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# 2023

## devotional journal

*As for these four youths,  
God gave them learning  
and skill in all literature and  
wisdom, and Daniel had  
understanding in all visions  
and dreams.*

**DANIEL 1:17**



# february

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2023  
devotional journal

february

*As for these four youths, God  
gave them learning and skill in all  
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understanding in all visions and dreams.*

**DANIEL 1:17**

### JANUARY

But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food, or with the wine that he drank. Therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself.

***Daniel 1:8 (ESV)***

### FEBRUARY

As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.

***Daniel 1:17 (ESV)***

### MARCH

He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding

***Daniel 2:21 (ESV)***

### APRIL

If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

***Daniel 3:17-18 (ESV)***

### MAY

How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion endures from generation to generation.

***Daniel 4:3 (ESV)***

### JUNE

He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions.

***Daniel 6:27 (ESV)***

### JULY

And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

***Daniel 7:14 (ESV)***

### AUGUST

And the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

***Daniel 7:27 (ESV)***

### SEPTEMBER

O Lord, hear; O Lord; forgive. O Lord, pay attention and act. Delay not, for your own sake, O my God, because your city and your people are called by your name.

***Daniel 9:19 (ESV)***

### OCTOBER

Then he said to me, "Fear not Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard and I have come because of your words."

***Daniel 10:12 (ESV)***

### NOVEMBER

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

***Daniel 12:2 (ESV)***

### DECEMBER

And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

***Daniel 12:3 (ESV)***

# preparing to meet king jesus: into your hands

Since 2021, our theological burden and impetus towards Vision 2028 & Beyond is Preparing to Meet King Jesus. Every year, we also ask God to show us a specific spiritual emphasis that we must pay attention to as we continue in our mission. For this year, it is **Preparing to Meet King Jesus: Into Your Hands.**

Hence, we will be studying the Old Testament book of Daniel this year.

The phrase "Into Your Hands" was inspired by Daniel 6:26-27, which reads: "I make a decree, that in all my royal dominion people are to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, enduring forever; his kingdom shall never be destroyed, and his dominion shall be to the end. He delivers and rescues; he works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, he who has saved Daniel from the power of the lions."

As the lyrics of the song "Ancient of Days" by CityALight declares, "Though the nations rage, kingdoms rise and fall, there is still one King, reigning over all. So I will not fear for this truth remains: That my God is the Ancient of Days." Indeed, just as every king and every kingdom are ultimately in the sovereign hands of God, we entrust ourselves into the hands of God.

As we entrust **ourselves** – every leader, child, marriage, family and every generation – into God's Hands, let us also entrust **our mission** to make disciples into His hands.

Salvation is no small thing. We have a mission to be witnesses and we must act with a sense of urgency. Will we be found sleeping on our watch? May we not forget our call and mission as the Church – to be witnesses for Christ.

*May you entrust yourself into  
His sovereign hand daily as you  
prepare to meet King Jesus!*

## Into His Hands: We Pray and Obey

As disciples of Christ, how do we submit our lives, our families and our mission into the sovereign hand of God? We follow His leading, as we simply pray and obey. Whatever circumstance we are going through – in our family or work – let's pray and obey the Lord's leading. Whatever sphere of influence that we can be salt and light, let's pray and obey the Lord's leading. Whoever God brings across our path to share the Gospel, let's pray and obey the Lord's leading.

Based upon our core values, may we fulfil our mission through the 3 Faith Exploits anchored on Jesus' Great Commandment (Matt 22:36-40) and Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20)!

## Our Core Values:

- Truth centred upon the Word of God
- Community centred upon the worship of God
- Stewardship centred upon the will of God

- Balance centred upon the wisdom of God
- Brokenness centred upon the way of God

## Our Mission:

Returning the Church to its discipling roots through authentic discipleship and intentional discipling so as to reproduce disciples of a certain kind and to multiply them to win the world for Christ!

## Our 3 Faith Exploits:

1. Disciple the Generations
2. Disciple Singapore
3. Disciple the Nations

This Devotional Journal is designed to help you walk daily with God and experience the transforming power of His Word and Spirit as you reflect, pray and obey. May you entrust yourself into His sovereign hand daily as you prepare to meet King Jesus!

## In Christ,

Rev Tan Kay Kiong and  
Rev Tony Yeo

senior pastors,

foreword

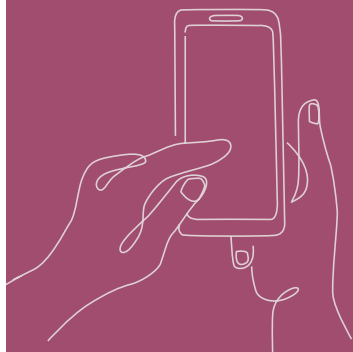
# guide to using this devotional journal

## PREPARE YOUR HEART IN GOD'S PRESENCE

- Select a fixed time (preferably in the morning before you begin your day) and a quiet place where you can be alone and undisturbed.
- Observe a moment of silence as you acknowledge God's presence. Centre down.
- Begin with a song of worship. Meditate on the lyrics even if you are unfamiliar with the tune.
- Ask God to open your heart to hear Him.

## SOMETHING TO PONDER

Examining your life is essential in your faith journey. Your redeemed life as a disciple of Christ deserves careful examining. May you take root and bear fruit in Him!



You can continue to type in the PDF copy of the Devotional Journal using your digital device as we have allotted fillable boxes for you to journal your thoughts and prayers without space constraints.

## ALLOW GOD TO S.O.A.P. YOU WITH HIS WORD AND SPIRIT

- **Scripture** – Take your time to meditate on the Scripture passage for the day. Pause and mull over words and phrases that stand out to you.
- **Observation** – Jot down significant insights and reflections from the passage you have read. You may use the guiding questions provided. The “Deeper Reflection” section is to aid your contemplation of the Scripture. It is not to replace your own observation, for the Holy Spirit illuminates the Scripture to you as you seek Him earnestly.
- **Application** – Note down a specific and practical commitment to God's Word for you. Is there a command to obey, a sin to avoid, an example to follow, or a principle to live out? Where appropriate, share your devotional entry with someone.
- **Prayer** – Bring your heartfelt response to God in prayer.

## + PRAYER POINTERS FOR 2023

We have provided prayer pointers for Pastors and Staff every Tuesday and for one of the 3 Faith Exploits (Disciple the Generations, Singapore and the Nations) every Wednesday. Every Thursday, a prayer pointer is included for Outreach/Missions/New Life Leaders. On each Friday, there is a prayer pointer for SGI Leaders (e.g. Zone Mentors, CG Leaders and Assistant CG Leaders). A prayer pointer for Church Board Members is included every Saturday. Please pray for each group as well as any specific individuals whom God may bring to your mind.

step one

step two

## pray for home missions

*“So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.”*

**EZEKIEL 37:10 (ESV)**

**W**e praise the Lord that the Spirit of God has blessed us with spiritual life and fruitfulness in the past year. In our four fellowship groups and outreach groups, we saw more than 140 prayed to receive Christ and more than 30 got baptised in 2022. We have established entry into ST Lodge and Defu Lane dormitories, and found new venues for small group meetings in Sengkang, Teban and Jurong. Three leaders were appointed and more than 10 will follow in 2023. Our hearts are simply overwhelmed by God's abundant and steadfast grace to us!

