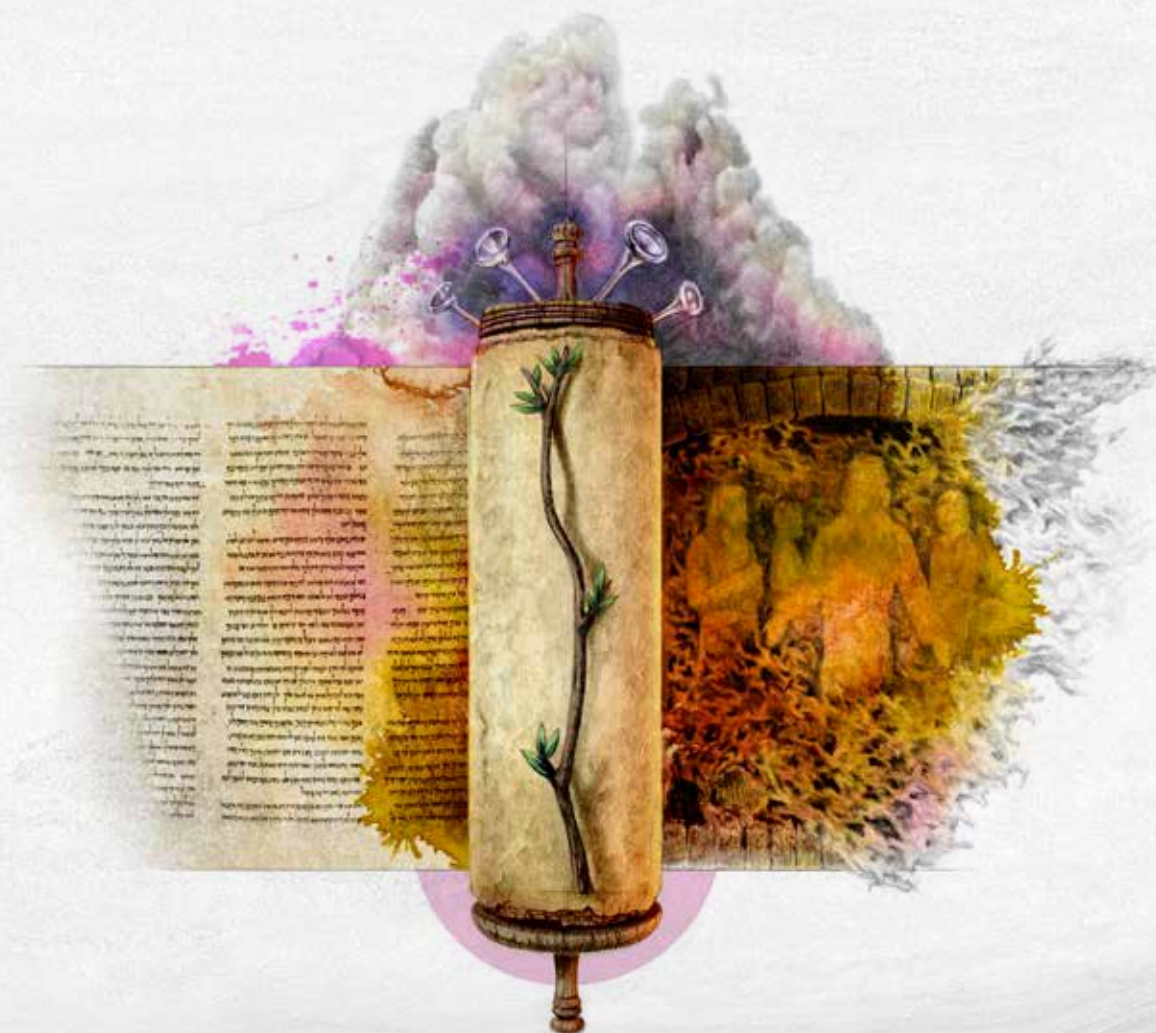


# THE GOSPEL PROJECT

## A People Restored

### *Daily Discipleship Guide*

WINTER 2019-20 | VOL. 6 | ESV



# God's Word to You



## Hope in the Midst of Darkness

God's plan to redeem humanity centered on Him forming a people through whom He would bring blessing to the world (Gen. 12:1-3). It would be through this people—the descendants of Abraham—that One would come to crush the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15) and put an end to sin and death. Not only would God's blessing come through the Israelites, it would be extended to them. God had promised to care for His people, to protect them, and to be their God and their Father.

