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# 2023 devotional journal

*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)**



may



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2023  
devotional journal

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)**

### **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)***

from daniel

# preparing to meet king jesus: into your hands

## senior pastors'

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 disciplemaking roots through authentic discipleship and intentional disciplemaking 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

foreword

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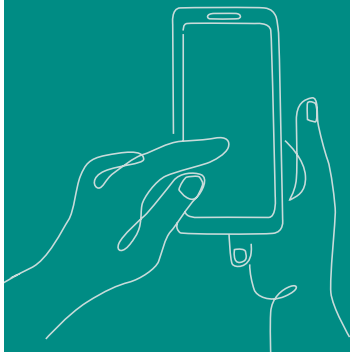
# guide to using this devotional journal

## 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.

step one



## 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.

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### ✦ 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 two

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# pray for urban missions

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.”*

**MATTHEW 5:14 (ESV)**

**U**rban missions focus on outreach ministry in the cities in healthcare, literacy, disaster relief and orphanage work. The post-Covid situation is not looking good for cities. Here are some recent reports from church leaders across Asia:

- **Hong Kong:** 30% of church leaders and church members emigrated in 2022. The church has been struggling with insufficient funds for missions and church ministries.
- **Taiwan:** Over 300 churches closed between 2021 and 2022, yet 298 traditional temples were set up in the same period. The young adults are not coming to church anymore. The proportion of evangelical Christians has reduced from 4% to 2% of the population.
- **Sarawak, Malaysia:** The rural population is hollowing out, the churches there are empty and the pastors from the rural areas are not equipped for urban work.

Yet we celebrate the following breakthroughs:

- **Bangladesh:** 195 churches were planted recently.
- **Hanoi, Vietnam:** Almost 50 churches were planted.
- **Miri, Sarawak in Malaysia:** Through outreach efforts to children in the community, 380 families (parents and children) prayed to receive Christ.

The Gospel is the message of hope in such times. Let us be of one heart to intercede for the cities.

**Pray:**

- That outreach efforts will not cease. For the Gospel to be preached and shared in various creative ways despite the growing challenges.
- That disciples globally continue to tithe and give towards God's work.
- That the urban poor receive proper and adequate food, shelter and healthcare. For the churches to lead the community in meeting these needs.
- That sponsorship for the education of children and youth will continue.
- For the five Steady Readers missions trips to the Philippines, India, Nepal and Vietnam this year.
- For the village doctor training in Davao, Philippines in October.
- For follow-up of the restoration work in Bangladesh arising from the floods.
- For the rebuilding of homes and lives of families impacted by the Turkey and Syria earthquakes.
- For the re-equipping of pastors in Sarawak, Malaysia for urban ministries.

monday

01

# Acting in Love Together

**SCRIPTURE** Romans 12:1-2, 9-21

## OBSERVATION

According to verses 9 to 21, what would a church that is practising genuine love look like?

## APPLICATION

In what ways do I desire to grow in my love for fellow Christians and unbelievers?

## PRAYER

You are the blessed God. May I live by You, live for You, never be satisfied with my Christian progress but seek to increasingly resemble Christ. May conformity to His principles, character and conduct grow hourly in my life. As I pursue my heavenly journey by Your grace, let me be known as a person with no aim but that of a burning desire for You, and the good and salvation of my neighbour. Amen.<sup>1</sup>



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

## deeper reflection

**T**his week leading up to New Life Friends Day, we will reflect on the theme of “Acting in Love Together”.

Verses 9 to 21 unfold from verses 1 and 2 where Paul instructs us to live in a manner that is “holy and acceptable to God” (v.1) and to “discern what is the will of God” (v.2). As such, verses 9 to 21 do not constitute a hodgepodge of seemingly unrelated moral exhortations. Instead, **genuine love** is explicitly stated up front (v.9a) as the opening call and stands as the heading to, and central theme stringing together, the entire section.<sup>2</sup> In the original language, verses 9 to 13 constitute one long sentence with one overarching idea: **love must be authentic** (literally, “without hypocrisy”). Together with verses 14 to 21, they provide practical examples of what such love looks like in action,<sup>3</sup> and are part of God’s “good and acceptable and perfect” will (v.2) for His people.

Furthermore, an *inclusio*<sup>4</sup> demarcates this passage. It opens (v.9b) and closes (v.21) with the same idea that genuine love involves **shunning evil and clinging to good**. Christians are to manifest good by loving God and people, and to avoid evil by renouncing selfishness and revenge.<sup>5</sup>

In summary, Christians living out genuine love in daily life **love God** (vv.11-12), **love fellow Christians** (vv.10, 13, 15-16) and **love unbelievers** (vv.14, 17-21).<sup>6</sup> In other words, **the church acting in love together** will (1) **love God together**, (2) **love one another within the church** and (3) **love others outside the church together**. Over the next few days, we will dive deeper into each of these sub-themes.

<sup>1</sup> Abridged and adapted from “Divine Support”, in *The Valley of Vision: A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions*, ed. Arthur Bennett (Edinburg, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust), 115.

<sup>2</sup> Douglas J. Moo, “Romans,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1151.

<sup>3</sup> Steven E. Runge, *High Definition Commentary: Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 219.

<sup>4</sup> This is a literary device that resembles a “hamburger structure”, where the idea at the beginning of the section is repeated at the end, thus “sandwiching” or bracketing the intervening ideas.

<sup>5</sup> C. Marvin Pate, *Romans*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 248.

<sup>6</sup> This thematic division of the text follows Pate, 248.

tuesday

02

## Loving God Together

**SCRIPTURE** Romans 12:9, 11-12

### **O**BSERVATION

According to verses 11 and 12, what would a church that is loving God together look like?

### **A**PPPLICATION

In what ways do I desire to grow in my service to the Lord and steadfastness in Him?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for pastors and staff: To lead the church through exemplary service to the Lord and steadfastness in Him
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**F**irst and foremost for Christians, our genuine love is to be directed towards God. Such love for God is expressed in our **service to the Lord**. The word translated as “serve” (v.11; Greek *douleuō*) literally means “to stand in the relationship of a slave”<sup>7</sup>. As slaves to the Lord our Master, we can only show genuine love towards God if our service is fueled by zeal and fervency in spirit. Because our service to God is to be a lifelong commitment, if it is merely powered by human eagerness and enthusiasm, then “losing steam” is only natural and to be expected, and deterioration to sloth and complacency only a matter of time. Paul’s reference to fervency “in spirit” is almost certainly a reminder to us to rely on the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> He is the true source of God-given zeal and fervency, and ultimately enables our lifelong, loving service to God.

Such love for God is also expressed in our **steadfastness in the Lord**. Being “joyful in hope, patient in tribulation and faithful in prayer” (v.12, NIV) all demonstrate an unwavering steadfastness in our faith in the Lord. And “at the heart of this triplet is...hope, namely our confident Christian expectation of the Lord’s return and the glory to follow. It is to us the source of abiding joy. But it also calls for patience, as meanwhile we endure tribulation and persevere in prayer”<sup>9</sup>.

Christians are called to love God by way of zealous and fervent service to Him, and joyful, patient and faithful steadfastness in Him. When we do this together as a church, we are loving God together.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 261.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 778.

<sup>9</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 332.

wednesday

03

## Loving One Another Within the Church (1)

**S**CRIPTURE Romans 12:9, 10, 13

### **O**BSERVATION

According to verses 10 and 13, what would a church that is acting in love together look like?

### **A**PPPLICATION

In what ways do I need to grow in showing affection, honour, generosity and hospitality to fellow Christians?