What's next in 2023?

God's fields are white for harvest! Therefore, we want to further equip our people to reap and disciple the harvest. We believe that the harvest field of today can become the harvest force of tomorrow – both here in Singapore and in the migrant workers' countries of origin. We also want to continue being watchful, that we may discern where our Heavenly Father is opening up new avenues of ministry for us – new dormitories, new partnerships, new classes, new homes and new fellowship groups.

Let us pray for dry bones to be continually filled with His Spirit, to live and stand on their feet, an exceedingly great army (Eze 37:10)!

### PRAY FOR

1. The guest workers, domestic workers, international students and foreign professionals:
  - a. That God will stir their hearts, helping them to see their need for God.
  - b. To know Christian friends who will invite them to a Christian community to hear the Gospel and respond to it.
  - c. For the Lord to grant them favour at work, provide amply for their families back home, and grant them physical and mental well-being.
2. The leaders in Home Missions:
  - a. To arise and lead strongly in evangelism.
  - b. To care for our flock.
  - c. To teach the Word, disciple and be role models for the flock.
  - d. To watch their own lives and walk with God daily.
3. Covenanters:
  - a. To continue praying for Home Missions.
  - b. To bring domestic workers, friends who may be guest workers, students or foreign professionals to missions fellowship groups.
  - c. To step up to serve in missions.
4. The spiritual climate in Singapore:
  - a. For employers to act justly, kindly and to treat foreign workers with care.
  - b. For the government to continue strengthening provisions to support and care for migrant workers in Singapore.

wednesday

01

## Covert Sovereign Presence of God

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 7:19-27

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the people of God and what happened to them?

### APPLICATION

What do I expect as a part of the people of God?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for Singapore: That God will visit Singapore with His redemptive presence
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

In Daniel, the people of God are “to live out their faith in an increasingly hostile Gentile world under circumstances that would make it more and more difficult to do so” and count on “the sovereignty of God to sustain them generation after generation, crisis after crisis”<sup>1</sup>.

There are significant theological contrasts in God’s people suffering for their faithfulness to God in Daniel 1-6 and 7-12. The sovereign presence of God is overt in Daniel 1-6, but covert in Daniel 7-12. The 24 occurrences of divine titles that underscore the supremacy and sovereignty of God are found 18 times in Daniel 1-6, but only six times in Daniel 7-12.<sup>2</sup> God is highly visible in Daniel 1-6, in both text and narrative, but very less so in Daniel 7-12.

God’s faithful people experienced God’s miraculous deliverance in Daniel 1-6 (3:24-28; 6:19-23). But there is no divine deliverance for them in Daniel 7-12. Instead, “they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder” (Dan 11:33). The confession of faith in God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the face of death points to these two pictures of God and deliverance. God is the God who is “able to...and will deliver” in Daniel 1-6, and He is the God who “does not” in Daniel 7-12 (Dan 3:17-18).

When we go through difficult times, we prefer the God of Daniel 1-6 rather than the God of Daniel 7-12. But Daniel calls us to be “the people who know their God”, especially so in suffering tribulations (Dan 11:32). And such people know the God of both Daniel 1-6 and 7-12.

<sup>1</sup> Andrew E. Hill & John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Zondervan, 1991), 352

<sup>2</sup> See 31 January entry of *Devotional Journal* 2023

thursday

02

## Theological Paradigm of God's Sovereignty (1)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 5:18-23

### OBSERVATION

What does the passage tell us about man and God?

### APPLICATION

How do I respond to pride that is found in people, in the world and in me?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To walk in humility with Jesus of Nazareth
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel can be divided into chapters 1-6 and 7-12 by **literary form** – stories and visions. It can also be divided into chapters 1-7 and 8-12 by **language** – in that Daniel was written in two languages, Hebrew and Aramaic: 1:1-2:4a (Hebrew), 2:4b-7:28 (Aramaic), chapters 8-12 (Hebrew). Commentator Ernest Lucas calls Daniel “an enigma”, in that “It is written in two languages, but the language division does not coincide with the other obvious division, that between the stories and the visions.”<sup>3</sup> **Daniel 7** overlaps in the two approaches to dividing the book: chapters 1-6 and 7-12; chapters 1-7 and 8-12. In these two approaches, we can view “chapter 7 as the centre of the book, belonging as it does to the first part by language [chaps. 1-7] and to the second by literary form [chaps. 7-12].”<sup>4</sup>

In dividing Daniel as chapters 1-7 and 8-12, the structure of mirror parallelism is surfaced in Daniel 2:4-7:28 (in Aramaic) that presents a theological paradigm of the sovereignty of God, highlighting three pairs of theological themes:

Introduction (chap. 1)

God dominates over history (chap. 2)

God delivers from harm (chap. 3)

God dethrones the haughty (chap. 4)

God dethrones the haughty (chap. 5)

God delivers from harm (chap. 6)

God dominates over history (chap. 7)

All the six chapters of this theological structure are meant to be seen and grasped as a whole, not just as individual parts, as all the three themes are interrelated. This theological paradigm of God's sovereignty ought to become our **theological vision** – **how we see God**, by which we suffer harm inflicted by haughty people.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Apollos, IVP, 2002), 312

<sup>4</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Word Books, 1989), 325



friday

03

## Theological Paradigm of God's Sovereignty (2)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 7:9-14

### OBSERVATION

What does the passage tell us about the kingdom of God?

### APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to live in the kingdom of God?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for SGI leaders: To live by the eternal values of the kingdom of God
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel 2:4-7:28 shows three pairs of theological themes in mirror parallelism. **God dominates over history (chaps. 2 and 7):** In Daniel 2, the great and awesome statute in Nebuchadnezzar's dream represents four Gentile superpowers in history (2:31-33, 36-43). In the dream was a "stone", which represents God's everlasting kingdom that "will crush and put an end to these kingdoms" (2:34-35, 44-45). In Daniel 7, the four monstrous beasts in Daniel's vision represent four Gentile superpowers in history (7:1-8). But the high point in the vision is the "everlasting dominion" given to "a Son of Man" whom all peoples and nations will "serve" (vv.13-14).

**God delivers from harm (chaps. 3 and 6):** The faithful people of God refused to compromise their faith, even if it means to be burned in a furnace (3:13-15, 19-23) or devoured by lions (6:6-10, 16-17). But God delivered them miraculously (3:24-25; 6:21-22). **God dethrones the haughty (chaps. 4 and 5):** Nebuchadnezzar arrogantly boasted: "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself built...by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" (4:30). But God who "humbles those who walk in pride" (4:37) humbled Nebuchadnezzar by dethroning him (4:31-33). Belshazzar "exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven" by using the "gold vessels" taken from God's temple as drinking vessels in his "great feast" (5:1-14, 22-23). But God humbled him by ending his empire (5:30-31).

The theological structure of Daniel 2:4-7:28 begins and ends with God dominating over history. It means that overarching and undergirding everything is God dominating over history from the beginning to the end. What security we have!

saturday

04

# Unto the Den, Until the End

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 12:1-13

## OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about “the end times”?

## APPLICATION

How do I live in the end times?

## PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To be strengthened to be faithful to God until the end
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

The visions in Daniel 7-12 are complex. But they are not unrelated. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2 parallels to Daniel’s vision in Daniel 7: Both are about four kingdoms in history with God’s everlasting kingdom as the climax (2:31-45; 7:1-14). “The visions of Daniel 2, 7, 8 and 10-12 are to be understood as complementary presentation of the same realities.”<sup>5</sup> Daniel 9 consists of Daniel’s prayer of confession at the end of the “seventy years” of Babylonian exile (9:1-3) and God’s response with the vision of “seventy sevens/weeks” (9:23-27). And “the four-kingdom sequence in Daniel 2, 7, 8 and 10-12 will establish the framework within which the seventy weeks of Daniel 9 must be understood”<sup>6</sup>.

One key focus in Daniel 7-12 is an anti-God king – referred to as “another horn, a little one” (Dan 7:8), “a rather small horn” (Dan 8:9), “the prince who is to come” (Dan 9:26) and “a despicable person” (Dan 11:21). This anti-God king is very arrogant. With “a mouth uttering great boasts” “he will speak against the Most High” (Dan 7:8, 25; 11:36) and “fling truth to the ground” (Dan 8:12). He will wage war against the people of God to wear them down and overpower them (Dan 7:21, 25).

These visions pertain “to the time of the end” (Dan 8:17, 19; 10:14; 12:4, 13). When God’s people are persecuted by the anti-God king, they are to be faithful **unto the den** (like Daniel) – falling “by the sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder” (Dan 11:33). And be faithful **until the end** – to “keep waiting and attain to the 1,335 days” (Dan 12:12).

<sup>5</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (IVP, 2014), 104

<sup>6</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., 87

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sunday

05

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

the past week

—

review

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

# the past week

## reflect

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

## respond

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying? Commit in prayer.



Week 1

## FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

### RESPECT:

Show others they are important by what you say and do.

### Memory Verse

"Do to others as you would have them do to you." – Luke 6:31 (NIV)

### 1 Bottom Line

Include people who are left out.\*

### 2 Bible Story

Luke 5:1-11, 27-32 – Calling of the Disciples

### 3 Activity

#### Get Into the Group

Props: Some paper and a paper cup

Ask your family members to tear out small bits of paper the size of a 10-cent coin. Place a paper cup on a table. Then get everyone to drop as many bits of paper, one at a time, into the cup from one foot above it. After the activity, get everyone to share their experience.

Say, "Every bit of paper represents a person. Everyone likes to be part of a group. Sometimes, we are excluded or exclude others from a group, just like the paper that fell outside the cup. Jesus did not choose His disciples based on their looks or status. He also loves and helps everyone, including the poor and the weak. God listens and opens His door to anyone who calls upon Him (Psa 91:15; Matt 7:7). As Jesus' followers, we must learn to accept and respect others."

### 4 Talk About It

- What can we learn from Jesus about choosing friends?
- Why does God want us to show respect to everyone, including those who are not "cool"?
- It's not wrong to have a close group of friends. It becomes a problem when it causes others to feel excluded. What can you do to keep that from happening?

**Parents:** Share an experience in which you were excluded from a group. How did you feel? What did you do to overcome the negative feelings? Who did you talk to?

### 5 Prayer

Pray that God will make us more compassionate to others. Ask God to forgive us for the inappropriate actions and thoughts we have of others who are different from us.



Click or scan this QR code for this week's Bible story video!

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Adapted by Joshua Wong/CEFC/February 2023

monday

06

## More than Meets the Eye (1)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:1; Habakkuk 1:6-11**OBSERVATION**

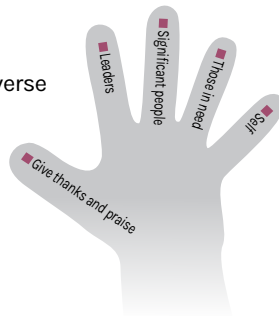
What does the Babylonian invasion of Judah look like?

**APPLICATION**

How do I respond to situations that are frightening and distressing?

**PRAYER**

Lord, I feel overwhelmed and distressed by the adverse circumstances surrounding me. When my heart and my flesh fail, be the strength of my heart.<sup>7</sup> You are my strength and my salvation, help me to trust in You and not be afraid.<sup>8</sup> As I pour out my heart to You and wait on You, help me to be strong and courageous in You.<sup>9</sup>



prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**N**ebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah in 605 B.C. (v.1) was the fulfilment of a prophecy in Habakkuk: "Behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans" (Hab 1:6a).

What were these invaders like? They were "a cruel and violent people. They will march across the world and conquer other lands. They are notorious for their cruelty and do whatever they like. Their horses are swifter than cheetahs and fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their charioteers charge from far away. Like eagles, they swoop down to devour their prey. On they come, all bent on violence. Their hordes advance like a desert wind, sweeping captives ahead of them like sand. They scoff at kings and princes and scorn all their fortresses. They simply pile ramps of earth against their walls and capture them! They sweep past like the wind and are gone" (Hab 1:6-11, NLT).

How would you feel if you were an Israelite who experienced the Babylonian invasion, seeing violent soldiers killing people mercilessly – among whom were your loved ones and destroying property? "I trembled inside when I heard this; my lips quivered with fear. My legs gave way beneath me, and I shook in terror" (Hab 3:16, NLT). This was Habakkuk's feeling. Just the hearing of the invasion made him feel that way. How much more when he sees it happening!

When tragic things happen to us, it is natural and human of us to see and feel them circumstantially. But just like the Babylonian invasion of Judah, our rough and tough times are only one side of the story. There is more than meets the eye.

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 73:26<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 12:2<sup>9</sup> Psalm 31:24

tuesday

07

## More Than Meets the Eye (2)

SCRIPTURE Daniel 1:1-2

## OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the three kings in the text?

## APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to walk with the King of kings in a world that can give us anxiety?

## PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for pastors and staff: To rest in God's sovereignty over their ministry challenges
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

Daniel is about kings and kingdoms. And verses 1 to 2 is a tale of three kings. Who are the three kings? “Jehoiakim king of Judah”, “Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon” (v.1) and “the Lord” (v.2).

Clearly, Nebuchadnezzar was a more powerful king than Jehoiakim, for he “came to Jerusalem and besieged it” (v.1). The Babylonians broke into Jerusalem and invaded Israel's most sacred place: “the house of God” (v.2). And they took “some of the vessels of the house of God”, and under the order of Nebuchadnezzar, they “brought them...to the house of his god” (v.2). This act shows – to both Babylonians and Israelites – that the god of Nebuchadnezzar was more powerful than the God of Israel. Removing the temple articles was “a sign of the victory of Nebuchadnezzar and his god over the Israelite king and his god. Wars were fought in a god's name and plunder thus belonged to him. The temple articles are his booty”<sup>10</sup>. This is what it appears to be. But there is more than meets the eye.

