

Called to Counter-Cultural Living

Daniel 1 | Week One

Overview

The goal of the Fellowship is to create connections leading to authentic community, and provide biblical perspective on becoming a Christian scholar. Therefore, be sure to take time to hear from each other (15 minutes), review the lesson (30 minutes) and to pray for personal concerns and campus outreach efforts (15 minutes). Encourage participants to read the chapter in advance, using it for personal devotionals, reflecting on the Memory Verse and journaling insights from your Quiet Time. Try to connect with others outside of the Fellowship this week. In this way your spiritual and relational goals for the group can be met. Having leaders rotate discussion will allow each to share their perspective.

Background

The Book of Daniel opens with some of the Israelites being taken into captivity along with objects from the temple (605 or 598 B.C.). It says the Lord gave the king and many of the nobility into the hands of the Chaldeans. He warned them this would happen (Deuteronomy 28:64-66, Isaiah 39), so like a loving parent who tells his children the rules ahead of time, God warned Israel to obey lest they suffer the consequences. It is merciful of God to continue the line of David through Israel, intending to fulfill his promise to raise up the Messiah to rule over us forever. This is ultimately the gospel. God is insuring His plan of redemption, graciously saving those who cannot save themselves.

The Big Idea

Choosing not to become defiled with the king's food can still produce excellence in the world's eyes.

Memory Verse

Daniel 1:20

Looking at the Text

Ask someone to read 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 gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. **3** Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, **4** youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. **5** The king assigned them a daily portion of the food*

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Get Started

Open up the session by asking someone to pray. This will help break the ice and get everyone in the practice of listening to each other.

Don't Forget

Before you start calling on people to read Scripture or pray, make sure the individual you are calling on is comfortable with the task. You never want to put someone on the spot!

All provided Scripture quotations are in the English Standard Version.

Think About It

The Chaldeans began to redefine the Israelites by teaching them their language, customs, and literature, and by giving them new names. They were pressing these men to reconsider themselves, not as Yahweh's children, but as servants to their king. They were not to be working for the defeated god they left back in Israel. They

that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. **6** Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah. **7** And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

What do verses 3-4 say about the youths taken to stand in the king's palace? Would you say God had prepared them years ago for this assignment?

They were chosen because of their appearance, knowledge, wisdom, understanding and ability to "stand before the king." They were assigned royal food and drink, taught for 3 years and then called to defend. Similar to the application process for grad school? Grad school may feel like exile to some of us. Many of us were chosen because of similar factors such as a "good appearance" like grades, publications, and contribution to the academic community as we show that we are "skilled in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding, and learning." Many of us had to leave our homeland to enter grad school. Many of us are ruled by people who have a drastically different worldview and faith than we do. If you're lucky, you were given a "daily portion of food" through a stipend! Isaiah 39:7 shows that God knew the Chaldeans would do this many years ago, so he would have prepared Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah for these positions. Though grad school is difficult, God has prepared you ahead of time for it. He knew you would be selected and has prepared you for your studies. As you reflect on your grad school experience so far, what are some ways that God prepared you prior to entering? How have you seen his hand of guidance/ preparation in your life?

Ask someone to read verses 8-10.

*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. **9** And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs, **10** and the chief of the eunuchs said to Daniel, "I fear my lord the king, who assigned your food and your drink; for why should he see that you were in worse condition than the youths who are of your own age? So you would endanger my head with the king."*

What is Daniel doing by taking this stand and making his request?

Daniel (and his friends) are banking on the Lord. The "King's Food" would be affiliated with pagan religions and would not follow the guidelines God set out for his people (clean/unclean). What are some things that may "defile" a person in grad school? It could be a philosophical assumptions, an ethical commitment, or even a cultural practice (even within your cohort)?

Some grad schools require that students hold to a naturalistic view of the world, which by nature assumes that God cannot exist. Other times, there are cohorts that have a practice of getting drunk together on the weekends. And so, if you don't participate, you are considered an outsider in the cohort. They do not believe God has hung them out to dry in Babylon. They believe He has

were to be remade into Babylonians.

Illustrate It

Apple had a corporate culture but Steve Jobs needed freedom to create something spectacular. To encourage innovation he selected a team, sequestered them in their own area and encouraged them to think outside the box. There was secrecy, camaraderie and the magic of novelty: the Mac. Do you think they would have attained the same result if they followed the traditional Research and Development methods?

Illustrate It:

Years ago as a young grad student, Rob Koons (Philosophy, UT Austin) had a life changing encounter with Dr. Alvin Plantinga. Dr. Plantinga asked him some critical questions about his reason for studying philosophy:

- "How will it make a difference in your study that you are a believer?"
- "Why do you think God called you into this discipline?"

This intentional perspective caused Dr. Plantinga to challenge the presuppositions of his field and radically change philosophy for generations of Christian scholars who followed his lead.

put them there “for such a time as this,” like Mordecai tells Esther (Esther 4:14). So they trust that he wants them to follow his precepts, even in a foreign land.

1. What stands out to you more, Daniel’s request or the eunuch’s agreement to permit it? Has someone ever gone to bat for you?

“God gave Daniel favor...” As Daniel desired to remain holy, the Lord provided a way for him to be holy. The trainer recognized the personal peril of letting the men choose their food and regimen, but allowed them freedom.