### **P**RAYER

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



- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for the Generations: To show mutual affection and honour, and genuine generosity and hospitality, in relating with one another and sharing our lives across generations
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

Our genuine love is to be directed, next, towards other Christians. In verse 10a, the Greek word *philostorgos* (ESV: “love”; NASB: “be devoted to”) typically describes parental love, while *philadelphia* (ESV: “brotherly affection”; NASB: “brotherly love”) designates love between siblings. Both words originally denote familial blood relationships, but Paul applies them here to the **mutual affection** within God’s family.<sup>10</sup>

Paul also exhorts us in verse 10b to show **mutual honour**, giving credit to others over ourselves. This may mean either to “take the lead in honoring one another” (CSB), or to “give preference to one another in honor” (NASB).<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, Paul instructs Christians to “in humility consider others as more important than yourselves” (Phil 2:3b CSB; “count others more significant than yourselves”, ESV).

**Generosity** moves us to “share with God’s people who are in need” (v.13a, NIV). Indeed, the Jerusalem church “had all things in common” and believers willingly sold private possessions and distributed the proceeds to all “as any had need”<sup>12</sup>. The church in Antioch also gave, “everyone according to his ability”, to the needs of believers in Judea.<sup>13</sup>

**Hospitality** ministers to visitors. In verse 13b, “to show hospitality” is translated from the Greek word *philoxenia*, literally “love of strangers”. As inns were few in Paul’s time, it was crucial for believers to open their homes to travelling visitors, especially Christian missionaries, providing food and shelter without charge. Christians must pursue hospitality – gladly, not grudgingly (as may have sometimes occurred, see 1 Pet 4:9).<sup>14</sup>

When we practise mutual affection, mutual honour, generosity and hospitality within the church, we are acting in love together as one family in God.

<sup>10</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 331.

<sup>11</sup> This exhortation, in its original language, can be read either way, both correctly.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 2:44-45; also 4:32, 34-37.

<sup>13</sup> Acts 11:27-30.

<sup>14</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 332; also Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 779-780.

thursday

04

## Loving One Another Within the Church (2)

**S**CRIPTURE Romans 12:9, 15-16

### **O**BSERVATION

According to verses 15 and 16, what would a church that is acting in love together look like?

### **A**PPPLICATION

In what ways do I desire to grow in empathy, harmony and humility?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To practise empathy, pursue harmony and personify humility in all their collaborations with fellow Christians
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**O**ur genuine love towards other Christians is manifested in several other ways. Joy and sorrow often arise from personal gain and loss. Paul teaches that “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.” (1 Cor 12:26). Identifying so deeply with fellow Christians that we rejoice with them even when we do not enjoy their gain, and weep with them even when we have not suffered their loss (v.15) – this is **empathy** that only genuine love can bestow.<sup>15</sup>

In verse 16a, the Greek word for “to think” (*phronco*) appears twice. The verse can be rendered: “Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind,…” (NASB) Thus, Paul exhorts **harmony** that results from being like-minded (v.16a; cf. Phil 2:2-4). This does not mean that we must all think in the same way about every issue. Rather, our attitude toward everything that touches our lives ought to spring from the same Christ-renewed mind we have (cf. Rom 12:2).<sup>16</sup>

Finally, Paul warns against overrating ourselves: “...but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.” (v.16b NASB) Pride makes us believe that we are better than others and that we are always right. This precludes the church from the harmony to which God has called her. The antithesis of pride is **humility**, one practical outworking of which is to fellowship with the lowly among us.<sup>17</sup> Jesus Himself taught and exemplified humble service to the lowly and ostracised.<sup>18</sup> So must we, His church.

When the church practises empathy, harmony and humility, we are acting together in love towards one another.

<sup>15</sup> James R. Edwards, *Romans*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 297.

<sup>16</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 782.

<sup>17</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 783.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Matthew 25:40; Luke 5:12-14.

friday

05

## Loving Others Outside the Church Together (1)

**SCRIPTURE** Romans 12:14, 17-18

### **O**BSERVATION

According to verses 14, 17 and 18, what would a church that is acting in love together look like?

### **A**PPPLICATION

Who do I consider my enemies, and in what ways do I need to learn to bless them and live peaceably with them?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for SGI leaders: To serve effectively as peacekeepers and peacemakers in their CGs, and to mentor others to do the same
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**G**enuine love moves us to love unbelievers, even those who treat us badly and we consider our enemies. In verses 14 and 17 to 21, Paul instructs Christians using four sets of “do not...but instead...” exhortations. We consider the first two exhortations today and the remaining two tomorrow.

First, **do not curse our persecutors, but instead bless them** (v.14). To curse our persecutors is to invoke on them divine punishments, even disasters. Since God is ultimately the Giver of all blessings, a major way for Christians to bless our persecutors is to pray for God’s mercy and grace upon them. Blessing our persecutors is a powerful demonstration of genuine love which shuns evil and clings to what is good (Rom 12:9), and it clearly manifests the renewed way of thinking which characterises believers (Rom 12:2).<sup>19</sup>

Second, **do not repay evil for evil** (v.17), **but instead live peaceably with all** (v.18). The world views retaliation against adversaries as natural and justified, but Paul echoes here<sup>20</sup> our Lord Jesus’ teaching to love our enemies (Matt 5:38-48). Christians are not only to be peacekeepers (Mk 9:50), but also peacemakers (Matt 5:9).<sup>21</sup> Notably, Paul includes two qualifications — “If possible” suggests that peace with enemies cannot always be achieved;<sup>22</sup> and “so far as it depends on you” implies that another party can, in fact, disrupt the peace.<sup>23</sup> The Christian, however, must never be that party responsible for causing disharmony.<sup>24</sup>

When the church refrains from cursing or retaliating against her enemies, but blesses them and, as far as possible, lives peaceably with all, we are acting together in love towards those outside the church.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 780.

<sup>20</sup> Paul also teaches against retaliation in 1 Thessalonians 5:15; and so does Peter (1 Pet 3:9).

<sup>21</sup> James R. Edwards, *Romans*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 298.

<sup>22</sup> For example, one cannot compromise the Gospel to keep peace: Pate, 251.

<sup>23</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 12-13, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 420-421.

<sup>24</sup> John A. Witmer, “Romans,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 490.

saturday

06

## Loving Others Outside the Church Together (2)

**S**CRIPTURE Romans 12:19-21

### **O**BSERVATION

According to verses 19 to 21, what would a church that is acting in love together look like?

### **A**PPPLICATION

In what ways do I desire to grow in overcoming evil with good?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To be overcomers of evil with good, both in their personal lives and in their church leadership responsibilities
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**W**e continue with Paul's third and fourth sets of "do not...but instead..." exhortations towards genuine love even for our enemies.

Third, **do not take revenge, but instead leave vengeance to God (v.19) and help your enemy (v.20)**. The Old Testament prohibition of vengeance applied largely to relationships within the faith community.<sup>25</sup> But here, Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:35 and applies it beyond the church, calling us to show kindness even to our enemies, modelling Jesus' revolutionary ethic of love.<sup>26</sup> To heap burning coals on your enemy's head<sup>27</sup> might refer to an Egyptian ritual in which a person carried a pan of burning charcoal on his head to purge sin. Helping your enemy aims to move him to repentance — to heal, not hurt him.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, **do not be overcome by evil, but instead overcome evil with good (v.21)**. This consummates Paul's argument and returns us to Romans 12:9 (genuine love pursues good and avoids evil). If we curse (Rom 12:14), retaliate (Rom 12:17) or take revenge (v.19), then, having adopted evil responses to evil, we become defeated by evil. However, if we bless our persecutors (Rom 12:14), make peace (Rom 12:18), leave vengeance to God (v.19) and help our enemy (v.20), then we have vanquished evil with good (v.21).<sup>29</sup>

When we are moved by God's mercies and offer our lives to God, and our minds are renewed by His Word (Rom 12:1-2), our relationships become transformed. Christ's love compels us to love God together, love one another within the church, and love others outside the church together. That is what a church that is acting in love together would look like.