All that had happened from Jerusalem to Shinar is “**The Lord gave**” (v.2). Nebuchadnezzar defeated Jehoiakim because “the Lord gave” him “into his hand” – and also “along with some of the vessels of the house of God” (v.2a). Then, “the Lord gave” shifts seamlessly to “he brought them...to the house of his god” (v.2b). “The house of **God**” and “the house of **his god**” in this context are theologically loaded. It appears that “his god” is more powerful than “God”, but the reality is the reverse. This is divine subversiveness.

<sup>10</sup> John E. Goldingay, 15

wednesday

08

## Living Life with Theological Perspectives

**SCRIPTURE** 2 Kings 23:36-24:4; Daniel 1:1-2

### OBSERVATION

How is the Babylonian invasion of Judah viewed from the perspectives of these two passages?

### APPLICATION

How important is perspective for me in living life?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for Singapore: That pre-believers' eyes be opened to see God's reign over Singapore
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**P**erspective – how we look at things – is important. How we look at life determines how we live life – consciously or unconsciously. But the looking should consciously precede the living. Perspective gives things their meaning and significance. But more importantly, our perspective must be **theological perspectives: Seeing God in life.**

Daniel and the narrator of Kings are looking at a similar event – Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah under Jehoiakim's reign in 605 B.C. (2 Kin 24:1; Dan 1:1), but with different perspectives and for different purposes. Their perspectives are theological perspectives. Kings was written for the people of God who were in exile in Babylon, whereas the audience of Daniel were post-exilic Jews. Both writers give their theological interpretation of the same historical event. For Kings, the Babylonian invasion was the judgment of God on His people: "He sent them against Judah to destroy it" and "to remove" Judah "from His sight" (2 Kin 24:2-3). And its purpose is to convict God's people of their unfaithfulness to God and that they are to return to Him. Daniel points his readers to the sovereignty of God over the Babylonian invasion: "The Lord gave" (Dan 1:2). And its purpose is to comfort God's people living under hostile Gentile superpowers and that they are to rest in God's sovereignty.

To get theological perspectives, we ask these questions: Where is God in this? What is God doing? What is God saying? But we must answer these questions through the Scriptures, where God has revealed Himself. Hence, knowing the Scriptures is vital. And theological perspectives come from, as well as lead to, knowing God.

thursday

09

## When Things Are Beyond Our Control

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:1-7

### OBSERVATION

What happened to the four youths from Judah?

### APPLICATION

How do I respond when I am being moved around with not much of a choice?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To rest in God's sovereign control over things that are beyond their control
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

The scene has moved from holy Jerusalem to unholy Babylon, to King Nebuchadnezzar's court. Nebuchadnezzar gave orders for some of the captured Israelites – among whom were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (v.6) – to be developed and deployed for “serving in the king's court” (vv.3-4). And for this purpose, these Israelites were put through a Babylonisation programme. They were to be “educated for three years” by immersing in “the literature and language of the Chaldeans” (vv.4, 5). In so doing they were to adopt the Babylonian culture.

Now, these Israelites were captives of Babylon. Things were not in their control. They had no say in what was given to them, done to them and required of them. Even their identities were Babylonised. Their Hebrew names contained the names of the true God: Daniel – “God is judge”, Hananiah – “Yahweh is gracious”, Mishael – “Who is what God is?” and “Azariah – “Whom Yahweh helps”. But they were replaced by Babylonian names, which contained names of heathen gods: Belteshazzar – “May Bel protect his life”, Shadrach – “command of Aku” (moon god), Meshach – “Who is what Aku is?” and Abednego – “servant of Nebo” (v.7). These four Judahite youths accepted these names without protest, and without any sense of theological compromise, spiritual defilement, being idolatrous or dishonouring God's name.

No matter how things are beyond our control on the outside, our hearts on the inside remain within our control. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego remained as “servants of the Most High God” (Dan 3:26). And Daniel remained as “Daniel, servant of the living God” (Dan 6:20).



friday  
10

# The World's Strategy of Spiritual Reprogramming

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:3-7

## OBSERVATION

How might Daniel and his friends be spiritually reprogrammed?

## APPLICATION

How can I keep myself from being spiritually reprogrammed by the world?

## PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for SGI leaders: To be kept from being spiritually reprogrammed by the crafty world
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel and his friends, along with others, were “educated for three years” in “the literature and language of the Chaldeans” (vv.4-5). At the heart of this Babylonisation is “spiritual reprogramming”, for “the fundamental goal of the whole procedure” was “to obliterate all memory of Israel and Israel’s God from the lips and minds of these young men, and to instill into them a sense of total dependence on Nebuchadnezzar for all of the good things in life”<sup>11</sup>.

Nebuchadnezzar’s intent was that Babylonian myths and legends would replace the Scriptures as the source of these youths’ wisdom and worldview.<sup>12</sup> Nehemiah contended vehemently with the Jews who married foreign women that resulted in their children speaking foreign languages, and “none of them was able to speak the language of Judah [Hebrew]” (Neh 13:23-25). Nehemiah’s fear was that the next generation of Israelites would not be able to read the Scriptures. Satan does the same spiritual reprogramming today. Living in the real world, we inevitably need to learn and know the contemporary “language and literature of the Babylonians”, but we must be armed with biblical discernment into its falsehood, flaws and follies.

Surely, the Babylonian names of the four Judahite youths were mostly used in their daily life. But they never forgot God, whose name was embedded in their Hebrew names. At the core of their being, their Hebrew names stood up most prominently, although their Babylonian names were most frequently used. As for Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, even when their Babylonian names were used, their God was “the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego” (Dan 3:28).

<sup>11</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Daniel*, Reformed Expository Commentary (P&R, 2008), 9

<sup>12</sup> Iain M. Duguid, 9

saturday

11

## Living as Exiles in Babylon

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:3-7; Jeremiah 29:4-7

### OBSERVATION

How did God intend the life of His people in exile in Babylon to be like?

### APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to live as an exile in this world?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To shine for the Lord in living as exiles in the world
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel knew from the Book of Jeremiah (cf. Dan 9:1-2) that the Babylonian exile was the will of God: Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant, to whom He had given the nations and "all the nations shall serve him", and God will "punish" any nation that "will not serve him" (Jer 27:6-8). And Daniel understood that it was God's will for His people in exile to live normal lives: "build houses", "plant gardens", get married and raise families, "seek the welfare of the city" and "pray" for the city (Jer 29:4-7). Followers of Jesus continue to live as "sojourners and exiles" (1 Pet 2:11), and our "Babylon" is the world.

Daniel was a captive of Babylon, but he viewed it as God's call for him: "to enter the king's personal service" (v.5). God's call for our lives is more than just our vocation. God's call encompasses everything in our personal lives. Daniel discovered God's call for him in difficult circumstances. He was totally passive in the God-directed process in this discovery.

God's call for our lives does include what the world looks for. Nebuchadnezzar was looking for youths who were "qualified to serve in the king's court" (v.4, NIV). What mattered to him were social status – "of the royal family and nobles" (v.3), good looks (v.4a) and intellectual acumen – "showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well-informed and quick to understand" (v.4b, NIV). For Daniel, these "worldly" elements were given by God for answering His call. We can possess these "worldly" elements without conforming to the world. The key is living a God-centred life.

sunday

12

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

the past week

review

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

# the past week

## reflect

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

## respond

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying? Commit in prayer.



