

# God's Authority Sustains His People

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE:** God humbles the proud so that they can recognize His authority and praise Him.

**BACKGROUND PASSAGE:** Daniel 4

Years ago I heard a story about three business professionals sharing their definitions of success with each other while eating a meal.

“For me,” said the first man, “being called to the White House for a private meeting with the president would be the ultimate achievement.”

“Not me,” interrupted the second man. “My pinnacle of success would be meeting in the Oval Office with the president and watching him ignore his ringing emergency phone in order to talk to me.”

“You’re both wrong,” exclaimed the third man. “Real success is when you’re meeting with the president in the Oval Office and the phone rings, he answers, and says, ‘It’s for you!’”

Though we chuckle over the ego of these men, most of us crave notoriety and acclaim. We secretly long to be the center of the universe. While our self-obsession may seem harmless (at least in our eyes!), this sin makes a relationship with God impossible.



What is the relationship between success and pride?

# Group Time

## Point 1: Those who walk in pride are blind to God's authority (Dan. 4:29-30).

<sup>29</sup> At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, <sup>30</sup> and the king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"

Despite voicing praise for the authority of Yahweh (3:28-29), Nebuchadnezzar still idolized himself above all others. Daniel pleaded with Nebuchadnezzar to repent of his pride and avoid the punishment. Yet despite the warning that God would humble him like an animal because of his pride, Nebuchadnezzar continued to strut through Babylon. He saw his kingdom as the work of his hands for the glory of his name alone.

**Sin as Selfishness:** When we sin, we are acting out of a selfish attitude and mindset that assumes our action will lead us to more happiness than if we were to obey God. Sin is manifested in our tendency to be "\_\_\_\_\_ " toward self.

Unless we humble ourselves, we will remain oblivious to God's authority and activity around us. In this scenario, we become our own god, even if we say otherwise. Though we all possess the common knowledge of our human frailty, we will smugly put off until tomorrow what the Lord requires of us today—humble faith and worship. Ultimately, our overconfidence regarding the future is the direct result of an exaggerated view of ourselves. Those who esteem themselves dismiss that life is a vapor that appears briefly before vanishing (Jas. 4:14), as if they were somehow the exception to the rule.



In what ways do we take the future for granted, as if it were ours alone to plan?



### Voices from Church History

"In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that—and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison—you do not know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."<sup>1</sup>

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

## Point 2: God graciously humbles those who walk in pride (Dan. 4:31-33).

<sup>31</sup> While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, <sup>32</sup> and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." <sup>33</sup> Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

Our inclination is to read these words as an act of judgment wrought by God's anger toward Nebuchadnezzar. Though the king was deserving of the harshest plight, the Lord's resolve to humble him is seen more accurately as an act of compassion. By forcing Nebuchadnezzar to roam the earth like a wild animal, the Lord was wooing him toward repentance. Rather than condemn the king for his arrogance, God graciously reduced him to nothing in order to change his haughty heart and ways.

How do you tend to respond to God's interruptions in your life?



Anger

Irritation

Tolerance

Humble Receptivity

Our wickedness notwithstanding, the Lord is not eager for us to perish (2 Pet. 3:9). Even more astounding, our heavenly Father is aggressively patient as He actively shows kindness to us (Rom. 2:4). In the end, His efforts to bring us low communicate His passion to lift us high as His own children through faith in Jesus. Our humiliation, brought about by God's work and our response, will always precede our exaltation.



What are some ways God might humble people to lead them to faith in Jesus Christ?

### Point 3: Praise of God replaces pride in those who have been humbled (Dan. 4:34-37).

NEBUCHADNEZZAR / BABYLON	JESUS / KINGDOM OF GOD
Forced subjects to _____ of him (Dan. 1)	Became the _____ of all (Phil. 2:7)
Demanded _____ by means of his strength and threat of death (Dan. 3)	_____ Himself before God the Father exalted Him (Phil. 2:8-9)
_____ of his greatness as the king of Babylon (Dan. 4)	Taught the _____ are the greatest in the kingdom of God (Luke 9:48)

<sup>34</sup> At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; <sup>35</sup> all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?”