<sup>25</sup> Leviticus 19:18a; 2 Chronicles 28:8-15; Proverbs 20:22; 24:29.

<sup>26</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 787.

<sup>27</sup> See also Proverbs 25:21-22.

<sup>28</sup> John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 490.

<sup>29</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 337.

—  
sunday  
07

# Sunday Journal

**S**CRPTURE

**O**BSERVATION

**A**PPPLICATION

**P**RAYER



# 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

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## reflect

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

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## respond

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



Week 1

# FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

## CONFIDENCE:

Living like you believe God is with you.

### Memory Verse

"So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid...'"  
– Hebrews 13:6 (NIV)

### 1 Bottom Line

Share God's love with others.\*

### 2 Bible Story

Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-11 –  
The Great Commission and Ascension

### 3 Activity

#### Fishers of Men

Props: Scissors, paper, paper clips, string and magnets

Cut several fish shapes out of the paper and attach a paper clip to each "fish". Create fishing rods by tying a piece of string around each magnet.

Compete with your family members to see who can pick up the most number of fish within one minute using the rods.

Read Matthew 4:19 and discuss what it means to be fishers of men and what it takes to be one.

Say, "Before Jesus ascended to Heaven, He said, 'make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit...'" In other words, Jesus is encouraging us to be fishers of men. As Jesus' followers, we are to share God's love with as many people as possible so that more will enter His Kingdom. We can always ask God for confidence and wisdom to share the wonderful things God has done for us with others."

### 4 Talk About It

- Are there times when you don't feel confident?
- What keeps you from feeling confident?
- Recall a time when you felt afraid to share God's love.
- How does the way you live affect the way others see Jesus?

**Parents:** Talk about your experiences in sharing God's love with others, for example mission trips or sharing the Gospel. How did the other party respond? How did it change the way you see Jesus?

### 5 Prayer

Ask God for confidence and wisdom to share His love with others. Ask God to open more opportunities for us to share His goodness so that more will enter His Kingdom.



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

monday

08

## Where Do Dreams Come From?

**S**CRPTURE Daniel 2:1-3; 4:4-5

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in the two passages?

### **A**PPPLICATION

How do I respond to my dreams?

### **P**RAYER

God, I thank You that You desire to speak to Your children. You have given us the Scriptures as the primary means by which You speak. Let me hear the living voice of the living God in the Scriptures. Grant me the ability to discern Your voice, especially via other means by which You speak, such as impressions, inner voice, dreams, visions, circumstances and people.

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

## deeper reflection

**W**e all have dreams. I had a number of times what I call “Preacher’s Nightmare”: I was going to preach, but I had not prepared my sermon! I got onto the pulpit, feeling very anxious. Then I woke up...What a relief!

We do have dreams of bad things happening to us or to our loved ones. Some of us may feel fearful that the dream will become a reality. And we pray against that dream, that it will not come true. When we respond to such bad dreams with such a “Christian” response – “Christian” as in we pray against it – we are simply superstitious like pagans. When we have such bad dreams, the first thing to do is discern the **source** of the dream. There are three sources of dreams.

One source is **ourselves**. You have a desire for certain things, and this desire stays in your subconscious. You dream that you have your desire and you feel very happy, and then you wake up only to realise that it is not true. The second source is **Satan**. Satan does not predict or warn us about bad things that are going to happen to us. If we respond with fear and pray to God against it, it means we believe what Satan tells us in the dream. And that’s what Satan wants us to do. Satan is a liar and deceiver, and he never tells the truth. The third source is **God** – like Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams. Then we seek God as to what He is saying to us through the dream. And certainly, He will tell us.

tuesday

09

## An Understanding of Divine Visitation

**SCRIPTURE** Revelation 2:1-5; Hosea 5:12-15; 6:1-3

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about divine visitation from the three passages?

### **A**PPPLICATION

How do I desire the Lord to come to me?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for pastors and staff: That God will visit them to revive, renew and refresh their lives
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**T**he source of Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams in Daniel 2 and Daniel 4 was God. Nebuchadnezzar did not understand the dreams. But God would ensure that he understands them, because when God speaks to us – in whatever form – He wants us to get His message. Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams were divine visitations.

The Lord does not visit His church only on Sundays. He “walks among” all His churches all the time (v.1). But the Lord does make special visitations to some of His churches – like His church at Ephesus. It was a **divine visitation to remove from God’s presence: “I am coming to you** and will remove your lampstand”, unless they repent of their serious sin of leaving their “first love” – wholehearted love for God and people (vv.4-5; cf. Matt 22:37-40). May we not receive such divine visitation!

Israel was persistent in their unfaithfulness to God. And for that God would remove them from His presence: “I, even I, will tear [them] to pieces and go away...I will go away and return to My place” (Hos 5:14-15). And God would “go away” from His unfaithful people until “in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me” (Hos 5:15). There is always the redemptive hope of a **divine visitation to restore to God’s presence** when we “return to the Lord” (Hos 6:1): “**He will come to us** like the rain watering the earth” to regrow and refresh us (Hos 6:3). God will come to us as the God who has torn and wounded us, but will heal and bandage us, and revive and raise us up (Hos 6:1-2).

wednesday

10

## Spiritual Amnesia in Comfortable Life

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:4-8

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Nebuchadnezzar?

### **A**PPPLICATION

What does it mean for me to live a comfortable life?

### **P**RAYER

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



- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for the Generations: To not forget God when life is comfortable
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**A**s “king of kings” (Dan 2:37) who can be what he wants, do what he wishes and get what he desires, Nebuchadnezzar was living a very comfortable life: “I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at ease in my house and flourishing<sup>30</sup> in my palace” (v.4). **When life is comfortable, be careful.** Don’t be like the rich fool who says to himself, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry” (Lk 12:19). An unexpected divine visitation can just suddenly shake up and overturn the comfortable life: “You fool! You will die this very night” (Lk 12:20, NLT). How insecure are the present “many goods”! How uncertain are the presumed “many years”! In the same way, a divine visitation in a nightmare turned Nebuchadnezzar’s “at ease” and “flourishing” into “made me fearful” and “kept alarming me” (v.5).

What are we to be careful of when life is comfortable? **Spiritual amnesia.** Nebuchadnezzar gave orders for “all the wise men of Babylon” to come to him to interpret the dream for him (v.6). But they could not do it (v.7). Then “finally Daniel came in” (v.8) and interpreted the dream. Daniel was not among “**all** the wise men of Babylon” called by Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten about Daniel – but more than that, the God of Daniel – who interpreted his dream in Daniel 2.

We can turn God’s blessing into a curse by ourselves. It is when we “have eaten and are satisfied” from God’s blessings, our hearts “become proud” and “forget” God (Deut 8:11-14).

<sup>30</sup> Prosperous (NIV); prospering (ESV)

thursday

11

## The Place of Your Flourishing

**SCRIPTURE** Psalm 92:12-15; Daniel 4:4-8

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about “flourishing” in the two passages?