Week 2

## FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

### RESPECT:

Show others they are important by what you say and do.

### Memory Verse

"Do to others as you would have them do to you." – Luke 6:31 (NIV)

### 1 Bottom Line

Show respect even when you don't get along.\*

### 2 Bible Story

Matthew 5:43-47 – Love Your Enemies

### 3 Activity

#### Spread Your Love

Props: Milk, food colouring, a small flat-bottomed plate, a bowl, dish soap and toothpicks

1. Pour some milk onto the plate.
2. Add some drops of food colouring to the milk (use at least two different colours).
3. Pour some dish soap into the bowl and dip one end of a toothpick into it.
4. Dip the soapy end of the toothpick in the centre of the milk and observe how the colours spread.

Describe what you observe.

Say, "The colours represent love. The toothpick (with dish soap) represents us. Look at how the colours spread with just a touch. We have the power to spread God's love to everyone, including those who are less lovable. We show love and respect to others not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it shows our love and respect for God."

### 4 Talk About It

- Is it possible to not like someone but still show them respect? Why or why not?
- Do you think showing respect could turn an enemy into a friend? Why or why not?
- What are some of God's actions that display His great respect for us?
- What are some consequences that we might face if we are disrespectful?

**Parents:** Share an experience where someone showed love and respect to you even when you were not on your best behaviour. How did your behaviour affect others? Why did you choose to change your behaviour?

### 5 Prayer

Pray for God to draw our hearts to those who need help and attention, and to equip us with a generous and loving heart to accept and love others.



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monday

13

## What's Wrong with Babylonian Food?

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:5, 8, 12

### OBSERVATION

Why would partaking the Babylonian king's food and wine defile Daniel?

### APPLICATION

What are the things that can defile me spiritually which I need to watch out for?

### PRAYER

O God of love, true light and radiance of the world, shine into my heart like the rising sun, and banish the darkness of sin and the mists of error. Help me, this day and all my life, to walk without stumbling along the way which You have set before me; through Jesus Christ my Lord.<sup>13</sup>

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel refused to partake the “food” and “wine” as required by King Nebuchadnezzar (v.5), so as not to “defile himself” (v.8). He would later request for a vegetarian diet (v.12). So, the “food” here refers to meat. But why would partaking these food and wine defile Daniel?

There is no Old Testament law that prohibits the consumption of meat in general (cf. Gen 9:3), or of wine, except in the law of the Nazarites (Num 6:2-3). And it was not because the meat was not *kosher*.<sup>14</sup> If it was, Daniel could have requested for permission to cook his own food in the *kosher* way rather than asking for vegetables only.<sup>15</sup> The most oft-cited explanation is the food was offered to Babylonian gods. But there is no explicit association made between the food and Babylonian gods in the text. And “scholars have found evidence to show that even vegetables and fruits were regularly offered to the gods before being consumed by the devotees”<sup>16</sup>, and this certainly includes the vegetables that Daniel requested. There was another occasion when Daniel abstained from “meat” and “wine”, but it was because he was fasting and mourning over some troubling matters (Dan 10:2-3). This implies that on “normal” days, Daniel did eat meat and drink wine.

So, as to why Daniel rejected the king's food and wine in Daniel 1, “no certainty or agreement has been reached”<sup>17</sup> among Bible scholars on this question. While we do need to consider this question, the main point of the story is not about food, but faithfulness (cf. Rom 14:17).

<sup>13</sup> Adapted from Erasmus (1466-1536), Angela Ashwin, *The Book of a Thousand Prayers* (Zondervan, 1996, 2002), 275

<sup>14</sup> Food prepared properly satisfying requirements of Jewish law

<sup>15</sup> Gordon Wong, *Faithful to the End: The Message of Daniel for Life in the Real World* (Genesis, 2006), 2

<sup>16</sup> Gordon Wong, 3

<sup>17</sup> Gordon Wong, 1

tuesday

14

## Daniel Would Not Defile Himself

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:8

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Daniel?

### APPLICATION

What areas in my walk with God do I need to make up my mind for?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for pastors and staff: To walk in faithfulness, righteousness and holiness in the Lord
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

There are diverse views<sup>18</sup> on why Daniel would “defile himself” should he partake the Babylonian king’s food and wine, but “there is not enough information available to us to be certain”<sup>19</sup> about it. What is clear and central in the Daniel 1 story is Daniel’s faithfulness to God. And this faithfulness bears two vital characteristics.

**Decisiveness for God:** “Daniel made up his mind” – literally, “set his heart”. It is an intense attitude. It shows that for Daniel, eating the king’s food and drinking his wine or not was a weighty matter. It seems that it was a line that he must not cross, no matter what – whatever that line might be. “Follow Me” (Matt 4:19) is commitment to the Lord. It is a decisive commitment, marked by no turning back. Turning back is always a clear and present danger. And turning back occurs in the “heart”. Thus, this decisive commitment must be renewed daily in our hearts (2 Cor 4:16) and minds (Rom 12:2). This is what our daily devotions are fundamentally about.

**Distinctiveness in Babylon:** “he would not defile himself” (v.8). This defilement is defilement by Babylon – the world. We live much of our life, not inside the church, but in the pluralistic, secular world outside, where we can be defiled by its worldviews and values, and where we are to live faithfully to God. It means to live counterculturally. The positive side of “not defile himself” is distinctiveness in the world: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed” (Rom 12:2). “Faithful Christian living in a secular environment should be distinctive.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See John E. Goldingay, 18-19

<sup>19</sup> Gordon Wong, 3

<sup>20</sup> Gordon Wong, 9

wednesday

15

## It Is “God Gave” Again! (1)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:1-9**OBSERVATION**

What significant observations can you make about God in verses 2 and 9?

**APPLICATION**

How do I see God in the discipleship challenges that I face in my life?

**PRAYER**

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for Singapore: That God will rest His gracious and merciful sovereign hand on Singapore
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

In Daniel 1, Daniel was facing a discipleship challenge, defined by an expression repeated five times: “the king’s choice food” (vv.5, 8; 1 Dan 1:13, 15, 16). For Daniel, to eat “the king’s choice food” would result in spiritual defilement. So, having “resolved not to defile himself” by eating “the king’s choice food”, Daniel “asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way” (v.8, NIV). Then the narrator tells us what happened next: “**God gave** [*nathan*] Daniel favor and compassion” before this chief official (v.9).

This is the second time that “God gave” occurs in Daniel 1. It first occurs in verse 2: “**The Lord gave** [*nathan*].” This is the central theological idea – and thus, the central theological reality – in Daniel 1: God’s supreme sovereignty. Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Jerusalem and his deporting of the vessels from God’s temple to the temple of his god, Daniel and his three friends being captured by Nebuchadnezzar and exiled to Babylon, and then being Babylonised – all these happenings are subsumed under “the Lord gave” (vv.1-7).

And Nebuchadnezzar’s requirement of the Judahite youths to eat “the king’s choice food” (v.5) is also subsumed under “the Lord gave”. And it is in this “the king’s choice food” crisis that we see “God gave” again. The sovereign God is both the **source** of the crisis and the **salvation** from the crisis. “God gave Daniel favor [*hesed*] and compassion” points to God’s covenant faithfulness. *Hesed* refers to God’s steadfast covenant love. Clearly then, “God gave” is to be our **theological anchor** in following the faithful covenant God faithfully.

thursday

16

## Caught in a Complicated Situation (1)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:8-12

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about what happened in verses 8 to 12?