But one of the ways good fathers bless is by disciplining their wayward, disobedient children. Just as God had promised to take care of Israel many times, He had also warned them of the consequences of their disobedience. But they failed to listen. Time and time again, they played the harlot with pagan gods, wanting the faithful blessings of the one true God without being faithful to Him.

God's response is found in the prophets and can be summarized by one word: *Repent*. God called on His people to turn from their wicked ways and turn back to Him. If they did, He would receive them back, but if they did not, He would bring destruction upon them—not punitive destruction but restorative destruction. His discipline is always corrective.

And still, the people would not listen, they would not repent. So judgment came. First, it came in the form of the Assyrian army, which conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and hauled off its people into captivity. But even witnessing this did not draw the rest of God's people to repentance. And so, judgment came again, this time through the Babylonian army, which destroyed the Southern Kingdom of Judah, including Jerusalem, and exiled its people.

These were dark days for God's people. They were prisoners in foreign lands, their land was occupied by a pagan people, and the temple lay in ruins. The blessings of God seemed more distant than ever. Impossible even. But even if it was difficult for the people to see, God was drawing His master plan together—the promised Seed, the Deliverer, was closer than ever. In a blistering cadence of activity to close out the Old Testament, God restored His people to the promised land and the temple and the city of Jerusalem were rebuilt, but then God went silent. For four hundred years, the people looked, listened, and waited—the stage was set for Jesus to come and crush the serpent's head.

Suggested for  
the week of

## Unit 16: God Sustains His People (Daniel)

December 1	<b>11</b>	<b><i>Session 1</i></b>	God's Presence Sustains His People
December 8	<b>20</b>	<b><i>Session 2</i></b>	God's Authority Sustains His People
December 15	<b>29</b>	<b><i>Session 3</i></b>	God's Protection Sustains His People
December 22	<b>38</b>	<b><i>Christmas</i></b>	Immanuel, God with Us
December 29	<b>47</b>	<b><i>Session 4</i></b>	God's Promises Sustain His People

## Unit 17: God Restores His People (Ezra; Prophets)

January 5	<b>57</b>	<b><i>Session 1</i></b>	The Vision of Future Justice
January 12	<b>66</b>	<b><i>Session 2</i></b>	The Return of Exiles
January 19	<b>75</b>	<b><i>Session 3</i></b>	The Rebuilding of the Temple
January 26	<b>84</b>	<b><i>Session 4</i></b>	The Promise of a Coming King

## Unit 18: God Prepares His People (Esther, Nehemiah, Malachi)

February 2	<b>94</b>	<b><i>Session 1</i></b>	God Saves His People Through a Queen
February 9	<b>103</b>	<b><i>Session 2</i></b>	God Protects His People Through a Cupbearer
February 16	<b>112</b>	<b><i>Session 3</i></b>	God Revives His People Through a Scribe
February 23	<b>121</b>	<b><i>Session 4</i></b>	God's Warns His People Through a Prophet

**The Gospel Project®**

Adult Daily Discipleship Guide ESV  
Volume 8, Number 2 Winter 2019-20

**Ed Stetzer**  
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Content and Production Editor

**Ken Braddy**  
Manager, Adult Ongoing Bible Studies

**Michael Kelley**  
Director, Groups Ministry

**Send questions/comments to:**

Content Editor by email to  
daniel.davis@lifeway.com or mail to  
Content Editor, *The Gospel Project: Adult  
Daily Discipleship Guide*, One LifeWay Plaza,  
Nashville, TN 37234-0175; or make comments  
on the Web at lifeway.com.

Printed in the United States of America

*The Gospel Project®: Adult Daily Discipleship Guide*  
ESV (ISSN 2330-9393; Item 005573553) is  
published quarterly by LifeWay Christian Resources,  
One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234.  
© 2019 LifeWay Christian Resources.