### **A**PPPLICATION

How do I want to flourish in my life?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To flourish in knowing God
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

Like Nebuchadnezzar, when we are “at ease”, we can easily forget God in our “flourishing” (Dan 4:4). When Nebuchadnezzar mentioned “Daniel”, he added “whose name is Belteshazzar according to the name of my god” (Dan 4:8). At the point when Daniel interpreted his dream, Nebuchadnezzar looked at Daniel in terms of “the name of **my god**”. When Daniel interpreted his dream the second time, Nebuchadnezzar did not see “the God of heaven who reveals mysteries” as he did and acknowledged before (Dan 2:28, 47), but only his god. Do we see God in our “flourishing”, or “my god” – I, me and myself – who has accomplished the “flourishing”?

There is nothing wrong with “flourishing in my palace” like Nebuchadnezzar. But there is a place where we are to flourish and when we flourish in that place, we will not forget God in our “flourishing in my palace”. The Psalmist in Psalm 92 tells us: “The righteous man will **flourish** like a palm tree...will **flourish in the courts of our God**” (vv.12-13). **Flourishing in the presence of God!** We “flourish” in God’s presence because we are “**planted** in the house of the LORD” (v.13). Being “planted” in God’s presence is being rooted deeply and firmly in our relationship with God, walking with Him continually. Then, we “will **grow** like a cedar in Lebanon” (v.12). Cedar provides the finest wood for building the temple of God (1 Kin 5:2-6). In the long arduous discipleship journey, we keep growing and growing, and “will **still** yield fruit in old age”, and be “full of sap and very green” (v.14).

friday

12

## Tale of an Exalted Tree

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:10-12

### **O**BSERVATION

What is the significance of the tree as described in the passage?

### **A**PPPLICATION

How do I look at human greatness and glory?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for SGI leaders: To not seek after human greatness and glory
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel 4 is about a two-part dream of Nebuchadnezzar, with the story narrated in three stages: vision in the dream (Dan 4:10-18), interpretation of the dream (Dan 4:19-27) and actualisation of the dream (Dan 4:28-37).

When Nebuchadnezzar had his dream, he did not know that the dream was about him until Daniel interpreted for him. Until then, Nebuchadnezzar could only describe the content of his dream. The first part of the dream was a vision of an exalted tree (vv.10-12), which Nebuchadnezzar would realise later depicts his supreme greatness and glory.

We can be like this exalted tree in various ways. We may be at a “great height” (v.10) – in high positions or at the peak of our accomplishments. We may be pursuing our great dreams and ambitions, and keep pursuing them until we reach our limits – “the sky” (v.11). We may be seeking to be “large”, “strong” and “beautiful” – appearing good and great on the outside, and to be “visible to the end of the whole earth” (vv.11, 12). We desire to be prominently “visible” before people and it matters a lot to us if what we have done has gone unnoticed. Jesus warns us: “Beware of practising your righteousness” – in spirituality and charity – “before men” intentionally “to be noticed by them” (Matt 6:1).

There is a biblical place to be “great in the sight of the Lord” (Lk 1:15). It is a gift from God. It is a greatness as defined by God and it can be in ways that do not conform to the human idea of greatness.

saturday

13

## Tale of the Fallen Tree

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:10-18

### **O**BSERVATION

What does the passage tell us about God and humans?

### **A**PPPLICATION

How do I see God in human greatness and glory?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To see God in human greatness and glory
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**H**uman greatness, like the exalted tree in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (vv.10-12), can never last forever, as the second part of the dream tells us (vv.13-17). The time will surely come for human greatness to be subject to the divine “chop down”, “cut off”, “strip off” and “scatter” (v.14). When Nebuchadnezzar was an exalted tree, “the beasts of the earth found shade under it” (v.12). But, as a fallen tree, Nebuchadnezzar would be on his fours and “share[s] with the beasts in the grass of the earth” (v.15). Once above the beasts, but now equal with the beasts. Such tragic irony will not exist, if there is no God. But there is God, and God is there as “the Most High [who] is sovereign over all the kingdoms of the earth” (v.17, NIV).

Turning things around or upside down is one of the ways that God demonstrates His sovereignty. This is seen in how Nebuchadnezzar’s “human mind” – his most important faculty, his intelligence<sup>31</sup> – would “be changed” and he would “be given” a “beast’s mind” (v.16). The two verbs in the passive voice – “be changed” and “be given” – point to the Divine Passive that underscores God’s sovereignty. Perhaps, a greater significance is seen in what God replaces after what He has removed in Nebuchadnezzar: a “beast’s mind”.

According to human order, only powerful people make human kingdoms. But the sovereign God who turns things upside down “sets the lowliest of people over” “human kingdoms” (v.17, CSB). Jesus of Nazareth leads the way in this divine countercultural movement (Mk 6:2-3).

<sup>31</sup> Joyce G. Baldwin, *Daniel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (IVP, 1978), 112

—  
sunday  
14

# Sunday Journal

**S**CRPTURE

**O**BSERVATION

**A**PPPLICATION

**P**RAYER



# 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

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## reflect

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

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## respond

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



Week 2

# FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

## CONFIDENCE:

Living like you believe God is with you.

### Memory Verse

"So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid...'"

– Hebrews 13:6 (NIV)

### 1 Bottom Line

God sent the Holy Spirit to help you.\*

### 2 Bible Story

Acts 2:1-41 – The Holy Spirit at Pentecost

### 3 Activity

#### Blindfold

Props: A big piece of paper, pencils and eye masks

Draw a maze on the piece of paper. Pair up your family members and provide each pair with a pencil and an eye mask. Get partner 1 to put on the eye mask. Ask partner 2 to give directions to partner 1 to draw a line from point A to point B in the maze.

After the activity, invite everyone to share their thoughts about the Holy Spirit.

Say, "After Jesus ascended to Heaven, all witnesses were filled with the Holy Spirit. In John 14:17, we are told that the Holy Spirit lives in us. Our partner in the game is like the Holy Spirit, guiding us in the right direction when we feel lost."

### 4 Talk About It

- Who do you usually turn to for help first when you face problems?
- How do you know when the Holy Spirit is guiding you?
- Have you ever hesitated to rely on God for help? Why or why not?
- How can you believe that the Holy Spirit is here to help you and build your confidence?

**Parents:** Share how the Holy Spirit has helped you in your life.

### 5 Prayer

Thank God for sending us the Holy Spirit. Pray that God will help us be obedient to the Holy Spirit and let Him guide us in everything we do and say.

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monday

15

## We Are First God's Servants (1)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:6-9, 18

### OBSERVATION

What was Daniel's attitude when he was not at first among "all the wise men of Babylon" whom Nebuchadnezzar consulted on the interpretation of his dream?

### APPLICATION

How do I deal with the fear of being left out?

### PRAYER

Surely, Lord Jesus, You want me to be able to call myself "a bond-servant of Christ Jesus", like Paul,<sup>32</sup> and not just in mere words. Grant me to know deep inside me the meaning and significance in a real way of embracing this sacred identity. As I follow You, help me to be a servant of the Servant of God and to know the kind of servant that You are.

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

## deeper reflection

It was **not by choice** that Daniel was living in Babylon and serving the Babylonian king (Dan 1). He was **captured** by the enemies of his nation in a war, and **compelled** to be where he was and doing what he was doing now. His social status in Babylon was always “an exile from Judah” (Dan 2:25; 5:13; 6:13). But Daniel walked with God faithfully (Dan 1:8). That was central and fundamental in Daniel’s life.