<sup>36</sup> At the same time my reason returned to me, and for the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lords sought me, and I was established in my kingdom, and still more greatness was added to me. <sup>37</sup> Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, for all his works are right and his ways are just; and those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

After a long time living as an animal, Nebuchadnezzar finally acknowledged God’s sovereign authority over his life, and he could not help but praise the God who was so patient with him in his pride. Realizing that Yahweh had unlimited authority, Babylon’s once fearless leader now feared the one true, transcendent God over all creation.

**God Is Transcendent:** God is distinct from and independent of His created world. He is transcendent over us in regards to His \_\_\_\_\_ and power as well as His goodness and \_\_\_\_\_. Understanding God’s transcendence evokes awe and wonder at His goodness and power.



How has God worked in your life to bring you to faith in Jesus, our humble, sovereign King?

# My Mission

Because we have been given life through Christ’s humility, we follow His example and walk with humility as we seek to selflessly serve those around us.

- **How do you need to address the pride in your life?**
- **What are some ways your group can serve those around you and make a contribution to God’s kingdom?**
- **How do you need to reset your priorities in order to serve others in the name of Christ in an effort to reach them with the gospel?**



## Voices from Church History

“No penitent sinner, who now turns to do the works of God, may despair of mercy, however foul his life has formerly been.”<sup>2</sup>

—John Mayer (1583-1664)

## Notes

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# Daily Study

## Day 1: Read Daniel 4:1-27

Despite his observation of God's repeated glory and power, Nebuchadnezzar's pride continued to blind him to the authority of his Maker. Though he gave lip service to the unrivaled strength of Yahweh, Babylon's king saw himself as omnipotent and ultimate. To him, the strength of his kingdom was the work of his own hands. Thus, God again came to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream, but this time with a warning of his impending humility. Daniel not only interpreted the vision but also pleaded unsuccessfully with his leader to repent.

Unfortunately, we often fall victim to the sin of self-reliance as well. Though every good and perfect gift in our lives is from above (Jas. 1:17), we dangerously live as if we were the source of the blessings we enjoy. In order to appreciate the grace of Christ fully, however, God desires that we walk in faith and humility. Failing to do so blinds us to the authority God has over our lives while also creating the illusion that we chart our destiny. Because Jesus submitted to the will of the heavenly Father, we must seek to do the same. Unless we humble ourselves, God's greatest blessings in our lives can actually become stumbling blocks that foster sinful arrogance.



### Voices from Church History

"True humility comes when, in the light of God, we have seen ourselves to be nothing, have consented to part with and cast away self, to let God be all."<sup>3</sup>

—Andrew Murray (1828-1917)



In what ways have you mishandled God's blessings in your life?

## Day 2: Read Daniel 4:28-30

How do you respond to bad news? Despite God's revealed intention to humble Nebuchadnezzar like an animal, Babylon's king continued to boast in his strength. In his mind, the strength of the kingdom was a testimony to his power and majesty. Though he claimed that the Hebrews worshiped the Most High God, the wayward king lived as if he were above all others. Tragically, it is not difficult to see ourselves falling into the same destructive pattern.

Though we say Christianity is not about us, we sometimes live to the contrary. We may nod our heads in agreement with declarations about the priority of God's kingdom, yet we might also reduce the kingdom to whatever makes us happy or fulfilled. Knowing that God's glory takes precedence over our own glory does not prohibit us from magnifying ourselves at the expense of our Savior. Like Babylon's ancient king, our hearts gravitate toward what we perceive to be testimonies of our strength. In our efforts to be like God, we sometimes recklessly compete with Him.



How does your allegiance to self stand in the way of your commitment to Christ?

