

# 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?

# My Mission

Because we have confidence that God is with us, we trust in God's power as we embrace a countercultural lifestyle, regardless of what the immediate outcome may be.

- **How do you need to live by faith in God, trusting that He will work for your good and not your harm?**
- **What are some ways your group/church can live a countercultural lifestyle for the sake of the gospel?**
- **What circumstances in your life, either past or present, can you use to point others to Christ?**

## Voices from the Church

"God has different purposes for His own, and He shows Himself strong and gains glory in different ways throughout each of our lifetimes. And if He allows suffering in our lives, He does for very specific, very important reasons, and He does not do so lightly!"<sup>2</sup>

—Joni Eareckson Tada

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# 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?



# Encourage One Another

*Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.*

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- God's people have faith that He is all-powerful, sovereign, and good (Dan. 3:13-18).
- God's presence is with His people at their time of greatest need (Dan. 3:24-27).
- God's glory is made known through the faith of His people (Dan. 3:28-30).



How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?



When was the last time you reminded someone about God's presence in his or her life?



When have you sensed God's presence during a difficult time or season?

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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)*

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