When we walk with God faithfully, we are walking in alignment with God’s purpose for our lives. It means God is fulfilling His purpose and we are fulfilling God’s purpose. Thus, for Daniel, his **circumstances** constituted God’s **calling** for his life. In serving the Babylonian king, Daniel viewed himself **first as a servant of God**. For Daniel, serving the king was actually a means of serving God who had appointed the king. When Christian employees (“slaves”) serve their employers (“masters”), they are to recognise that “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve” (Col 3:22-24). And Christian masters (employers) are servants of their Master in heaven (Eph 6:9).

Daniel served Nebuchadnezzar with **commitment**. When Nebuchadnezzar called “all the wise men of Babylon” to interpret his dream, Daniel was left out, even though he alone was up to the task (vv.6-8). Daniel did not have a FOMO<sup>33</sup> feeling, because he was first a servant of God, and he recognised the sovereignty of God over being included or excluded. When Daniel was finally consulted by Nebuchadnezzar, and his unique competency was acknowledged, there wasn’t any sense of prideful self-importance or indispensability in him.

<sup>32</sup> Romans 1:1

<sup>33</sup> Fear Of Missing Out

tuesday

16

## We Are First God's Servants (2)

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:19-23

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Daniel?

### **A**PPPLICATION

What is my attitude toward people who have hurt me?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for pastors and staff: To grow to be wounded healers in the Lord
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**S**erving Nebuchadnezzar, first as a servant of God, Daniel served as answering God’s **calling** for him and with **commitment** to the king, whether he was being looked for or overlooked.

Daniel served the king with **concern**. Nebuchadnezzar told Daniel about his dream, and by divine revelation (cf. Dan 2:27-30), Daniel immediately knew the interpretation of the dream. And his immediate reaction was he was “appalled” and Nebuchadnezzar could see through his facial expression that he was “alarmed” (v.19a). Then, Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he wished that the dream applies to the king’s adversaries and those who hated him, and not to him (v.19b). It would be natural, reasonable and fair, for Daniel to rejoice and celebrate that the dream applies to Nebuchadnezzar, that he deserved it, because he had destroyed his homeland and deported his people. He did not. Daniel was practising in Old Testament style “Love you enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt 5:44).<sup>34</sup> It is likely that Daniel knew about Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles, instructing them to “seek the welfare of the city [Babylon]...pray to the LORD on its behalf” (Jer 29:1, 7a). What a strange divine design: “In its welfare you will have welfare” (Jer 29:7b)! And being a man of prayer (Dan 2:17-18; 6:10), we can be certain that Daniel prayed for Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon regularly.

Daniel served the king with **courage** – “prophetic courage”<sup>35</sup> – and interpreted the dream faithfully and truly to the world’s most powerful man: “It is you, O king...” (v.22). Daniel risked losing his head. But he was secure in God.

<sup>34</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Hearing the Message of Daniel: Sustaining Faith in Today’s World* (Zondervan, 2017), 97

<sup>35</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, 99

wednesday

17

## Nebuchadnezzar Eating Grass Like Cattle

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:20-25

### **O**BSERVATION

How do you understand the condition of Nebuchadnezzar as described in verses 23 and 25a?

### **A**PPPLICATION

How can I know that a story in the Bible of a king eating grass like cattle to be historically true?

### **P**RAYER

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



- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for the Generations: To believe that the Bible is truly the Word of God
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

“**T**he Bible is the Word of God given in the words of men in history.”<sup>36</sup> Note “in history”. There are stories in the Bible that sound like the stuff of fairy tales, that may cause one to wonder about their historicity. The historicity of Bible stories can stand on their own without necessarily being verified by extra-biblical evidence.

One such story is Nebuchadnezzar being “driven away from mankind... be given grass to eat like cattle” for “seven periods of time” (v.25). Nebuchadnezzar suffered from a mental illness, and “history is by no means silent” about it.<sup>37</sup> Some three centuries after Nebuchadnezzar’s death, a Babylonian priest, Berossus, “preserved a tradition stating that Nebuchadnezzar was taken ill suddenly towards the end of his reign”<sup>38</sup>. This does correspond to verse 25a.

According to Old Testament scholar R. K. Harrison, Nebuchadnezzar suffered from a rare form of deviant behaviour known as “boanthropy”, where he “imagined himself to be a cow or bull, and acted accordingly”<sup>39</sup>. While “a great many doctors spend an entire, busy professional career without once encountering an instance” of boanthropy, Harrison “actually observed a clinical case of boanthropy in a British mental institution in 1946”<sup>40</sup>. A man “in his early twenties, in fine bodily health but decidedly anti-social, spent whole days from dusk to dawn outdoors on institutional grounds. He was limited in his ability to care for himself... They gave him water from a clean container so he wouldn’t drink from mud puddles. But as he wandered over the grounds, he would pluck up chunks of grass to eat; he never ate institutional cuisine with other inmates”<sup>41</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Eerdmans, 1967), 12

<sup>37</sup> R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Eerdmans, 1969), 1114

<sup>38</sup> R. K. Harrison, 1114 – citing Josephus, *Against Apion*, I, 20

<sup>39</sup> R. K. Harrison, 1115

<sup>40</sup> R. K. Harrison, 1116

<sup>41</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (IVP, 2013), 59 – citing R. K. Harrison, 1115-1117

thursday

18

## God Is Merciful and Gracious

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:20-23

### **O**BSERVATION

What is the significance of God's command, "Chop down the tree and destroy it; yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground" in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (v.23)?

### **A**PPPLICATION

How have I experienced God's mercy in His discipline in my discipleship journey?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To be merciful as God is merciful
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**W**hen we reach somewhere like we “have become great and grown strong” and our “majesty has become great” (v.22), this must be accompanied by a keen awareness of the possibility of the divine “Chop down the tree and destroy it” (v.23a). But we are safe, if our focus and orientation are not inward and outward, but upward.

Nebuchadnezzar met the divine “chop down and destroy” judgment when he was at his prime. However, it was not “chop down and destroy” – period. The divine “chop down and destroy” is accompanied by a “yet leave the stump with its roots in the ground” (v.23b). God judges in righteousness and justice, but with mercy and grace.

When Amos saw God’s “locust-swarm” judgment coming on Israel, he cried out, “Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive?” (Am 7:1-2, NIV). God “changed His mind about this” (Am 7:3). God expected Israel to repent of their unfaithfulness. They did not. Then God would send His “fire” judgment and Amos cried out again, “Sovereign LORD, forgive! How can Jacob survive?” (Am 7:4-5, NIV). And God “changed His mind about this” again (Am 7:6). But Israel ignored God’s mercy. This incurred the divine “I will spare them no more” (Am 8:1-2). But still there is divine mercy and grace: “Nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob” (Am 9:8). More than that, God promised Israel that He will “raise up” and “rebuild” their “ruins” (Am 9:11). Capture this heart of God.

God in His mercy and grace gave Nebuchadnezzar the opportunity and time – “seven periods of time” (v.25) – to repent.

friday  
19

# God Is Patient and Kind

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:22-26

## **O**BSERVATION

How is God's patience and kindness toward Nebuchadnezzar shown in verse 25?

## **A**PPPLICATION

How have I experienced God's patience and kindness toward me?

## **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for SGI leaders: To show God's patience and kindness to people
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**P**aul's grand portrait of love in 1 Corinthians 13 is not that of human love – albeit it was meant for the divisive Corinthians to learn and practise among themselves – but divine love. God is love and we are to love as God loves us (1 Jn 4:8; Eph 5:1-2). In painting the characteristics of the love of God, Paul begins with **patience** – “Love is patient” and **kindness** – “love is kind” (1 Cor 13:4). “In Pauline theology” patience and kindness “represent the two sides of the divine attitude toward humankind”<sup>42</sup>. God's patience is loving patience and God is lovingly kind.