### APPLICATION

How will I respond to personal situations that have serious implications on other people?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To show sensitive consideration toward others
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel was firm in his heart that he would not be spiritually defiled by eating “the king’s choice food” (v.8). However, in his situation, for him to live out his commitment to God would lead to a complication: The endangering of another person’s life and an unbeliever’s life at that. Should the chief official permit Daniel to be exempted from eating “the king’s choice food” and it resulted in his appearance “looking more haggard” than the other youths in the Babylonisation programme, Daniel would “make” him “forfeit” his “head to the king” (v.10). It is one thing for Daniel to risk his own life in his radical discipleship, but it is a different matter altogether putting another person’s life at risk. We can trust in God to take care of our lives in such a discipleship situation, but we are presumptuous in “trusting in God” to be responsible for others whose lives are put at risk because of our radical discipleship. Are we to make others pay the cost of our discipleship? Radical discipleship is not reckless.

Daniel was **sensitive** to the chief official, saying “I am afraid of my lord the king” (v.10). He was **considerate** toward him: He did not want to put his life at risk because of his commitment to God. True commitment to God is marked by loving consideration for people. And Daniel acted with **wisdom**. He asked to be tested for ten days with a vegetarian diet (v.12). Was this proposal Daniel’s idea or was it from God, like Nehemiah – “What God had put in my heart” (Neh 2:12)?



friday  
17

## Caught in a Complicated Situation (2)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:8-16

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about what happened in verses 8 to 16?

### APPLICATION

How do I respond to life situations that are complicated?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for SGI leaders: To have the wisdom to live in complicated life situations
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**T**his story is not about Daniel choosing a diet of vegetables and water instead of meat and wine (v.12). It is not about a biblical basis for healthy eating, nor is it about the so-called “Daniel Fast”. Clearly, Daniel was not fasting.

The whole episode of Daniel and eating “the king’s choice food” (vv.8-16) is subsumed under “God gave Daniel favor and compassion” (v.9). So, we can theologically assume that Daniel’s proposal of the ten days test with a vegetarian diet came from God. We can assume that Daniel being Daniel, he would have sought God in prayer concerning the matter (cf. Dan 2:17-18; 6:10). But Daniel’s proposal includes this clause, “and deal with your servants according to what you see” after the ten days of testing. It reflects practical wisdom. And it is Daniel’s humble submission to the Babylonian authority.

We can’t be sure if Daniel foreknew the outcome of the test. Perhaps God had told him or maybe not. The text does not tell us. But it is more likely that Daniel was like Abraham, who “by faith...obeyed...not knowing where he was going” (Heb 11:8). But it turned out that after ten days, Daniel’s appearance “seemed better” and “fatter” than those who ate “the king’s choice food”, and he could continue with his vegetarian diet (vv.14-15).

This story is about trusting in the sovereignty of God and walking by wisdom from God. Faith and wisdom go hand-in-hand together. In Daniel, “the people who know their God” are “those who have insight” and “give understanding to the many” (Dan 11:32-33).

saturday

18

## Four-Dimensional Reading of Biblical Narrative

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:8-16

### OBSERVATION

What are the four dimensions in reading the story of Daniel in verses 8 to 16?

### APPLICATION

How do I read the story that God is writing for my life?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To discern the divine workings in their lives
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

God is writing a distinct story of each of our lives. How do we read that distinct story? Every biblical narrative is written to be read in four interrelated dimensions, as illustrated in this episode of Daniel's story (vv.8-16). And we can read our distinct story in these four dimensions.

The context of almost every biblical narrative is crisis. For Daniel, it is about eating "the king's choice food" (vv.8, 13, 15, 16). Biblical discipleship is highly crisis-oriented. Maturing in Christ is the clear divine agenda. And character is formed through crises.

The first dimension is the **divine part**: "God gave Daniel favor and compassion" (v.9). God is central in our distinct story. The fundamental life principle question must be: "Where is God in this?" The second dimension is the **human part**: "Daniel resolved not to defile himself" (v.8, NIV). We are to ensure that we walk with God faithfully day by day.

The third and fourth dimension are the **big picture** – verses 8 to 16 as a whole and the **progressing journey** – as the story unfolds progressively from verse 8 to verse 16. God in His sovereign wisdom leads us one step at a time, with us oftentimes not knowing what He is doing and where we are going. On Christmas Day in 1980, I had a very painful breakup in a relationship which involved a third party. But it was not until more than 30 years later that I saw the divine purpose for that heart-breaking crisis: God was beginning to set the stage for me to answer my call to full-time ministry.

sunday

19

Sunday Journal

SCRIPTURE

OBSERVATION

APPLICATION

PRAYER

the past week

review

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

# the past week

## reflect

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

## respond

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying? Commit in prayer.



Week 3

## FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

### RESPECT:

Show others they are important by what you say and do.

### Memory Verse

"Do to others as you would have them do to you." – Luke 6:31 (NIV)

### 1 Bottom Line

Take time to show others that they are important.\*

### 2 Bible Story

Luke 10:38-42 – Mary and Martha

### 3 Activity

#### Renewed

Props: Rubber bands

Provide each family member with about 50 rubber bands. Get everyone to form their own rubber band chain within one minute. The person who forms the longest chain wins the game. After the activity, get everyone to share what they learnt.

Discuss: If the rubber bands represent a relationship, what does it tell us about building a relationship?

Say, "Relationships take time to build and nurture, just like taking care of a plant. We water and give nutrients to the plant regularly so that it will grow well. To show that we care for and love a person, we have to set aside time to meet or pray for one another. God takes time to listen to us because we are important to Him. By praying to God every day, we are deepening our relationship with God."

### 4 Talk About It

- How has God shown His love for us?
- How can we use our time to show love to others?
- What are some ways that you can be like Mary and spend time with Jesus?
- How has someone shown you that you are important? How can you do that for others?

**Parents:** Share an experience in which you made an effort to spend time building a relationship with someone. What motivated you to make the move? How did God empower you?

### 5 Prayer

Ask God to reveal to us a relationship which needs restoration or time to build. Ask for God to empower us with His spirit when we approach the person.



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monday

20

## It Is “God Gave” Again! (2)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:1-2, 8-9, 17**OBSERVATION**

What is the significance of “God gave” being repeated three times in Daniel 1 (vv.2, 9, 17)?

**APPLICATION**

What does it mean for me to live in this world with the presence of “God gave” in every situation?

**PRAYER**

O Sovereign God, from whom and through whom and to whom are all things, You do whatever You please, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.<sup>21</sup> You are the only wise God, whose judgments are unsearchable, whose ways are unfathomable.<sup>22</sup> I trust in You that in Your sovereign freedom and wisdom You work all things together for good for me.<sup>23</sup>

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

There are three sets of circumstances in Daniel 1 (vv.1-7, 8-16, 17-21). And central in each situation is “God gave” – a concrete expression of the supreme sovereignty of God. **“The Lord gave” in crisis** (v.2) – the political downfall of Judah, the captivity, exile and Babylonisation of Daniel and his friends. **“God gave” in consecration** (vv.8-9): When Daniel resolved not to be spiritually defiled by eating the royal food, “God gave Daniel favour and compassion” before the chief official and delivered him from his difficult situation. **“God gave” in calling** (v.17): “God gave” “knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom” to the four Judahite youths in preparation for serving the king. What “God gave” to them was for fulfilling His call for them as exiles in Babylon.