For ordering or inquiries, visit lifeway.com, or  
write LifeWay Resources Customer Service, One  
LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0113. For bulk  
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**Brian Dembowczyk**

Managing Editor—*The Gospel Project*  
AUTHOR OF *Gospel-Centered Kids Ministry*  
AND *Cornerstones: 200 Questions and  
Answers to Learn Truth*

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.

## About the Writers



**Quina Aragon** (Christmas session) is an author and spoken word artist who resides in Tampa, Florida, with her husband, Jon, and three-year-old daughter. She is a small group leader at her church. Her first children's book, *Love Made*, poetically retells the story of creation through a trinitarian lens of overflowing joy and love.



**Aaron Armstrong** (unit 17, session 1) is the brand manager of *The Gospel Project*, author of several books, including *Awaiting a Savior* and *Epic: The Story That Changed the World*, and screenwriter of the award-winning documentary *Luther: The Life and Legacy of the German Reformer*. Find him online at [bloggingtheologically.com](http://bloggingtheologically.com) and on Twitter at [@aaronstrongarm](https://twitter.com/aaronstrongarm).



**Adam Dooley** (unit 16, sessions 1-4) serves as the senior pastor of Englewood Baptist Church in Jackson, Tennessee. He is a two-time graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also serves as an adjunct professor. Adam is the author of *Passion in the Pulpit* and the forthcoming *When Life Unravels* (June 2020). He and his wife, Heather, have three sons and two daughters.



**Micah Fries** (unit 17, sessions 2-4) is the senior pastor of Brainerd Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Micah has authored and edited multiple books, including a volume in the *Christ-Centered Exposition* commentary series, *Islam and North America*, and *Leveling the Church* (releasing Spring 2020). Micah is married to Tracy and has two daughters, Grace and Kessed, and a son, Haddon.



**Muche Ukegbu** (unit 18, sessions 1-4) is the lead pastor at The Brook Church in Miami, Florida, a church he and his wife, Diamone, helped to plant in 2015 in association with the North American Mission Board. He received a BA in Anthropology from the University of North Texas and an MA in Christian Leadership from Dallas Theological Seminary. The Ukegbus have three children.

# THE GOSPEL PROJECT

A Journey Through the Storyline of Scripture

Fall 2018

## *In the Beginning*

Creation and the Fall (Genesis; Job)  
God Establishes a Covenant People (Genesis)  
God Grows His Covenant People (Genesis)



Winter 2018-19

## *Out of Egypt*

God Redeems His People (Genesis; Exodus)  
God Provides for His People (Exodus)  
God Receives Worship from His People (Ex.; Lev.)



Spring 2019

## *Into the Promised Land*

God Guides His People (Num.; Deut.)  
God Gives His People a Home (Joshua)  
God Delivers His People (Judges; Ruth)



Summer 2019

## *A Kingdom Provided*

God Provides a King (1 Samuel)  
God Provides a Godly King (1-2 Sam.; Psalms)  
God Provides a Wise King (1 Kings; Eccl.)



Fall 2019

## *A Nation Divided*

God Speaks to His People (1-2 Kings)  
God Judges the Sin of His People (2 Kings; Prophets)  
God Shows Mercy to His People (2 Chron.; Prophets)



Winter 2019-20

## *A People Restored*

God Sustains His People (Daniel)  
God Restores His People (Ezra; Prophets)  
God Prepares His People (Neh.; Esth.; Mal.)



**Spring 2020**

***Jesus the Messiah***

Jesus Comes into the World (Luke)  
Jesus Begins His Ministry (Gospels)  
Jesus Among the People (Gospels)

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**Summer 2020**

***Jesus the Servant***

Jesus the Healer (Gospels)  
Jesus the Teacher (Gospels)  
Jesus the Miracle-Worker (Gospels)

---

**Fall 2020**

***Jesus the Savior***

Jesus and the Kingdom (Gospels)  
Jesus the Savior (Gospels)  
Jesus the Risen King (Gospels)

---

**Winter 2020-21**

***The Mission Begins***

The Holy Spirit Comes (Acts; Epistles)  
Fundamentals of the Faith (Acts; Epistles)  
New Life in Christ (Acts; Epistles)