We see these two sides of the divine attitude toward Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar to be “be driven away from mankind” and “be given grass to eat like cattle” is “the decree of the Most High” (v.24). The divine “decree” means there is no turning back of God's intention. It is a divine necessity. But, while there is no turning back for the divine “decree”, there is the possibility of turning back for Nebuchadnezzar. For in God's dealings with Nebuchadnezzar there is the **divine patient “until”** – “until you recognise that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind” (v.25). And there is also the **divine kind “after”** – “after<sup>43</sup> you have recognised that it is Heaven that rules”, along with the **divine gracious “be assured”**– “your kingdom will be assured to you” (v.26).

Paul sees God's grace in this way: “the **immeasurable riches** of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:7), “which He **lavished** on us” (Eph 1:7-8a). Are you overwhelmed by God's grace?

<sup>42</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 1987), 636

<sup>43</sup> “When” in some translations

saturday

20

## Humble Repentance Under Sovereign Grace

**S**CRIPTURE Daniel 4:24-27

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make from the conclusion of Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream (v.27)?

### **A**PPPLICATION

What does it mean for me to be "doing righteousness"?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To walk in righteousness under the grace of God
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

One of God’s purposes in showing us “the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience” is to lead us to repentance (Rom 2:4). Mark the intensity of the description of God. God’s “kindness, tolerance and patience” come in the form of His blessings upon us, despite us not living rightly before Him. And here lies the danger of presumptuousness. We “think lightly” of God’s patient grace, “not knowing” its redemptive purpose.

Daniel completed his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream that revealed God’s supreme sovereignty and His sovereign mercy and grace, patience and kindness toward the king with advice for repentance: “break away now from your sins...and your wrongdoings” (v.27). Daniel “put his finger on the sore spot of Babylon’s imperial glory, its social costs in terms of human oppression and exploitation”<sup>44</sup>. It was as described in Habakkuk’s prophecy of the Babylonian conquest expeditions: They “pile up stolen goods”, “make themselves wealthy by extortion”, “build their houses by unjust gains”, “build a city with bloodshed” and “establish a town by injustice” (Hab 2:6, 9, 12). But Daniel included positive counsel on “doing righteousness” and specifically “showing mercy to the poor” (v.27b).

Daniel’s advice ended with “Perhaps then you will continue to prosper” (v.27b, NLT). The “perhaps” points to possibility rather than certainty. It means that “judgment may not be cancelled, but it may be postponed if the threat of judgment is received in humility and penitence”, and “the king’s ease and prosperity could continue”<sup>45</sup>. Such “perhaps” calls for a humble posture under God’s sovereign grace: “Who knows, God may relent...” (Jon 3:9).

<sup>44</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, 100

<sup>45</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, 63

sunday

21

# Sunday Journal

**S**CRPTURE

**O**BSERVATION

**A**PPPLICATION

**P**RAYER



# 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

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## reflect

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

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## respond

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



## Week 3

# FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

## CONFIDENCE:

Living like you believe God is with you.

### Memory Verse

"So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid...'"  
– Hebrews 13:6 (NIV)

### 1 Bottom Line

God is with you no matter what.\*

### 2 Bible Story

Acts 4:1-21 – Peter and John with the Sanhedrin

### 3 Activity

#### Overflowing Water

Props: A transparent container and some pebbles

Fill the container with water almost to its brim. Get your family members to take turns putting in one pebble at a time. The person who causes the water to overflow with his or her pebble loses the game. After the activity, get everyone to share their thoughts about how they handle pressure in tough situations just like during the game. For example, "How do they stay calm? Who do they seek help from?"

Say, "In Acts 3:1-4:21, Peter and John were summoned to the authorities because they proclaimed Jesus' greatness after they healed a lame man. With the help of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John plucked up the courage to speak the truth about Jesus in front of the authorities. God was with them all the time and they were spared from punishment. Who do we turn to when we are under pressure? Jesus is our help and we can seek Him anytime we are under pressure."

### 4 Talk About It

- Recall a time when have you felt under pressure when making a decision.
- How can believing that God is with you give you confidence?
- What can you do to remind yourself that God is with you no matter what?

**Parents:** Share the different ways you handled pressure in the past with help from the Holy Spirit. How did you know that the Holy Spirit was there to help? What surprised you?

### 5 Prayer

Thank God for being with us no matter what. Pray for God's guidance to handle the pressure from different situations.

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this week's Bible  
story video!

monday

22

## Twelve Months of God's Grace

**S**CRIPTURE Daniel 4:24-30

### **O**BSERVATION

What is the significance of the “twelve months” in verse 29?

### **A**PPPLICATION

How can I keep myself from ignoring the Word of God?

### **P**RAYER

God of all *grace*,<sup>46</sup> I thank You for the immeasurable riches of Your *grace* in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus, which You lavished on us in redeeming us and *forgiving* our sins.<sup>47</sup> I thank You that I can draw near with confidence to the Throne of Grace to receive *grace* and mercy to help me in my weaknesses and needs.<sup>48</sup> But keep me from taking Your *grace* for granted.

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

## deeper reflection

**G**od had spoken twice to Nebuchadnezzar: in the vision of his dream (Dan 4:10-17), and then, in Daniel’s interpretation of his dream (Dan 4:19-27). Three things formed the content of God’s word to Nebuchadnezzar. First, God’s revelation of His sovereignty: “the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth” (Dan 4:17, 25, NIV). Second, God’s threat of His judgment: God would remove him from his throne and make him live among beasts (Dan 4:14-15, 23-25). Third, God’s call for Nebuchadnezzar’s acknowledgement: to “recognise that it is Heaven that rules” (Dan 4:17, 25-26).

“Twelve months later” (v.29), Nebuchadnezzar walked on the roof of his palace and saw the Babylon that he had built: “Is this not Babylon the great?” (v.30). God gave Nebuchadnezzar “twelve months” to respond to His word to him. It was “twelve months” of divine grace. God was waiting – quietly. But there was no response from Nebuchadnezzar. Probably, Nebuchadnezzar **had forgotten the Word of God**. God spoke to him the last time about His plan of world history through a vision of a great statue (Dan 2). Until now, Nebuchadnezzar was still the head of gold. And all that God said about the other parts of the statue and the stone cut out without hands has not happened. And now, one month passed...two months passed...three months passed... Nothing happened. There’s a danger in situations where nothing happens after God has spoken. Nebuchadnezzar probably thought **the Word of God is not true** after all.

We cannot know the grace period that God gives us to amend our wayward ways. And we can foolishly squander the grace of God.

<sup>46</sup> 1 Peter 5:10

<sup>47</sup> Ephesians 1:7-8a; 2:7

<sup>48</sup> Hebrews 4:15-16

tuesday

23

## “Isn’t This Babylon the Great?”

**S**CRIPTURE Daniel 4:28-30

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the words of Nebuchadnezzar in verse 30?

