

DANIEL

PATTERNS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Week Four: A Trust that Transforms Trial Daniel Chapter 3: 13-30; Matthew 4: 1-11

Opening Question: What is the largest statue or monument you have ever visited or seen?

1: CONTEXT

A quick look back: Spend a few minutes reviewing the big picture of Daniel from Week One and themes from the past two weeks. Why did it matter that Daniel knew his real name? What did we learn from Daniel and friends about the role of prayer in the life of a believer? What have you carried with you from these first weeks of study?

Today's Passage: Today's passage is one of the more familiar stories in Scripture, as Daniel fades into the background and the focus moves to his three Jewish friends. The idol worship that sits at the middle of this story was an accepted central practice in every single ancient Middle Eastern culture *except* for the nation of Israel, who had been clearly instructed to never worship idols. The chapter begins with king Nebuchadnezzar constructing a giant (9ft wide x 90ft high) golden statue (either of himself or a Babylonian god), placing it in a well-seen plain, calling all the big-wigs of the area together for a giant dedication, and then demanding that everyone in the kingdom bow down to this statue every time they hear music playing from his very extensive ancient orchestra. A group of nosey astrologers gets word that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are refusing to bow down, and they report this to the king. Our reading picks up as the king calls them into his presence.

2: CONTENT

Read Daniel 3: 13-30 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A or B) to help your group engage with this passage.

Option A. Notice/Wonder: Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text?

What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group and share your observations, writing them on a board or a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

Option B. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. Based on his actions, what do you learn about king Nebuchadnezzar from this story? What three verbs might you use to describe him?
2. In verses 16-18, what are the three men certain of in their answer? What are they uncertain of?
3. We are given a lot of small details in vs 19-27. What does the king do to try to intensify the punishment for these men? What happens to other characters? What important detail does the

king reveal in vs 25? What are the details about how the men emerge from the fire? What might be the purpose of all of these details in unfolding this story?

4. Remember that this narrative would have been read and heard by the Jewish people who are still in exile and those exiled in the future. Why might this story be especially important for them?

3: CONNECTING THE STORY TO JESUS

The men in this story are presented with a clear-cut choice- bow down to an idol or bear the consequences. At the beginning of His ministry, Christ has His own “furnace” moment, when the devil tries to convince Him to bow down to all the wrong places. Read **Matthew 4: 1-11**. Compare this story to that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. What connections are there between the two stories? What “idols” is the devil putting before Jesus? How does Jesus respond? Is Jesus alone in the desert? How do we understand the connection between what happens in the desert for Jesus, and His relationship both to His father and to His purpose?

4: APPLICATION

How does all of this connect to our lives? Here are some questions to help guide your discussion. Choose one or several.

- What big or small “golden idols” does our culture/family/churches/college context tempt us to bow down to? Which are the hardest to resist? Are there consequences (social, personal, etc...) to resisting?
- Some Christian traditions can harmfully say that pain, difficulty, sickness are always a result of lack of faith. How might this story help you to respond to this?
- In vs 16-18, the three men proclaim faith and trust in a God who *may* or *may not* save them from this particularly horrible trial. Have you ever experienced or seen this kind of unexpected faith at a critical moment in your life or in the life of someone you know?
- The presence of a 4th person in the fire is so important in this story. God does not just *save* or even *spare* these men from the fire (and He could have)- He accompanies them within it. Talk about this truth and the questions or insights it brings related to your own life.
- Daniel’s friends were tempted, responded in faith, and had their lives spared by the God of love. Jesus was tempted, responded in faith, and ultimately *gave* His life in love for all the idol-loving, fire-stoking people (you and I included) of this world. What does that truth stir in your heart? What kind of God walks *into* a fire? What does this tell you about the heart of Christ?

4: PRAYER

Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below.

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your “wonderings” from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Speak these words from Isaiah 43 (words which Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego very likely knew by heart) as a prayer blessing over the group:

But now, this is what the Lord says- He who created you, He who formed you: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Do not be afraid, for I am with you...”