamming him (and he's right).
4. They, too, were advisers to the king because of their great success in chapter 1.
5. Their excellence and the favor of God.
8. He prays and gets his friends to pray.
10. To save the lives of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and the other wise men (verse 18); to reveal the glory of God (verses 20-23, 47); so that Nebuchadnezzar will know and understand the meaning of the dream (verse 30).
11. Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome.
12. Discuss. In verses 17-23, notice his dependence upon and gratitude toward the Lord. In verse 28, he refuses to steal glory from God. In verse 45, he again gives credit to the great God.
13. Discuss. As in chapter 1, he interacts with other officials with wisdom and tact (verse 14). Also, evidence is building that he has become a friend of the king himself.
14. Discuss. Throughout the entire chapter, Daniel is

excellent. He is the only person in the kingdom who can do what the king asks. By God's grace, he does such an outstanding job that he is promoted to rule the entire province.

16. He is impressed but not truly a believer. The important thing, though, is that incremental progress has begun in his heart. Ministry is a process.

DANIEL 3

1. His favorite part, no doubt, was the association of his kingdom with the glorious head of gold.
2. He is making the statue from the dream, but in his version, the gold is never replaced by silver, bronze, or iron. It is a depiction of his intention to lead a kingdom that will never be destroyed. It is a boast against the decree of God.
3. The repetition and details are meant to provide emphasis. In this case, the author is showing that absolutely everyone is expected to submit to this. Everyone. And everyone does, except for three.
4. The call to worship this image wasn't an anthem blown on some little kazoo. This was a huge deal, with a massive orchestra, making it an impossible-to-ignore summons. It shows the attention and pressure involved in this call to worship.
6. Yes, there are exceptions. We aren't obligated to obey orders that would cause us to sin. See Acts 4:18-20.
10. Discuss. It's hard to know. They had already seen God intervene by revealing the dream. Surely that made their faith grow. But death must have been on their minds as well.
11. To emphasize that they are wrapped in tinder. Those garments would ignite immediately.
12. It is the Lord Himself.
13. He's astounded. It's one more event moving him toward faith. But he's not yet a true believer (as the next chapter will show).

DANIEL 4

1. It is a letter written by Nebuchadnezzar to all the inhabitants of the world.
2. He is writing to declare the praises of God after God restored him to sanity.
3. He calls him the Most High God. Previously, he identified him as the God of Daniel or the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He no longer sees Yahweh as a local god but as the one true God.
5. Discuss. He likely fears that he is the tree and will be cut down.
6. To show that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes.
7. People likely saw that Babylon's triumph over Israel was a triumph over Israel's God. He desired to show His true power and purpose and to vindicate His glory.
8. Discuss. We are also to live to make His glory known.
9. Probably he fears what is about to happen to Nebuchadnezzar and is struggling to figure out how to tell him.
10. He is incredibly gracious and compassionate.
12. The lack of immediate fulfillment made him doubt and forget
16. Discuss. Hopefully the list will include the three things we've been repeating: intimately walk with God, develop relationships, and pursue excellence in all your responsibilities.

DANIEL 5

1. Apparently a long time has passed since chapter 4. Daniel is not known by Belshazzar. Nebuchadnezzar is spoken of in the past tense and thus is probably dead. There is a new king.
2. They won't know this, but he is the second in command under his father, Nabonidus. This is why he offers Daniel the "third highest" place in the kingdom. (Nabonidus was first, Belshazzar second, Daniel third.)
3. He used holy articles from the temple to worship false gods. This flagrant disrespect earned God's judgment.
4. In each case, God gives a message that needs to be interpreted by a mediator.
5. Discuss. God uses people to communicate His message.
7. Discuss. To show his guilt and the righteousness of God's judgment.
9. "Mene" means "numbered" or "mina" (a unit of money); "Tekel" means "weighed" or "shekel" (also a unit of money); and "Parsin" means "Persia" or "divided" or "half shekel" or "half mina."
10. They each have two meanings, one of which is a unit of coinage. He may be connecting the judgment to His worship of gold instead of worship of the true God.

11. You're dead.

15. To those who believe, it is the fragrance of life. To those who are perishing, it is the smell of death.

16. Both. Some will believe and be saved; others will not. Our responsibility is to take the initiative in the power of the Holy Spirit to share Christ and leave the results to God.

DANIEL 6

1. He was taken into Babylon in 598 B.C., 66 years earlier, so he's probably in his early 80s.
2. To oversee the entire kingdom.
3. Probably because he is a Jew whom they regarded as inferior.
6. "If it is possible" and "as far as it depends on you." It may not be possible, and it doesn't entirely depend on you. We need to do everything reasonable to have peace. We are not called to peace at any cost.
7. The priority must always be to walk with God.
9. Probably for the restoration of Jerusalem.
10. Darius has a horrible night, but Daniel is fine. Daniel had been trusting God for a lifetime, so he was able to trust Him again. Darius had no idea how loving and powerful God is and did not trust Him.
11. Again, a letter goes out to the whole world declaring the praises of God.
13. Discuss. We walk with God because He is worthy of our lives and we love Him. We pursue relationships because all people were made in His image. God made us for relationships with other people. We work hard because all work has dignity and was part of the created order before the Fall. We are to work "unto the Lord."