## Day 3: Read Daniel 4:31-33

Grace takes many forms and is not always immediately recognizable. Yet what sometimes appears to be God's harsh judgment often turns out to be one of His blessings in disguise. Driven from the throne to the field in order to eat like cattle, Nebuchadnezzar endured the harshest of circumstances from the hand of God. The goal of this plight, however, was to rescue the king from himself. Because the only remedy for pride is humility, the Lord was actively prodding His subject to repentance. We should expect no less today.

Because life is no more than a vapor (Jas. 4:14), we should not view the temporary inconveniences that humble us as liabilities to resent. To the contrary, we can rejoice knowing that God compassionately interrupts our temporal lives in order to reward us eternally. Rather than chastise Him for every problem we face, we should first look for ways to humble ourselves before the Lord instead. What we erroneously perceive as His absence in our lives is often the greatest evidence of His activity.



What inconveniences has God used in your life to humble and sanctify you?

## Day 4: Read Daniel 4:34-37

Nebuchadnezzar's journey comes full circle in these verses. After enduring a time of great distress, the king was able to see reality much more clearly. By recognizing God's supreme sovereignty over his life, Nebuchadnezzar could now appreciate his achievements as gifts from the Lord rather than evidence of his equality with the Most High God. Because he yielded to God's chastening hand, this pagan king (possibly pagan no more) felt compelled to acknowledge Yahweh's supremacy and sovereignty.

For us, abandoning the subtle deceptions of pride can be just as painful. Though God likely will not force us to the ground like animals, He will strip us of any encumbrances that prevent our conscious reliance upon Him. He is more than willing to remove the hindrances that cause us to glory in our personal resumes rather than the praise of our heavenly King. In His providence, God is willing to hurt us in order to help us. Praise readily falling from our lips is a good indicator that we, like Nebuchadnezzar, finally realize how undeserving we are of His good gifts in our lives.



What season or event in your life has led you to praise the Lord more deliberately than before?

## Day 5: Read Daniel 5:1-31

Our lives would be much easier if we could learn from the mistakes of others without repeating them. Yet the sins of the past—in this case, pride—seem to rear their ugly realities in every generation. Some time after King Nebuchadnezzar's reign in Babylon ended, Belshazzar began to rule. Despite knowledge of his predecessor's costly arrogance, this new king also refused to walk in humility (5:22-23). As a result, God stripped the kingdom from Belshazzar in dramatic fashion, proving that He will not be mocked. The same is true today.

The Bible repeatedly warns that God will not share His glory with anyone (Isa. 42:8; 48:11). Wisdom beckons us to avoid much heartache by heeding the devastating examples of how pride destroys us. Are our modern idolatries any less significant than Belshazzar's? Do we expect our blatant disregard for God's commands to go unnoticed? As difficult as humbling ourselves before the Lord might be, facing His judgment for unbridled pride is much more painful.



How have you learned from the sins of others? In what ways have you failed to do so?





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Think about the encouragement people often share to help others through times of adversity. We might hear someone speak of how pressure is required to transform coal into a diamond; thus, pressure can be good for us, transforming us into someone better. Or we might be told of the hatchling that has to work to break through its eggshell, and that struggle is good for this creature—even necessary—so that it grows strong. Likewise, adversity strengthens us and positions us to be who we were meant to be.

While these illustrations might provide encouragement, they reveal something quite important about the world's view of adversity. The world sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to dig deep, gaze within their soul, and discover who he or she truly is. But the gospel tells a different story—a better story. The gospel sees adversity as an opportunity for a person to look high above, gaze upon Christ, and see who He truly is. For it is Christ, not ourselves, who carries us through all trials and suffering. Adversity positions us to rely on Christ's power, not an inner human strength that has been lying dormant.

In this volume we pick up the story of Scripture with the Jews living in bondage in a foreign land, the result of their rebellion against God. But even in the midst of judgment, God's faithful love still shines forth brightly. We will witness God continuing to guide, strengthen, and protect His people in their time of great adversity, not to help them discover who they were but rather to understand who He is. At the same time, we will see God continue to drive the events of history toward the fulfillment of His ancient promise to provide the Rescuer, the One who would free people from an even greater bondage, that of sin and death.