---

**Spring 2021**

***The Church United***

Living Like Jesus (Acts; Hebrews)  
The Sent Church (Acts; Epistles)  
Don't Forget (Acts; Epistles)

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**Summer 2021**

***All Things New***

Paul in Prison (Acts; Epistles)  
Facing Adversity (Acts; Epistles)  
Jesus Will Come Again (Revelation)







## Unit 16

# God Sustains His People

## *Daniel*

### Memory Verses

“If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

—DANIEL 3:17-18

# God's Presence Sustains His People

**SESSION IN A SENTENCE:** God is present with His people and sustains them through trials so that He may be glorified through their faith.

**BACKGROUND PASSAGE:** Daniel 1–3

What is the worst crisis you have ever faced? For me, it was my son's cancer diagnosis just two weeks shy of his fourth birthday. When the doctor said, "Leukemia," my wife and I instantly froze in fear. In that moment, God seemed distant, and even uncaring. Little did we know, however, that the next three years would deepen our faith and broaden our awareness of God's presence in our lives.

**?** When have harsh realities in your life left you feeling as if God were distant and uncaring?

Sometimes God delivers His people out of their trials. After one hundred twenty-eight weeks of chemotherapy, today our son is cancer free and thriving. We praise the Lord for His gracious, healing touch that took our burden away. Even more importantly, however, we learned that God sustains us throughout our suffering regardless of its outcome. The lengthy duration of our family's trial left us living in limbo for years before relief came. With no resolution in sight, God taught us that He is not only present when His people hurt but He is also enough. Having God in our lives is better than just having the results we desire.

# Group Time

**Point 1:** God's people have faith that He is all-powerful, sovereign, and good (Dan. 3:13-18).

<sup>13</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought. So they brought these men before the king. <sup>14</sup> Nebuchadnezzar answered and said to them, "Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up? <sup>15</sup> Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?"

<sup>16</sup> Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. <sup>17</sup> If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. <sup>18</sup> But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."

Life in Babylon was difficult for God's exiles. In that land, narcissistic Nebuchadnezzar erected a pagan statue to his unrivaled authority, and that idol served as a test of the loyalty of the king's subjects. "Bow or burn," he said. Obviously, no dedicated follower of Yahweh could obey this idolatrous edict, regardless of the cost.



In what ways does our culture tempt us to compromise our faith?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's image, communicating their profound faith in God's sovereignty over and goodness in their lives. Though these men knew God *could* deliver them, their course of action was not dependent upon the *certainty* of what their Master chose to do. Foundational to their profound display of faith was the conviction that God is always working for the good of His children, even if it is not obvious how.

**Faith:** Genuine faith begins with a recognition and confession of the truth of the \_\_\_\_\_, followed by a receiving of Christ as Lord and Savior of one's life. \_\_\_\_\_ faith is not \_\_\_\_\_ faith.

## Point 2: God's presence is with His people at their time of greatest need (Dan. 3:24-27).

<sup>24</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up in haste. He declared to his counselors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the fire?" They answered and said to the king, "True, O king." <sup>25</sup> He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

<sup>26</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the burning fiery furnace; he declared, "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. <sup>27</sup> And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them.

God powerfully brought these men out of their plight. When the Lord carries us through our adversities, whether by miraculous or ordinary means, His presence with us is undeniable. The records and experiences of God's presence through trials remind us that never will we experience the coming storm of God's judgment. Because of Christ's sacrificial work on the cross, the fires of God's wrath will never consume us.



How has God's presence changed your outlook on trials, even when your circumstances remained the same?

The presence of a fourth man in the fire is a vivid reminder that God is present to comfort us on our most difficult days (see Isa. 43:1-3; 2 Cor. 1:3-5). Before the Lord delivered these men out of the fire, He chose to be with them in the fire. God does not always remove our troubles, but He remains active in them nonetheless. He refuses to forsake us when the path of difficulty is His chosen course for our lives. Had these three Jewish heroes remained in the fire to perish on that day, God would have stayed with them until the end.



### Voices from Church History

"Rest assured, there will not be a saint then who will regret having suffered for Christ or borne reproach for His name's sake; but there will be thousands who would give worlds, were they theirs to give, if they had been but more faithful and devoted while in this scene of testing."<sup>1</sup>

—H. A. Ironside (1876-1951)

### Point 3: God's glory is made known through the faith of His people (Dan. 3:28-30).

<sup>28</sup> Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. <sup>29</sup> Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that speaks anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way." <sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

When Nebuchadnezzar observed the miraculous result of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's ironclad commitment to Yahweh, even to death, he could not ignore the majestic power and beauty of the true God. His decree gave testimony to the strength of Israel's God, even though Babylon's king remained thoroughly pagan. This incident underscores the profound witness the faith of God's people can have on those around them. Our lives should always communicate that Christ is strong, good, and holy.



When have you witnessed God's glory revealed through the faithful suffering of others?

The salvation of these men from the fire further amplified the worship of the true God. In their day, Gentiles from every people, nation, and language were to refrain from dishonoring Yahweh, who delivered His people like no false deity could. But one day, and even now, the nations will gather around the eternal throne of Jesus and take great joy in glorifying God's sacrificial Lamb for the salvation He provided through the cross (Rev. 7:9-10).



What are some ways our faith in Jesus can result in praise to God among the nations?



# Daily Study

## Day 1: Read Daniel 1:1-21

The opening verses of Daniel set the stage for the theme of God's sovereignty throughout the book. While we are prone to doubt the goodness of God when our circumstances take a turn for the worse, the mundane weariness of a fallen world can also take a toll on our faith. When the Lord dramatically intervenes in our lives, as is often the case in Daniel, it is easy to acknowledge His control over our circumstances. Navigating sustained difficulties or hardships, however, might leave us wondering if God is involved in our day-to-day lives. That is why the first chapter of Daniel is so encouraging.

During the traumatic exile of God's people into Babylonian captivity, we see God protecting His people, honoring their obedience, and giving them favor with a pagan king. By refusing to eat the food given to them, Daniel and his friends took a great risk. Yet the Lord blessed their desire for righteousness and took care of them in a hostile situation. Long before three of these young Jews faced a fiery furnace, they watched God piece the small details of their lives together for good. Their willingness to trust Him when the pressure was on was largely a result of their faith through the ordinary happenings of their routine.



How can you better rest in God's sovereignty over the daily frustrations you face?



## Day 2: Read Daniel 2:1-49

The prophetic impact of Daniel 2 is just as significant today as it was originally because we are still looking for the final kingdom to be revealed—the messianic kingdom. With Babylon (head of gold), Medo-Persia (chest/arms of silver), Greece (legs of bronze), and Rome (feet of iron and clay) in our rearview mirror, we long for the coming of a new heaven and new earth where our Savior King will reign forever and ever. Until then, Daniel models how we should live in a fallen world.

With his life in jeopardy due to the king's decree, Daniel sought the Lord faithfully in order to report and interpret the dream of Nebuchadnezzar. Ultimately, his ability to do so was the direct result of God's mercy and goodness toward him and his friends (Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah). Realizing this, Daniel refused to boast or promote himself while speaking God's words. In fact, he celebrated God's power and glory so much that the king also declared that Daniel's God was God of gods and Lord of kings (2:46). The faith of a faithful prophet revealed the glory of the Lord over all.



How can you better reveal God's glory with the gifts He has given to you?

## Day 3: Read Daniel 3:1-18

Despite witnessing the glory of Daniel's God firsthand, wicked Nebuchadnezzar chose to erect a monument made of gold and commanded his people to bow and worship it. Though we cannot be sure whether the statue represented the king or one of his gods, it does seem clear that Nebuchadnezzar was declaring, contrary to his dream, that his kingdom would never end. Standing alone, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to insult the true God by kneeling before the idol. The logic behind their countercultural stand is still instructive today. These committed Hebrews were content to let God choose the course of their lives, knowing that He is good and trustworthy.

Why is it so difficult for us to do the same? Though God is able to prevent all things in our lives, we must learn to trust Him even if He chooses not to. Harsh circumstances should not limit our willingness to obey the Lord. If He, for reasons we cannot understand, allows our worst-case scenario to unfold, we must continue to believe that He is working for our ultimate good and for His divine glory.