### **A**PPPLICATION

How can I see pride in me?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for pastors and staff: To be able see pride in themselves
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**W**hen Nebuchadnezzar walked on the roof of his palace, he was awestruck by the sight of the Babylon that he had built: “Is this not Babylon the great?” (v.30). What was the greatness of Babylon like? The Hanging Gardens of Babylon was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. But there were more. Old Testament scholar John Goldingay makes this comment: “The sense of achievement that Nebuchadnezzar here expresses [Dan 4:30] is severely understated compared with that expressed in his successive building inscriptions in Babylon.”<sup>49</sup> To give perspective to Goldingay’s comment: Nebuchadnezzar’s building inscriptions in Babylon “occupy 126 pages of text and translation” in Professor S. Langdon’s edition of them in his book, *Building Inscriptions of the Neo-Babylonian Empire*.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps, there is no better statement of pride and egotism in the Bible than that of Nebuchadnezzar: “**I myself** have built...**by** the might of **my** power and **for** the honor of **my** majesty” (v.30). It is so personal and concrete, that we can use it to check ourselves if that is how we think and feel about our achievements.

We must see the pride in us, which is not easy. I am a person with passion for truth. Some years ago, God made me aware of a reality in me: My passion for truth can subtly shift to become pride of heart. I find it impossible to see the line that divides the two. The feelings of both are the same. All that I can do is to bring my heart before God for Him to judge, saying, “Lord, You know my heart.”

<sup>49</sup> John E. Goldingay, *Daniel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Word Books, 1989), 89

<sup>50</sup> John E. Goldingay, 89

wednesday

24

## Meet the God Who Rules

**S**CRIPTURE Daniel 4:30-32

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about God?

### **A**PPPLICATION

What aspects of the sovereignty of God do I need to lay hold of in my discipleship journey?

### **P**RAYER

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



- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for the Generations: To see and trust God's sovereignty in all life situations
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**N**ebuchadnezzar's egotism, "I myself have built...by the might of my power and for the honor of my majesty" (v.30), is expressed in various forms of humanistic arrogance: Human sovereignty – "I do whatever I want." Human omnipotence – "'Cannot' is not in my life vocabulary." Human supremacy – "Everything is in my control." Human security – "No crisis can knock me down." Human glory – "I am the best of all!" Such a spirit like Nebuchadnezzar's will inevitably meet the God who rules.

**God rules with sudden prevention:** "While the word was in the king's mouth" – before he could fully enjoy and savour his great achievements, God interrupted – "a voice came from heaven..." (v.31). In life, it can be "While I have become most successful...", "While I have gotten what I want in life..." that comes the divine sudden prevention: It "has been removed from you" (v.31). God has forewarned this kind of divine act in His Word, but there is no warning when God actually acts.

**God rules with supreme power:** "the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth" (Dan 4:17, 25, 32, NIV). We can be secure in this theological reality in an unstable world of geopolitical conflicts and global economic crises. This transcendent theological reality is also "the gospel of the kingdom of God" that gives the hope of salvation (Lk 16:16).

**God rules with sovereign prerogative:** "[He] bestows it on whomever He wishes" (Dan 4:17, 25, 32). We must learn and live by this theological truth – that God is God – when God does not meet our expectations or God seems to be unfair to us.

thursday

25

## God Fulfils His Word Faithfully

**S**CRIPTURE Daniel 4:29-33

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the Word of God?

### **A**PPPLICATION

What is God fulfilling His Word to me like in my discipleship journey?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Outreach/Missions/New Life leaders: To believe that God will fulfil what He has spoken
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

In His dealings with Nebuchadnezzar, God waited patiently for “twelve months” for him to respond to His Word (v.29). Then God acted suddenly – “While the word was in the king’s mouth...” (v.31). This sudden act was God fulfilling His Word faithfully: “Immediately the word concerning Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled” (v.33).

Oftentimes, when God has spoken to us, He wants us to wait for Him to fulfil His Word. And the waiting can be long and not easy. Capture the struggle and tension of the Psalmist in waiting for God to fulfil His Word: “I long for Your salvation; I put my hope in Your Word. My eyes grow weary looking for what You have promised; I ask, ‘When will You comfort me?’” (Psa 119:81-82, CSB). There are times when we are waiting for God to fulfil His Word and His Word keeps testing us (Psa 105:18-19).

On Christmas Day of 1980, I had a very painful relationship breakup, which involved a third party. I cried bitterly before God for days. On one of these days, I randomly flipped open my Bible... A verse, Jeremiah 31:16, caught my teary eyes: “Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears; for your work will be rewarded.” I sensed God was speaking to me. But for the next ten years, I faced closed door upon closed door in this area of relationship. Then came November 1990, I dated a fine woman, who became my life partner. She is the best gift that God has given me. God fulfilled His word to me – after ten years.

friday

26

## Where Are My Eyes Looking?

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 4:34

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Nebuchadnezzar in this verse?

### **A**PPPLICATION

What changes do I need to make with regards to my focus in life?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for SGI leaders: To keep Christ as the central focus in their lives
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel 4 is about God dealing with “those who walk in pride” (Dan 4:37). In a way, pride is concretely defined by “**I myself** have built...**by** the might of **my** power and **for** the glory of **my** majesty” (Dan 4:30). Pride “locates the self at the centre of the universe, glorifying in its own achievements and putting everyone else in second place. Its eyes are always directed sideways and downwards, comparing ourselves with others, and endlessly trying to outdo them. In its very nature, pride has to be cleverer than someone else or more attractive than other people.”<sup>51</sup>

Pride has to do with where our eyes are looking. The “eyes of pride are always fixed on myself and my performance, in a way that leaves no room for looking upwards to God”<sup>52</sup>. God is gracious when He deals with our pride, because pride blinds us and we cannot see it in us by ourselves. God has to show us our pride, and oftentimes, by tearing down our ego, as He did to Nebuchadnezzar. God will do so until we “raised my eyes toward heaven” (v.34) – until we see God. We can see our pride only when we see God. And especially, when we look “toward heaven”, we see the One “who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself... He humbled Himself...even [to] death on a cross” (Phil 2:6-8). As we see Him, we know Him and walk with Him in the Spirit of “Jesus of Nazareth” (Jn 1:45-46).

<sup>51</sup> Iain M. Duguid, *Daniel*, Reformed Expository Commentary (P&R, 2008), 70

<sup>52</sup> Iain M. Duguid, 70

saturday

27

## Glory and Grace of God

**S**CRIPTURE Daniel 4:34-37

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about God in verses 34 to 37?

### **A**PPPLICATION

What aspects of who God is do I need to grasp in my relationship with Him?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for Church Board: To see and know the glory of God
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**S**omething happened to Nebuchadnezzar when he “raised my eyes toward heaven”: “my sanity returned to me” (v.34, NIV). This “sanity” is more than just mental sanity. It is **seeing true reality** – of oneself and who God is. Reformer John Calvin said, “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”<sup>53</sup>

Our discipleship journey is to be a theological journey – a journey of knowing God personally. In his God-humbling journey, Nebuchadnezzar came to see through experience the **glory of God**. Here we see theology, and not theology in a vacuum, but with a context. The context is the arrogant human claim of its greatness and power. Note that Nebuchadnezzar’s theology is marked by its exaltedness. **God is incomparably great** – “All peoples of the earth are nothing compared to Him” (v.35, NLT). **Nothing can obstruct God** – “He does according to His will...and no one can ward off His hand” (v.35). **God is never questionable** – “no one can...say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (v.35). **God is never wrong** – “all His works are true and His ways just” (v.37). How does this exalted theology build your relationship with God?

Nebuchadnezzar came to taste the **grace of God**: “my majesty and splendour were **restored** to me...I was **re-established** in my sovereignty” (v.36). God did not owe Nebuchadnezzar anything when he humbled himself after God had humbled him. When God exalts us when we humble ourselves, that divine exaltation is God’s “greater grace” that He gives us (Jas 4:6, 10).

