

Small Group Guide



Overview

This guide is based on the opening sermon of a series in the book of Daniel. The passage is Daniel 1:1-21. The central themes are God's sovereignty amid chaos, the danger of cultural assimilation, and what it looks like to live faithfully as people who do not fully belong to the world around them.

Key Takeaways

1. God is sovereign even when circumstances suggest otherwise. Daniel 1:2 makes clear that it was the Lord who delivered Jehoiakim into Nebuchadnezzar's hand. What looked like a Babylonian victory was actually God working within history. His sovereignty is not canceled by chaos.
2. God's faithfulness includes keeping difficult promises. The exile was not a sign that God had abandoned Israel. It was a sign that he had kept his word. His faithfulness is not limited to blessings -- it includes the warnings he gave through Moses in Deuteronomy 28:36-37 and through the prophets.
3. We are all living in a re-education camp. Every culture, nation, and commercial force works with intense, prolonged, and intentional effort to shape our identity and values. The danger is greatest for those who are unaware this is happening.
4. Faithfulness requires knowing where to draw the line. Daniel adapted in many ways to life in Babylon -- he learned the language, the literature, and the customs. But he also drew a clear line. Living faithfully is an ongoing process of discernment, not a single decision.
5. We are called to bring blessing wherever we are. Daniel and his friends did not withhold their gifts from a corrupt system. They served faithfully and excellently, bringing life and blessing even within Babylon. This is the call of every follower of Jesus.

6. Empires are temporary. God is not. Babylon fell. Every earthly power eventually does. Daniel chose to live for the one who is, who was, and who is to come. That choice shaped everything else about how he lived.

Discussion Questions

Opening

- What did you know about Daniel before this sermon? What surprised you or challenged your previous understanding of the book?

God's Sovereignty

- In Daniel 1:2, the narrator credits the Lord -- not Nebuchadnezzar -- with delivering Judah into Babylon's hands. Why is this detail significant? How does it change the way you read the rest of the story?
- Can you think of a time in your own life when something felt like a defeat or a loss, but you later recognized God's hand in it? What made it difficult to see at the time?
- The sermon draws a connection between Israel's exile and God's faithfulness to his word in Deuteronomy 28. What does it mean to you that God's faithfulness includes keeping hard promises, not just comforting ones?

Cultural Assimilation

- The sermon describes Nebuchadnezzar's re-education program as an "intense, prolonged, intentional effort to shape identity." Where do you see similar efforts at work in our culture today?
- The pastor said, "If you say, man, we can't imagine that, then we're in greater danger than Daniel and his friends." What do you think he meant by that? Do you agree?
- What voices, systems, or forces have most shaped the way you see yourself, your worth, your desires, and your fears? How much of that shaping has been intentional on your part?

Drawing the Line

- Daniel adapted to Babylonian life in significant ways but refused to eat the king's food. What do you think guided his decision about where to draw that particular line?
- What does faithful discernment look like for you in your daily life -- at work, in your neighborhood, online, or in your family? Where do you feel the tension most?
- Is there an area of your life where you sense God calling you to draw a clearer line? What makes that difficult?

Serving Where You Are

- Daniel and his friends served Babylon faithfully and excellently even though Babylon was corrupt and they were there against their will. What does that challenge or encourage you about your own situation?
- The sermon says our call is to bring blessing and life wherever we find ourselves, without compromising. What does that look like practically in your context this week?

Living for What Lasts

- The chapter ends with a quiet but powerful note -- Daniel outlasted Babylon. How does keeping an eternal perspective change the way you make decisions in the short term?
- What is something you are tempted to live for right now that is ultimately temporary? What would it look like to reorient that area of your life around the one who is, who was, and who is to come?

Practical Applications

1. Audit your influences. This week, spend 15 minutes identifying the top five voices that most shape how you think and feel -- social media, news sources, relationships, entertainment, or work culture. For each one, ask: Is this forming me more into the image of Christ, or pulling me away from it?

2. Practice daily identity questions. The pastor named several questions worth asking on a daily basis: Why do I believe what I believe? Why am I afraid? Where does this desire come from? Why am I choosing this over that? Try building one of these questions into your morning routine this week as a brief moment of reflection and prayer.

3. Identify your line. Think about a specific area of your life -- work, relationships, entertainment, finances -- where you are currently navigating the tension between adapting to your culture and

remaining faithful to Christ. Write down where you believe the line is, and share it with a trusted person in your group for accountability.

4. Serve where you are. Identify one concrete way this week to bring blessing or life to someone in your workplace, neighborhood, or household -- especially someone who does not share your faith. Do not wait for the circumstances to be ideal.

5. Pray for awareness. Ask God to make you more aware of the ways you are being shaped by forces other than his Spirit. Use Psalm 139:23-24 as a guide -- the psalmist asks God to search him and reveal anything in him that is not aligned with God's ways. Make that prayer your own this week.

Closing Reflection

Daniel chapter 1 is not primarily a story about willpower or moral courage. It is a story about four young people who were deeply convinced of two things: that God was still in control, and that God was faithful to his word. Everything else -- the refusal to compromise, the excellence in service, the willingness to remain in a foreign land -- flowed from that conviction.

As your group closes, take a moment to sit with this question together:

What would change in the way I live this week if I were fully convinced that God is in control and that he is faithful to every word he has spoken?

This guide covers Daniel 1:1-21. The series continues in the weeks ahead.