Summarize verses 11-16

Then Daniel said to the steward whom the chief of the eunuchs had assigned over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, ¹² “Test your servants for ^vten days; let us be given vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then let our appearance and the appearance of the youths who eat ^kthe king’s food be observed by you, and deal with your servants according to what you see.” ¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter, and tested them for ten days. ¹⁵ At the end of ten days it was seen that they were better in appearance and fatter in flesh than all the youths who ate ^kthe king’s food. ¹⁶ ^wSo the steward took away their food and the wine they were to drink, and gave them ^xvegetables.

2. How do you account for their better health and appearance?

There were probably some healthy benefits to Moses’ dietary laws that the four men wanted to respect. Also there are probably some practices that are assumed to be part of grad school (all-nighters, junk food, and 80 hour weeks) that could be challenged by a balanced life producing better results. But don’t forget that the Lord gave them favor in all things because they loved him with all of their heart, soul, and mind.

God made them successful in Chaldean research and training.

Daniel and the other captives were under pressure to succeed as trainees in a new culture. They saw the program as being unfaithful to God and conforming to a pagan culture. They felt compelled to ask for freedom to do it their way. They didn’t ask to be exempt from the test but fully expected to comply and exceed the standards (“test us and see”). There was intense pressure, tangible dangers and the potential for failure, but the Lord walked them through it by giving them the grace to maintain their focus on Him.

Read Daniel 1:17-21.

*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. **18** At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. **19** And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Therefore they stood before the king. **20** And in every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his kingdom. **21** And Daniel was there until the first year*

Following Christ through grad school will make you a better scholar. By taking time for Sabbath rest, by daily connecting with the Author of all truth, and by having certain virtues that only Christ can produce in your heart, you may find that you flourish and excel. What are some counter-cultural practices you could begin that may cause you to excel?

(There are studies on the advantage of taking time to rest, connect in community, and eating healthy for thinking/producing work - this would be a good place to insert some of that).

3. What do you notice about the performance of the Israelites? If we viewed our academic discipline through God's lens as Creator/Redeemer, should we expect Christian grads to be 10 times better as a result?

Understanding God's role in creating the universe and the big plan of loving and redeeming man for Himself could cause unique insights into your research, whether sciences or humanities. Seeing His order and beauty in nature is informative and motivating for believers. Understanding the brokenness of man and knowing His plan to redeem and restore gives value and meaning to our existence. Jesus wants to be the center of our studies and will enhance our academics and personal lives as we walk in His grace and power. Dallas Willard stated, "To excel as a believer in academics you should be asking questions that no one else is asking."

4. How are we trusting God to walk with us through the challenges of our graduate study program? How are we guarding our minds and hearts so we won't defile ourselves with the world's food?

This is an open-ended question with many good answers. However we devote ourselves to our Lord and provoke ourselves to fully depend on him is good.

"Often the large ideas that frame and dominate our lives are so deeply ingrained that we do not realize they are there," writes Richard Horner.

These ideas are presuppositions or assumptions that we take as reality. They color everything else we learn. The Chaldeans wanted to reorder their captives' presuppositions, turning them to false gods. Our university, mentor, or peers may want to do the same thing. They may call it common ground, common sense, or facing the facts, but the result is a rejection of our Lord as King and Master of our lives.

Richard Horner writes, "I would suggest that late-modern ways of thinking often frame our lives and our religious beliefs and practices far more than we may realize. Specifically, an understanding of the spiritual realm that views it as either a realm of imagination or a realm that is malleable and open to individual taste and will generally frames religious and spiritual experience and belief."

WRAPPING IT UP

Consider reading this to your group:

God shows his faithfulness in the book of Daniel, but we can easily turn the story upside-down and think Daniel's faithfulness is what wins every battle. If we were to ask Daniel how he got through his captivity, he would say, "[It was the] Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments" (Daniel 9:4).

Dr. Bryan Chapell explains: "God preserves young men from impurity and an old man from lions; He answers prayer and interprets dreams; He exalts the humble and humbles the proud; He vindicates the faithful and vanquishes the profane; and He rescues covenant-forsaking people by returning them to the land of the covenant. Daniel acts on the grace God repeatedly provides, but God is always the One who first

Tips for application:

ask yourself what your discipline would look like if it were more "friendly to Christian views?" What topics would you research if your advisor supported you and gave you freedom to explore the intersection of faith and academics?

As your discussion comes to a close, end the session in prayer.

provides the opportunity, resources, and rescue needed for Daniel's faithfulness. If we reverse the order and make God's grace dependent on Daniel's goodness, then we forsake the Gospel message Daniel is telling and produce the hero worship of adventure tales, rather than the divine worship of the Gospel according to Daniel."

Closing

When Scottish runner Eric Liddell competed in the 1924 Olympics in Paris, he refused to run on Sundays. But his races, the 100 meter and 100 meter relays, were scheduled on Sundays. Liddell trusted in the Lord's grace and changed to the 400 meter.

His wife, Florence, remembered, "Eric always said that the great thing for him was that when he stood by his principles and refused to run in the 100 meter, he found that the 400 meter was really his race. He said he would never have known that otherwise." He won a gold medal for the 400 meter and a bronze medal for the 200 meter at the Paris Olympics. You might discover a new and better expression for your gifts and skills when they are yielded to God's principles.

Notes:

Richard Horner, "What Frames What?" *Reconsiderations: Exploring Christian Thought in the University Community*, October 2005.

Dr. Bryan Chapell and Richard Doster, "The Gospel According to Daniel: Our Conversation with Bryan Chapell," *byFaith*, no. 44 (Q.2.14), 38-43.

Lord,

Let us learn to see what is clearly from you and what is "defiled" and to be avoided in our academics. Let us live Godly and think wisely, loving our peers with your love and seeing our discipline through your eyes.

Amen