<sup>53</sup> Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1, John T. McNeill, editor, Library of Christian Classics, Volume XX (Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 35

—  
sunday  
28

# Sunday Journal

**S**CRPTURE

**O**BSERVATION

**A**PPPLICATION

**P**RAYER



# 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

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## reflect

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

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## respond

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



Week 4

# FAMILY DEVOTIONAL

## CONFIDENCE:

Living like you believe God is with you.

### Memory Verse

"So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid...'"

– Hebrews 13:6 (NIV)

### 1 Bottom Line

God is with you even when you have questions.\*

### 2 Bible Story

Acts 8:26-40 – Philip and the Man from Ethiopia

### 3 Activity

#### Questions

Props: Picture cards or word cards

Ask your family members to take turns picking a card without showing others what it is. After someone has picked a card, get everyone else to ask questions to try to identify what is on it. You may give clues such as, "It's an animal".

Discuss:

- How does it feel when we know nothing about something?
- Who do you turn to for answers?
- Why is it necessary to ask questions?

Say, "It is good to ask when we have questions, especially when it's about things in the Bible. Having questions shows that we are thinking seriously about what we read. Getting the answers from a trusted person, source or God ensures that we understand the Scriptures accurately. Our God answers!"

### 4 Talk About It

- Recall a time when God found a way to answer a question that you had.
- Who do you talk to when you have questions?
- Is it okay to question things that we have always been taught?
- What questions do you have?

**Parents:** Share some of the doubts you had about the Bible in the past. Who did you turn to for answers? How did God answer your questions or clarify your doubts?

### 5 Prayer

Pray that God will give us the wisdom to ask the right questions about things we do not know. Pray that God will send the right people to help us understand Him accurately.



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

monday

29

# The Sovereign Holiness of God

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 5:1-5; 1:1-2

## OBSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about the acts of Belshazzar and Nebuchadnezzar toward the holy vessels of the temple of God?

## APPLICATION

How does the fact that God can judge us suddenly affect the way I live my life?

## PRAYER

Holy and gracious God, I thank You that I have access into Your holy presence with freedom and confidence through Jesus Christ. But You are also a consuming fire.<sup>54</sup> So, keep me from presumptuousness in my relationship with You, knowing that You do judge us for our sins, but in love, mercy and grace, for our good that we may walk in holiness before You.

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

## deeper reflection

**B**elshazzar “held a great feast for a thousand of his nobles”, “drinking wine” together (v.1). At this point, the Neo-Babylonian empire was under threat from the Persian army (cf. Dan 5:31). Holding such a lavish feast, “especially in the face of an enemy army...is probably meant to underline the king’s careless hubris”<sup>55</sup>.

Belshazzar ignored with indifference not just a political danger, but also a spiritual danger. When he “tasted wine” – “under the influence of”<sup>56</sup> wine – he gave orders to bring “the gold and silver vessels” which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple of God to be used for drinking wine (vv.2-3). This incurred the wrath of the holy God immediately: “Suddenly the fingers of a man’s hand emerged...” (v.5). When Nebuchadnezzar took these holy vessels from God’s temple (Dan 1:2), there was no such response from God. When Belshazzar was drinking wine with these holy vessels, he “praised the gods of gold and silver...” (v.4). Such a sacrilegious act was no different from Nebuchadnezzar’s act of putting these same holy vessels in “the house of his god” (Dan 1:2). But the same holy God just let it go.

God is not inconsistent. The two contrasting divine responses to two similar sacrilegious acts point to the **sovereign holiness of God**. God in His anger struck a Levite dead for touching the ark of the covenant (2 Sam 6:6-7). But this did not happen when the uncircumcised Philistines captured the ark with their unclean hands (1 Sam 4:10-11). God is **always holy**, but He can act in any way, at any time in His **sovereign freedom**. Such sovereign acts of God are His holy acts.

<sup>54</sup> Hebrews 12:29

<sup>55</sup> Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Apollos, IVP, 2002), 128

<sup>56</sup> John E. Goldingay, 100, Notes 2.a-a

tuesday

30

## Idolatrous Use of God's Things

**SCRIPTURE** Daniel 5:1-9

### **O**BSERVATION

What reality does Belshazzar's act in verse 4 point to?

### **A**PPPLICATION

How can I guard myself against using the things of God in an idolatrous way?

### **P**RAYER

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

- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for pastors and staff: To guard against any form of idolatry in their lives and ministry
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for those in need
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**T**he “gold and silver vessels” taken out of “the house of God” by Nebuchadnezzar belonged to God (vv.2-3). And these holy vessels which were consecrated by God “represented the God of Israel”<sup>57</sup>. So, when Belshazzar and his party guests “drank the wine” with God’s holy vessels and “praised” their idols (v.4), they were in reality **using God in idolatry**.

We can commit the same evil as Belshazzar, although not in the same way. We can misuse and abuse the things of God. “Just as Belshazzar used the temple vessels to praise his false gods, so too we take the things that belong to God and use them to feed our lusts and idolatries.”<sup>58</sup> God is the Creator of all things, and thus, all things belong to God. Money belongs to God. God says, “The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine” (Hag 2:8). The pagans use the silver and gold that belong to God to make “gods of gold and silver” and worship them. We can make money, which belongs to God, to become gods that we worship. When Jesus warns us, “You cannot serve God and wealth” (Matt 6:24), He is implying that money can very easily become a god that we will serve. And why does Jesus exhort us, “Do not worry about your life”, in a long discourse (Matt 6:25-34) immediately after His warning, “You cannot serve God and wealth”? Worry about life can lead to worshipping money. The safeguard is: Seek first the kingdom and the righteousness of our Heavenly Father who knows our needs and provides them (Matt 6:32-33).

<sup>57</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, 110

<sup>58</sup> Iain M. Duguid, 85

wednesday

31

## Answering God's Call in Vocation

**S**CRIPTURE Daniel 5:7-17

### **O**BSERVATION

What significant observations can you make about Daniel?

### **A**PPPLICATION

What positive attitudes do I need to cultivate in my workplace?

### **P**RAYER

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



- Give thanks and praise
- Pray for leaders
- Pray for significant people
- Pray for the Generations: To view their vocation as answering God's call for their lives
- Pray for self

## deeper reflection

**D**aniel did not choose to serve Babylonian kings in Babylon. It was circumstances – a national crisis of his country – that compelled Daniel to be where he was and doing what he was doing. Daniel did not have the privilege, opportunity or freedom to pursue a career of his own desire. However, it was out of these adverse circumstances, that Daniel discovered God's call for him: To serve God through serving Babylonian kings. And God gave him the specific competency to fulfil God's call (Dan 1:17). After Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar about his dream and the interpretation, he was “promoted” to be “ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon” (Dan 2:48).

When Belshazzar gathered his wise men to interpret for him the inscription on the wall, Daniel was not among them. Daniel was not unknown to Belshazzar.<sup>59</sup> He knew him as “one of the exiles from Judah, whom my father the king brought from Judah” and “appointed him chief” over all the wise men of Babylon (vv.11-12). It was only when the queen mentioned Daniel to him, that Belshazzar called for him (vv.10-11). Belshazzar “deliberately ignored Daniel”<sup>60</sup>. Daniel was **sidelined**. How do you respond to being sidelined? For Daniel, he felt **secure**. Daniel was secure because he had no ambition to climb the corporate ladder. He had no interest in rewards and promotion. Daniel said to Belshazzar, “Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else” (vv.16-17). But Daniel interpreted the inscription for Belshazzar. Daniel was answering God's call for him.

<sup>59</sup> Ernest C. Lucas, 131

<sup>60</sup> Ernest C. Lucas, 131

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# NOTES

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