

DANIEL

PATTERNS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Week Five: Modeling the Mercy of our Maker
Daniel Chapter 4:19-37; Matthew 5:43-48

Opening Question: Share a humbling or embarrassing experience you have had OR ask this question: Is pride ever a good thing? Why or why not?

1: CONTEXT

A quick look back: Spend a few minutes reviewing the past 4 weeks (main themes=identity, prayer, trust) Where are we in the big picture of Scripture? What have we learned about the qualities and characteristics of a person rooted in God? What have we learned about the qualities and characteristics of God? How have the stories of Christ illuminated the book of Daniel?

Today's Passage: Today's passage centers on a dream and a very bizarre consequence for disobedience, but really it is about a God whose love and mercy extends to those who don't know Him, even to those certain that they do not need Him. This is an interesting chapter, as much of it is written in first person, and is really the king's surprising testimony of God's work in his story. God once again uses a dream to speak to king Nebuchadnezzar, this time about his pride. Historically, the king had much to be prideful about. Ancient documents reveal that his buildings and palaces were magnificent, and his "hanging gardens" were one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. This king "has it all", but he can't understand the meaning of his dream. When none of the wise people in his kingdom can interpret the dream, Daniel is called onto the scene. Our reading picks up as Daniel explains the dream and desperately calls the king to a change of heart...

2: CONTENT

Read Daniel 4: 19-37 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 C. Guided Bible Study Questions:

1. Describe Daniel's heart and posture towards the king as revealed in vs 19 and 27-28. Is this what you would expect of someone towards their captor? What does this teach you about Daniel and his life with God?
2. What does Daniel advise the king to do in vs 27-8, and what does he say may happen if the king heeds his advice?
3. Look at vs 28-30: What do you notice about the time detail, and why might this matter? Do Daniel's words of warning and hope from vs 27-28 take root? What words are repeated in these verses? What do they tell you about the heart of the king?

4. Look at vs 17, 25, 32. What is God's hope for the king through his dream? Why is this such an important lesson for him in particular?
5. How is the king's consequence (life for seven years living like an animal) perhaps related to his particular sin of pride?
6. Look at the king's psalm of praise in vs 34-35. Compare this with what you know of the king and his own words in vs 30. What do you learn? What has happened?

3: CONNECTING THE STORY TO JESUS

In this passage, we see Daniel interact with his captor in a way that exhibits kindness, care, and a deep hope that he would turn away from a life centered on himself and come instead to know the living God. Daniel has experienced the mercy of God, and now he reflects that to the king. In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus issues a stunning call to his followers related to their posture towards their enemies. Read **Matthew 5: 43-47**. How does this passage connect with our story in Daniel? What does praying for our enemies reveal about our identity? What does this passage say about God's care for both those who love Him and those who don't? Why does this pattern of loving our enemy matter so much?

4: APPLICATION

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

- King Nebuchadnezzar serves as a surprising deliverer for some important truths about God. Have you ever heard or witnessed a truth about God from a very unlikely person?
- How often do you think about those who don't yet know the love and mercy of God? Is your heart tender for those people? Judgmental? Indifferent? How do the passages this week speak to that reality?
- Matthew 5 ends by calling us to "be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect." The Greek word for perfect has the meaning of being whole, complete, undivided. This seems to indicate that somehow, loving our enemy and extending mercy beyond the expected boundaries helps us to grow into wholeness. Completeness. Have you ever experienced this in your own life?
- Often, like the king, success and prosperity lead to pride and self-sufficiency. What is different or similar between these two? Which one do you tend to struggle with more in your life?
- God went to great lengths to reveal Himself to the king. Christ went to great lengths to reveal His love to the world. What does it mean to have a God who pursues you, even when you don't recognize your need for him?

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
- Use this written prayer:

Merciful God-

We marvel that in your goodness and mercy, you see us for more than our worst decisions, more than our prideful attitudes, more than our sinful selves. We are amazed at how far your love extends, how far you are willing to go to reveal Yourself to us. May we be people who pattern ourselves after your mercy. Whose hearts break for those who don't know you. Whose prayers are filled with love for the hardest of people. Whose eyes watch expectantly for the least-likely to be drawn into your story of love. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen