

The Gospel Project® for Adults

Daily Discipleship Guide, Unit 16, Session 2

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GOD’S REWARD FOR THE FAITHFUL

SESSION IN A SENTENCE:

Faithfulness to God is not easy, but it is rewarded.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE:

Daniel 1

SETTING:

In our last session, we saw the people of Judah at the very beginning of the Babylonian captivity. God had warned them time and time again that if they worshiped and served other gods, He would remove them from the land. And that’s exactly what God did. In today’s session, we still find ourselves at the beginning of the Babylonian captivity, but instead of hearing God speak through a prophet from outside Babylon, we will see God work through the lives of four young men in Babylon as they resolved to remain faithful to the Lord in a seemingly impossible situation.

DAY 1

READ:

Daniel 1:1-16

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Daniel 1:8-16

The book of Daniel begins with a Babylonian siege of Jerusalem and an initial exile of God’s people. Within that group of exiles were Daniel and his friends—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Most of us know the latter three by their Babylonian names—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These four friends cared deeply about being faithful to the Lord. In verses 8-16, we see that these men were tested when the king ordered that they be given a diet from his table. Each of the young Hebrew nobles was given a portion of the king’s meat to eat and wine to drink. Daniel, however, took a stand here by saying that he would not defile himself with the king’s food or his wine and that he would only eat vegetables and drink water. It’s not that Daniel didn’t like meat, but rather, he wanted to remain obedient to the Lord by not eating meat that had been set aside for pagan sacrifice or was considered unclean by God’s law.

Daniel rightly made a big deal out of this small thing. He knew that obedience to the Lord was more important than anything else. He also trusted that the Lord would take care of him. Daniel asked to be tested by the Babylonians, and after ten days, Daniel and his friends looked healthier and better than those who took the meat and the wine. God rewarded the faithfulness of Daniel,

and He would continue to do so throughout the rest of the book.

At different points in our lives, we will be asked to stay faithful in the midst of unknown circumstances. Staying faithful isn't always easy and sometimes makes our future feel uncertain. But God rewards our faithfulness to Him. However, God's reward for faithfulness is ultimately something He will fulfill in eternity. The greatest reward that we receive in heaven is also the reward we have now—Jesus. God's ways are better than our own because God's ways are what we were made for. Faithfulness to God always turns out better for us in the end.

What are some ways the Lord has rewarded your faithfulness?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

“Our faith is not meant to get us out of a hard place or change our painful condition. Rather, it is meant to reveal God's faithfulness to us in the midst of our dire situation. God does at times change our trying circumstances. But more often, he doesn't—because he wants to change us!”¹
—David Wilkerson (1931-2011)

DAY 2

READ:

Daniel 1:17-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Daniel 1:17-21

Every year, millions of people make New Year's resolutions. People set goals of losing weight, working out more, reading more, watching less TV, etc. The sad thing is that most people don't actually keep these resolutions. Gyms are often flooded with people until about mid-February, and then people start dropping like flies. The weight of life comes back into reality and people abandon their resolutions.

One study shows that only 8% of Americans actually feel as if they keep their resolution throughout the year.² The problem with resolutions is that they aren't convictions. Convictions are much deeper, where the heart of a person truly lives.

Daniel and his friends had a conviction to remain obedient to the Lord at all costs. Whatever circumstances might arise, they knew that obedience to the Lord was the most important thing in their life. We see at the end of Daniel 1 that the Lord rewarded their faithfulness with knowledge and insight. God allowed these men to stand out among all others when presented before King Nebuchadnezzar. But Daniel and his friends weren't working for a reward. They weren't faithful to the Lord because they were working for a wage or looking to obtain great wisdom and insight. To them, faithfulness to God was the reward. They loved God and they loved His ways. They wanted to remain obedient to Him at all times.

This is the mind-set we should have as believers. We ought to be obedient to the Lord because of the love He shows us. We ought to keep His commandments to show the love that we have for the Father.

How is the Lord calling you to be faithful this week?

DAY 3

READ:

Colossians 3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Colossians 3:23-24

Thus far this week, we've seen the Lord reward faithfulness. In the story of Daniel, we see that the Lord rewarded Daniel's faithfulness with immediate favor in the eyes of men. God rewarded Daniel in this way because He knew Daniel would remain faithful no matter the level of authority he was given. Daniel is a great example of how the Lord might reward us in the present.

In the book of Colossians, Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, addressing issues in the church and encouraging the believers to be transformed by the gospel. In 3:23-24, Paul challenged the believers to work hard for the Lord because they will receive an inheritance. The inheritance that Paul was referring to is the reward of eternal life and the blessings that come with being present with God. Paul was reminding them that their work for the Lord, whatever it might be, was not in vain.

Our lives in Christ are a picture of who God is. God rewards us based on our faithfulness. This does not mean that God is going to give us nice clothes, a lot of money, and a big house. The inheritance that the Lord has in mind is much greater than material wealth. The reality is that our greatest days of reward will come after we die. Our greatest treasures are being stored up in heaven (Matthew 6:19-20).

How is our future inheritance from the Lord better than the material things of this earth?

DAY 4

READ:

Galatians 6:1-10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Galatians 6:7-10

The culture in which the Bible was written had a very agricultural landscape. The church at Galatia would have understood what Paul meant when he said that what a person sows, he reaps (6:7). Paul wanted these believers to know that their actions had consequences—some good and some bad. For whatever they did, there would be consequences that would come next. He was warning and encouraging them to sow in the Spirit so as not to reap from the flesh.