What hardships in your life tempt you to disobey the Lord?

## Day 4: Read Daniel 3:19-27

God is always present with His people. The incredible deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego illustrates this encouraging truth as vividly as any biblical passage. Though caught in a deadly fire, one of the worst circumstances imaginable, these three devoted servants of God were not alone, and possibly they were joined by the Son of God Himself. The comprehensive protection of God not only prevented their clothes from burning but also prevented the stench of smoke from following them out of the furnace.

Even when our outcomes are not so favorable, the abiding presence of God is just as certain. God is with us in the fire even if He does not allow us to come out of it. He comforts and cares for us when nothing about our lives makes sense. He will not forsake us even though the world does. He is there even though we cannot always see or feel how. We look forward to the day when God makes all things new and wipes away every tear from our eyes (Rev. 21:4). But until then, He remains faithfully by our side.



How confident are you of God's presence in your life when you face great difficulties?

## Day 5: Read Daniel 3:28-30

For the second time in the Book of Daniel, we observe Nebuchadnezzar exalting the God of Israel with elaborate praise. Through the lips of unbelievers, exclusive declarations magnified Yahweh as the only God worthy of worship. What caused these remarkable confessions? In a word, faith. Because Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego displayed faith under pressure, God's beauty and majesty were clear to all. In addition, their salvation from the fire made His strength and power undebatable.

Our lives have the same potential. Remaining faithful while suffering will inspire others to follow our God. And oftentimes, the miraculous intervention of God in our lives while we hurt compels others to praise Him. Likewise, the transforming effect of salvation magnifies the reality that God has rescued us from the flames of hell. When it is obvious that God is at work, His name will be exalted among believers and unbelievers alike.



Does your life compel unbelievers to see God's worth and glory? Why or why not?



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2. Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (New York: Robert Carter and Brother, 1874), 94.
3. Robert Murray McCheyne, in *The Works of the Late Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne*, vol. 2 (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), 179-80.
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1. N. T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 8.
2. A. W. Tozer, *Worship: The Reason We Were Created—Collected Insights from A. W. Tozer* (Chicago: Moody, 2017) [eBook].

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2. Yoiyah Yilpet, "Haggai," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 1102.
3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Meditations on Psalms*, ed. and trans. Edwin Robertson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 72.

**SESSION 4**

1. D. A. Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 30.
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2. Kathleen Nielson with D. A. Carson, *Rebuild: A Study in Nehemiah* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay Press, 2014), 36.

**SESSION 3**

1. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 138.
2. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Joy Unspeakable*, ed. Christopher Catherwood (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1984), 205.

**SESSION 4**

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# What's Your Next Step in Faith?

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# A People Restored

God is faithful to His Word. He blessed His people with a land, but He also exiled them from it on account of their wicked hearts, just as He had said. Yet God continued to sustain the Israelites, showing Himself to be the one true God even in a foreign land. From kings, fire, and lions, the Lord preserved His servants and demonstrated His glory and power.

When the time of their exile was completed, God brought His people home to worship Him with a renewed faith. True to His promises, the Lord worked through kings, prophets, a priest, and the reading of His word to restore their land and their worship.

Though back in the promised land, God's people still faced severe challenges that threatened their very existence. In the midst of these struggles, the Lord provided for His people. He appointed a queen "for such a time as this"; He led a man of faith to return home and rebuild a wall; and He worked through a prophet to call His people back to Himself. All this was preparation for the day God would provide His Son to save people from their sin.

## What's Next?

### SPRING 2020

#### Volume 7: Jesus the Messiah

*Jesus Comes into the World (Luke)*

*Jesus Begins His Ministry (Gospels)*

*Jesus Among the People (Gospels)*

### SUMMER 2020

#### Volume 8: Jesus the Servant

*Jesus the Healer (Gospels)*

*Jesus the Teacher (Gospels)*


*Jesus the Miracle-Worker (Gospels)*

### SOME OF OUR UPCOMING WRITERS

Dhati Lewis

Katie Orr

Ed Stetzer

 **Twitter:** @Gospel\_Project  **Facebook:** TheGospelProject  **Instagram:** GospelProject\_

