



WEEKLY STUDY

WEEK 1

Pastor Jacob kicked off a new message series based on the scriptural story of Daniel. Daniel “lived at a time when being a follower of God had become increasingly and then distinctly difficult and dangerous.” As we look at the world around us, we see some of the same challenges to living a faithful life as one who believes in and lives for God. Join with hundreds of others who are reading and praying through lessons learned from Daniel. May you find hope and encouragement as you follow Jesus in the world today.

Peace of Christ,
Dr. Mark Youngman
Pastor of Discipleship

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from daily readings as well as the additional questions at the bottom of this guide. If you would like to get connected visit prov.church/smallgroups.

Find a time each day to read the passage of scripture and follow the daily prayer prompt.

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: DANIEL 1.1-7

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— ⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

⁶ Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

- This is a description of what is known as The Babylonian Captivity or Exile of Israel. With the advantage of hindsight, we can already see how God was making a way for His people to remain faithful during their time of captivity. Daniel was among those who seemed to find favor with the king. What was the king hoping to accomplish by giving these men a special position? He was trying to assimilate prestigious Israelites in order to complete the captivity by doing away with their culture—the very things that made them distinct. **Are there ways in which you feel a pull to assimilate with something other than the Way of Jesus? Are you immediately aware when that is happening?**
- *God, I recognize that in many ways, I am in a position of privilege. May I not take it for granted but honor you with my position. Amen.*

TUESDAY: MATTHEW 6.24

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

- As we will see in the weeks to come, Daniel was devoted to God. But living on the king’s dime, he may have noticed the allure of wealth and security. In Matthew 6, Jesus taught that we are creatures of devotion. We will give our hearts to something, be it God or something else. If we give our hearts to the pursuit of money we are simultaneously taking our hearts away from God. **What signs would be evidence that your devotion to God is giving way to something else? When have you felt controlled (mastered) by finances?**
- *Jesus, lead me into total devotion to you. I want to serve and love God with every aspect of my life. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: 1 PETER 1.13-15

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

- Daniel lived a different kind of life. Because of his devotion to God, he was aware of the conforming influence of King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian culture. Centuries later, Peter wrote these words of admonition to followers of Jesus. It is a call to obedient holiness in the face of evil desires. Peter was not trying to insult his audience by calling them ignorant, he was reminding them of a time when they were unaware of the grace offered to them through Jesus Christ. Now that they were aware of this gift, they were able to pursue the Way of Jesus instead of conforming to the ways of the world around them. **Does verse 13 describe you? Do you have a mind that is alert and fully sober when it comes to the grace offered to you through Jesus?**
- *Jesus, today I set my hope on your grace. Reveal that grace to me now and lead me to holiness as you yourself are holy. Amen.*

THURSDAY: 1 CORINTHIANS 9.24-27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

- Pastor Jacob described the dedication and discipline required for high-level high school sports. Anyone who has trained physically to achieve a lofty goal understands the metaphor Paul used in 1 Corinthians 9. You must train for the prize you are aiming for, therefore aim for a prize worth training for. Daniel 1 describes an intentional time of training for Daniel and his friends, but the training was prepared by their captors and the prize was not for their own good. Had they achieved it, it would actually have resulted in their total submission to the Babylonian way of life. **If someone looked at your spiritual training regimen what prize would they think you are aiming for? Are there any areas of your training in which you feel aimless?**
- *God, I repent of my pursuit of unworthy prizes. Fix my heart on the prize of salvation. Fit me for a crown that will last forever. Amen.*

FRIDAY: ROMANS 12.1-2

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- These words from the Apostle Paul seem to point beyond the lesson learned in Daniel. Daniel is known for his unwavering dedication and refusal to conform. Paul (really Jesus!) takes it to another level by moving towards transformation. The goal is not simply to avoid conforming to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind. It is an incredible invitation that brings us closer to the heart of God. **How is the pattern of this world at odds with your transformation and the renewal of your mind?**
- *God, I offer myself to you as a living sacrifice. Bring transformation to my sometimes-distracted mind and restore me for your good purposes. Amen.*

SATURDAY: DANIEL 3.16-18

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter.¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand.¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

- Sometimes our devotion to God, our different way of living, and our disciplined lives will get us into difficult situations. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego found that out the hard way. Instead of giving into the cultural assimilation of the king, or pretending like their differences didn't matter, the three trusted in God to deliver them. Then came the line that haunts many would-be followers of God—"but even if he does not..." Even if God doesn't rescue them, they will stay devoted. **Describe a situation in which you or someone else demonstrated total trust in God regardless of the outcomes.**

- *God, I know that you are able to deliver me. You've done it before and I believe you can do it again. But even if you don't, I will stay devoted to you. Amen.*

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

In Sunday's message, Pastor Jacob identified these common and mistaken Christian responses to culture:

1. **Noise Canceling.** Avoiding or blocking out the culture.
 2. **Full Immersion.** Completely swimming in the culture like it's your natural habitat.
 3. **Combative and Angry.** Constantly upset and agitated by the surrounding culture. You spend all of your energy raging against what you see happening in the world around you.
- Where do you see each of these responses being lived out by Christians today?
 - Which response(s) are you most likely to participate in?
 - How does Daniel's path of Devoted, Different, and Disciplined stand in contrast to these three responses to culture?