“God gave” is not only central in Daniel 1, but the book of Daniel. The Hebrew verb *nathan*, and the Aramaic *netan* (in Dan 2-7), with God as the subject is a key word, whether the verb is in the active or passive voice (the divine passive): **“He gives** wisdom to wise men” (Dan 2:21); “to whom [Nebuchadnezzar] **the God of heaven has given** the kingdom” (Dan 2:37); “let a beast’s mind **be given** to him [Nebuchadnezzar]” (Dan 4:16); **“the Most High** rules the kingdom of men and **gives** it to whom He will” (Dan 4:17); “the saints of the Highest One...**will be given** into his [an anti-God king] hand” (Dan 7:25).

In our discipleship, overarching, undergirding and surrounding all that we are, we have, we do and happen to us, is “God gave”.

<sup>21</sup> Romans 11:36; Psalm 135:6

<sup>22</sup> Romans 11:33

<sup>23</sup> Romans 8:28

tuesday

21

## Some People Who Are Exceptional

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:4-5, 17

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the mental abilities of Daniel and his friends?

### APPLICATION

How do I see the place of mental abilities in the spiritual life?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for pastors and staff: To know how to live life and serve people holistically
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel and his friends already had strong mental abilities – formed by nature and through nurture: “showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well-informed and quick to understand” (v.4, NIV). Then, building on this, “God gave them knowledge and intelligence in every branch of literature and wisdom” (v.17a) through the three-year training (v.5) and also as a special grace. And for Daniel, he “even understood all kinds of visions and dreams” (v.17b). God had made Daniel exceptional among the four brilliant youths.

It is quite natural that we like to be exceptional. But God does not make all of us exceptional. And when God makes a person exceptional, it is purely His sovereign grace. “Sovereign” in that God chooses to do so; and “grace” in that it is not because we qualify for it. But we do not need to be exceptional in order to be significant. Seeking to be “extraordinary Christians” can be a stumbling block, when we think that our significance is defined by that. And it is flawed thinking that we are to be extraordinary because God is an almighty God, and He can make us so.

John’s disciples were comparing him with Jesus, that more were being baptised by Jesus than John (Jn 3:26). John’s response was, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given him from heaven” (Jn 3:27). We don’t have because God has not given us, simple as that. In living by this principle, we will not compare or compete with others, and we will not feel inferior or superior.

wednesday

22

## The Gifts of God's Grace

**SCRIPTURE** 1 Peter 4:10-11

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the gifts of God's grace?

### APPLICATION

What does it mean for me to exercise my gift(s) in serving others?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for Singapore: That God will bless Singapore through the gifts given to the church
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**E**veryone is **endowed** with “a gift” from God (v.10) – just like Daniel, who was given the gift of knowledge, understanding and wisdom, and the ability to interpret visions and dreams (Dan 1:17). Scripture does not give us an exhaustive list of gifts or concrete definition of particular gifts. For example, at the practical and experiential level, the gift of teaching is expressed in many ways. Peter broadly categorises gifts as speaking gifts and serving gifts (v.11). Gifts can be task-oriented or people-oriented, like working with children, old folks or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) patients, among others.

We are to **employ** our gifts “in serving one another” (v.10). Do not seek to discover your gift first. Start by serving in anything that you can do. And you will discover your gift as you serve. Gifts are for edification (1 Cor 14:12, 26). When people are edified as you serve them, they will testify to you about your gift. The witness of the body is the surest way for us to know our gifts. We are **expected** to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (v.10). We are accountable to God for faithfully employing what He has endowed on us. God **enables** us in exercising our gifts: “If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God... If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides” (v.11, NIV). This divine enablement brings about the divine effects. And our goal in serving with our gifts is **exalting** God: “that in all things God may be glorified” (v.11).

thursday

23

## Walking with Wisdom from God

**SCRIPTURE** Proverbs 2:1-6

### OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about wisdom?

### APPLICATION

How can I grow in wisdom from God?

### PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To grow in the wisdom of God
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**W**isdom from God is a key motif in Daniel, and particularly wisdom for “understanding of the vision” of God’s purposes and His ways (Dan 8:15-16). And discipleship in Daniel is walking with God faithfully in the world of Babylon by trusting in God’s sovereignty and living by God’s wisdom.

Wisdom of God makes her first appearance in Proverbs in this way: “Wisdom **shouts** in the street... at the head of noisy streets she cries out” (Prov 1:20). It is Wisdom taking the initiative to reach out to us to give us God’s wisdom. We live in a busy, hurry and noisy world, and Wisdom must shout to get our attention. Wisdom makes herself available to us, but we must respond to her. We must “**seek** her as silver” and “**search** for her as for hidden treasures” (v.4). To do so, we must see the supreme value of Wisdom: “Wisdom is better than jewels; and all desirable things cannot compare with her” (Prov 8:11).

The **soul** of wisdom is “the fear of the LORD” and “the knowledge of God” (v.5). To know and grow in wisdom is to know God and grow in knowing God. It is in a growing relationship with God that we seek wisdom and find her. And so, naturally, God is the **source** of wisdom: “the LORD gives wisdom” (v.6a). Unless God gives, we have nothing. But God will give us wisdom when we seek for her in **Scripture**: “From His mouth” – divine speech – “come knowledge and understanding” (v.6b). God “gives wisdom” through “His mouth” – the Word of God.



friday  
24

## “Ten Times Better than All”

SCRIPTURE Daniel 1:17-20

## OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about God?

## APPLICATION

What are my perspectives and posture when I am better than other people in certain areas?

## PRAYER

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for SGI leaders: To think of others as better than themselves
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

“God gave” Daniel and his friends “knowledge and intelligence” in secular learning – “in every branch of [Babylonian] literature and wisdom” (v.17; see Dan 1:4). And the result was they became **outstanding** – “out of them all not one was found like” them (v.19). And they **outdid** all the Babylonian wisemen: Nebuchadnezzar “found them ten times better than all...in all his realm” (v.20).

Students and parents with children who are schooling will probably find this fact of God giving “knowledge and intelligence” to His people in secular learning that results in “ten times better than all” attractive. Quite naturally, we want to be “ten times better than all”. However, this biblical fact is not a principle: That as God’s people we are to be like this. It is not God’s promise that we will be like this. We may pray to God for this, but God may or may not answer our prayer. But it is certainly a possibility. One thing is for sure: God will make us “ten times better than all” when it is a **divine necessity** for fulfilling a **divine purpose**, as in the case of these four Judahite youths, whom God had called to serve in the Babylonian court.