Today, this idea might be lost on us because we don't see the process of sowing and reaping as

closely. Whatever life we choose to live will have consequences. Consequences aren't always bad, but they will always follow our actions.

Paul then told these believers to work for the Lord and not to grow tired of doing what is good (v. 9). He wanted them to know that in due season, they would receive a proper harvest, and this required waiting.

Waiting is a hard concept for us to grasp and an even harder process to go through. We live in an age when many things can be had in an instant. When we want to know something, we can look it up on the internet. When we want something to eat, we can go to a drive-thru and get whatever we want in a matter of minutes. But spiritual fruit from faithfulness takes time. We must do good in order to reap a proper harvest. We may see an immediate reward, but most of the time, we don't see that reward until later down the road.

It must be noted that none of this is to say that we work for our salvation. Paul's encouragement to the believers in Galatia was that they would work from their salvation, not for it. It's the same for us. We have received new life through Jesus. But Jesus didn't save us to sit and be comfortable. No, we were saved for good works. So let's not grow weary of doing good because we will reap what we sow at the proper time.

Are you growing weary of doing good? How can you remain faithful in the face of that weariness?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #72: JUSTIFICATION AND WORKS

Justification is not the result of human effort or good works but through faith in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works in the life of a believer (Ephesians 2:10). Faith without works is dead (James 2:17). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

DAY 5

READ:

Matthew 25

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Matthew 25:14-30

The idea of investing is much older than any of us likely imagine. The financial concept has been around for a long time and remains popular today. There are trillions of dollars dedicated to investments every year, and many people are wrapped up in the business of investing.

In one of Jesus's parables in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells His disciples that the kingdom of heaven is like a man entrusting his servants with his things while he goes away on a journey. The man in the story considered the abilities of three servants and gave each a certain number of "talents," a sum of money. He wanted them to invest and increase the amount that He had given them. The first two servants are faithful and make more out of their given talents. However, the

last man buries his talent in the ground and returns only the original one back to the master. The success of the first two and the mistake of the last are all things that we can learn from.

For us, the “talents” in this story represent the things God has given us to make His name known—whether it be money, time, abilities, etc. As believers, we must honor God with the things He has given us. The resources that we have are not our own. Our talents and abilities are not our own. God has given us everything we have in order to make His name known in all the world. We can choose to use them for our own gain or we can choose to use them for God’s purposes and mission. In one sense, we will gain in the areas we choose to invest in. But let us choose wisely and learn to invest in things that are eternal and not things that are temporary—things that are of God, not things that are of the world.

How can you leverage what you’ve been given by God to make Christ known today?

GROUP

Point 1: Faithfulness to God is tested (Dan. 1:8).

Daniel was determined to not _____ himself, and because his _____ with God was firm, his faithfulness stood firm.

What opportunities from the world tempt believers today to defile themselves?

Essential Doctrine #72: Justification and Works

Justification is not the result of human _____ or good works but through _____ in the righteousness of Christ. Although good works do not lead to justification, justification leads to good works in the life of a believer (Ephesians 2:10). Faith without works is _____ (James 2:17). While good works do not establish justification, they do verify a genuine faith and make our justification evident to others.

How should the reality that we can’t work to justify ourselves before God change the way we see our work for God?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

“Faithfulness is our business; fruitfulness is an issue that we must be content to leave with God. God’s Word will not return to him completely void, we know, but we must be willing not to see the fruits of it ourselves, or at least not immediately. Visible success in the form of instant results is not guaranteed in Christian ministry, neither for you nor for me.”³ –J. I. Packer (1926-2020)

Point 2: Faithfulness to God is affirmed (Dan. 1:9-16).

Daniel and his friends acted with wisdom and _____, both to remain faithful to God and to _____ God’s image-bearers, even in the midst of a _____ and

compromising situation.

Even though God was not obligated to do anything in this situation, God _____ the faithfulness of these four young men for their _____ and His glory.

What are some ways God affirms faithfulness even if He doesn't provide for or rescue His people from trials?

Point 3: Faithfulness to God is rewarded (Dan. 1:17-21).

The greatest _____ that these four young men received from God was the opportunity to be His _____ to proclaim Him to the world.

Why should we see God's using us with our gifts and talents as a reward?

Daniel and his friends all _____ God to get more of God, not just His rewards. But God rewarded them as they understood that those rewards would be used for God's _____ .

My Response

Because Jesus has provided our greatest reward (eternal life with Him), we serve Him out of love and gratitude, not for anything else we might receive but so that others too might find salvation in Him.

- **HEAD:** What reasons do you have for remaining faithful to God even when your circumstances are difficult or dangerous?
- **HEART:** What sins or temptations do you need to confess to God today that He might forgive you and give you strength to overcome?
- **HANDS:** Who do you know that needs you to be faithful in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with them?

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

“Of no profit to me will be the ends of the world and the kingdoms of this age; it is ‘better for me to die’ to Jesus Christ than to rule the ends of the earth. I seek him who died on our behalf; I want him who arose for our sake.”⁴ –Ignatius of Antioch (c. 35-107)

References

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2. Tracy Brower, “4 Reasons to Make New Year’s Resolutions (Even If You Don’t Keep Them),” *Forbes*, December 31, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2021/12/31/4-reasons-to-make-new-years-resolutions-even-if-you-dont-keep-them/?sh=3b28c32f66a1>.

3. J. I. Packer, *God's Plans for You* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 45.
4. William R. Schoedel, Saint Ignatius Bishop of Antioch, and Helmut Koester, *Ignatius of Antioch: A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 181.