God will make us “ten times better than all” if He chooses to glorify Himself in this way. In God’s calling of His people, “not many were wise by human standards; not many were influential; and not many were of noble birth” (1 Cor 1:26, NIV). However, God does “exalt” us in our humility on His terms and in His ways (1 Pet 5:6).

saturday

25

## Until King Cyrus' First Year

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 1:1-21**OBSERVATION**

What is the significance of Daniel continuing until the first year of Cyrus the king of Persia (v.21)?

**APPLICATION**

What is the key application for me from Daniel 1?

**PRAYER**

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To be the Daniels in the world
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**H**ow a book in the Bible concludes is significant. Judges – the story of Israel living in deep spiritual darkness – ends with a negative note: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg 21:25). Judges is followed by Ruth – a story in the days of Judges (Ruth 1:1). The last word of Ruth is “David” (Ru 4:22). “David” was the greatest king of Israel. And “David” was God’s answer to the “there was no king in Israel” crisis in Judges. The conclusion of Ruth complements the conclusion of Judges. Matthew begins with Jesus born as “Immanuel” – “God with us” (Matt 1:23), and it ends with the promise of the resurrected Christ: “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

Daniel 1 concludes with “And Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus” (v.21). What is the significance? Daniel went into exile to Babylon in 605 BC. The Babylonian empire fell to Cyrus, king of Persia, in 539 BC, and “Daniel continued until the first year of Cyrus.” The theological point is, Daniel outlasted the Babylonian empire! Daniel was a captive of Babylon. Under Babylonian control, he had to take on a Babylonian name, wear Babylonian clothes and undergo Babylonian education. But Daniel became larger than the great Babylonian empire. However, the conclusion does not speak so much about Daniel as it is about “the God of Daniel” (Dan 6:26). Behind this grand conclusion of Daniel 1 is “the Lord gave” (v.2), “God gave” (v.9) and “God gave” (v.17).



## SCRIPTURE

## OBSERVATION

## APPLICATION

## PRAYER

# the past week

## review

What was my high point and my low point for the week?

What gave me life and what drained me?

How was the Spirit of God at work?

# the past week

## reflect

What is one key thing that God said to me this week in light of what has happened?

## respond

What is one thing I need to do in light of what God is saying? Commit in prayer.



Week 4

## FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

### RESPECT:

Show others they are important by what you say and do.

### Memory Verse

"Do to others as you would have them do to you." – Luke 6:31 (NIV)

### 1 Bottom Line

Remember that God is the most important.\*

### 2 Bible Story

Matthew 8:5-13 – A Roman Commander Has Faith

### 3 Activity

#### God's Time

Props: Long strips of paper

Provide each family member with a strip of paper. Ask everyone to cut different lengths from it based on the time he or she spends on each activity every day, for example:

- Praying/quiet time with God
- Playtime
- Study time
- Family time

Invite everyone to reflect:

- Do you think you have allocated enough time for important things? Why or why not?
- What would you like to change about the way you spend your time?

Say, "When we make time to pray or read the Bible every day, we are building a strong relationship with God. It also shows how important God is in our lives. We are precious in God's eyes. He takes time to listen and lovingly makes a plan for us. God is not asking for expensive gifts from us. He is asking us to put Him first in everything we do."

### 4 Talk About It

- Why does God deserve our respect?
- What are some ways that we disrespected God without realising it?
- What do you think is most important – words or actions – when it comes to respecting God? Why?

**Parents:** Share an experience in which you disrespected God. What consequences did you face? How did God help you to change?

### 5 Prayer

Pray that God will guide our paths and keep our eyes on Him at all times.



Click or scan this QR code for this week's Bible story video!

monday

27

## The King Who Dominates

SCRIPTURE Daniel 2:1-13

## OBSERVATION

Where is God in verses 1 to 13?

## APPLICATION

How do I see God where He does appear to be there?

## PRAYER

Lord, I can never escape from Your Spirit! I can never get away from Your presence! If I go up to heaven, You are there; if I go down to the grave, You are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there Your hand will guide me and Your strength will support me.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in Your apparent absence, You are present.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

Daniel 2 is a tale of two kings. It begins with “in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar” (v.1) – “the king of kings” (Dan 2:37). Daniel is about kings and kingdoms. The Hebrew word, *malikut* and its Aramaic equivalent, *maliku* (in Dan 2-7), for “kingdom” and “reign” are key terms in Daniel, occurring a total of 69 times. And Daniel 2 is primarily about the true King of kings – God, who dominates over human history.

Nebuchadnezzar had very terrifying nightmares. He desperately needed to know the meaning of his bad dreams. When he got the ablest men in his kingdom to interpret the dreams for him, they were not able to. Then the king became very angry with their inefficiency and made a decree to destroy all of them. And now the lives of Daniel and his friends were in danger.

At this point of the story (vv.1-13), we see just human activities and actions. God is not in the picture. Although the story begins with “the reign of Nebuchadnezzar”, the writer of Daniel intends for us to read it theologically – **starting with God**. This theological principle ought also to be our principle for reading and living the story of our lives, even when we do not see God in it and we ask, “Where is God in this?” **God is there** in verses 1 to 13 theologically, even though He has yet to appear in the text. We must see in here the theological continuity of “the Lord gave” and “God gave” in Daniel 1: 2, 9 and 17. Daniel 2 continues from Daniel 1.

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 139:7-10 (NLT)

tuesday

28

## The King Is Disturbed

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 2:1-3**OBSERVATION**

What does Nebuchadnezzar's dream experience tell us about him?

**APPLICATION**

How do I respond to matters that trouble me and give me anxiety?

**PRAYER**

Write a prayer to God as your response from your meditation on and application of the Scriptures.

prayer pointers

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for pastors and staff: That God will continually give them peace in every circumstance<sup>25</sup>
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**N**ebuchadnezzar had “dreams, and his spirit was troubled” (v.1). And he was “anxious to understand the dream” (v.3). Why was Nebuchadnezzar troubled and “anxious to understand the dream”? “In the ancient world, such dreams were thought to be shadows that the future cast in front of itself, tipping its hand to show what lay ahead. The interpretation of the dream was therefore important, in order that the king might take whatever steps that could be taken to counteract the events the dream anticipated, or at least be ready for them.”<sup>26</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar's emotional state reveals the deep sense of insecurity in him. In ancient Babylon, a bad dream was a bad omen, particularly if the dream was repeated, as the text hints.<sup>27</sup> There was another cause of Nebuchadnezzar's insecurity. In the early years of his reign, “he had to fight many campaigns to consolidate his new empire. There were several border revolts and other external threats. Somehow, he had to build up his own prestige and stature as the new king of a new world power. It seems that all that generated in him an inner insecurity and fear, which manifested itself in troubled dreams”<sup>28</sup>.

Nebuchadnezzar had the greatest human power and immense earthly treasures to do whatever he wished (cf. Dan 5:19). But still, insecurity laid hold of him and he couldn't shake it off. What humans think can give them security do not – because they cannot – give them security. Christians do find it hard to embrace this true reality. We say, “Let's be realistic. We live in a real world.” Do you?

<sup>25</sup> 2 Thessalonians 3:16

<sup>26</sup> Iain M. Duguid, 19

<sup>27</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Hearing the Message of Daniel: Sustaining Faith in Today's World* (Zondervan, 2017), 43

<sup>28</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, 43

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