

Session 1: Daniel's Story

OPEN

Leader: *Open the session in prayer. Distribute the handout. If this is a new group where the people don't know each other already, allow them to introduce themselves briefly before answering the question.*

If you could rate today's society compared to what it was fifty years ago, how would you rate it? Are things getting better? In what ways has morality declined? How has your community changed for the worse? And, with all that, how has media influenced the way you see the world? Does it hurt or help?

The truth is, we're living in a type of Babylon—a godless society bent on personal pleasure, power, and exploitation. And yet we're told in Scripture that ancient Babylon was the worst community ever to exist. In this video, pastor and author Larry Osborne will introduce us to a man who learned to thrive in the midst of Babylon: Daniel. And we'll see a poignant story about a family who lost their policeman son to a shooting, and how they learned to cope and grieve in the aftermath of such a painful tragedy. We will learn that nothing circumvents the power and sovereignty of God, even when we live in a sin-scarred world, our own personal Babylon.

VIEW

Show Session 1: *Daniel's Story* (18 minutes)

REVIEW

What did you learn about Daniel that you hadn't realized before? How can understanding the context of Daniel's stories help you see beyond the lion's den or the fiery furnace?

Larry not only introduced us to Daniel, but he also detailed just how awful and deranged Babylon was, something that would make even our society blush. **What kinds of behaviors alarm you today? How does knowing someone else faced far more opposition help you find peace today?**

In the midst of this difficult place, Daniel didn't merely survive, he thrived. Part of his secret was knowing God was in control, even when Israel's enemies appeared to have won. **In what ways have you seen God's hand in your life, even when chaos appeared to be reigning?**

What would it look like to thrive in your life today? What parts of your life are not thriving?

After watching Steve and Jeanne Bessant's tragic story of losing their son, what surprised you about what they shared? In what ways did God surprise them?

So many times we would rather enact justice, particularly when something unjust happens to us. **What was the Bessant family's response to the men who took the life of their son? How does their reaction inspire you? Who, in your life, is difficult for you to forgive?**

If a reporter followed you around for a few days, creating a docudrama about your life, what would your show look like? In what ways are you thriving? In what ways are you treading water?

We learn that God disciplines those He loves. How has He disciplined you in the last year?

BIBLE EXPLORATION

God's ways often seem counter-intuitive to us. We don't always see immediate victory, and we can tend to question the *why* of our suffering. We may ask the age-old question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" followed by an even more frustrating one, "Why do good things happen to bad people?" And yet, God has a redemptive plan to help us thrive in the midst of our circumstances.

Jeremiah 29:11 is a famous verse that is often quoted out of context, but explores this truth well:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

It's crucial to remember that Jeremiah wrote this to Jews who were in *exile*.

How has Jeremiah 29:11 offered you comfort? And yet, how does knowing this verse was written to a people who would remain in exile give you additional hope?

The Jews who were in Babylonian exile had disobeyed God in every possible way. They traded Him for evil gods, preferring to worship idols and demons than bow to the King of Kings. Their exile was a direct result of that disobedience. This is where we encounter the story of Daniel.

In the midst of that, we meet Hananiah, a seer. Read Jeremiah 28.

What did Hananiah the Seer do wrong? What was Jeremiah's reaction? (See verses 15–17).

Who today utters this same prophecy, that all will be well? How does believing that influence the way you deal with further difficulties?

Today we see hundreds of Hananiahs prophesying the same thing. All will be well. Prosperity is coming. Claim your victory. And then we lump Jeremiah 29:11 in with that. We want to believe the Christian life is all about our happiness. We want joy, but we don't want exile to create

it. We want to be strong in Jesus, but we don't want to walk the Calvary road He walked. We want holiness without pain. And yet Daniel teaches us that we don't need to escape Babylon to have true life. We can *thrive* in the midst of it.

Jesus' words in John 16:33 remind us of the importance of thriving in exile:

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

How does knowing the truth that pain and trials will be part of our life help you face them today? How does knowing that Jesus has overcome the world help you during your darkest trials?

Read Hebrews 12:4–11.

Who does God discipline? Why does He discipline His children? If you have children, why do you discipline them? Do they always enjoy it? But what is the greater purpose?

Read Daniel 1:1–2.

Who gave Babylon the victory over the king of Judah? How does knowing God allowed such a painful tragedy help you understand the way God deals with us today? (God allowed the Babylonians the victory. Sometimes His purposes aren't always clear, but He is always good.)

Read Ecclesiastes 7:10.

Why do we tend to think the old days are better than today? Why do you think Solomon thought it was unwise to have these kinds of speculations?

Read Daniel 3:1–15 about King Nebuchadnezzar.

How did the king blaspheme God? How does Nebuchadnezzar's demand of the people echo Satan's request to Jesus during His temptation in the wilderness? (See Luke 4:5–8 for the temptation of Jesus. Nebuchadnezzar blasphemed God by erecting a statue, placing himself above God, and demanding that people

worship it. Satan, too, demanded that Jesus fall down and worship him.)

It's extremely difficult to see those who adamantly worship Satan live seemingly perfectly untouched lives.

Read Habakkuk 3:16–19.

What does this Scripture tell us about the character of God? Does God always promise deliverance? And what did Habakkuk choose to do in the midst of a failed crop, starvation, and deprivation? How does Habakkuk's response help you to face your current trials? (Habakkuk chose to praise and worship God despite his difficult circumstances, and without knowing if they would ever turn around.)

LAST WORD

In the video, Larry helped us understand the exceedingly wicked Babylonian empire, and he showed us that God's purposes prevail despite evil. He described how Daniel learned to thrive in the midst of uncertainty, pain, misunderstanding and evil.

With that in mind, write down 3 situations in your life where you currently need Daniel's perspective.

Leader: Give people 5 minutes to write these down, then invite them each to share one.

Going over your list of three difficulties, what is one way you can, like Habakkuk, choose to praise God in the midst of your "exile"?

Sometimes we give into panic because we listen to panicking voices. With a steady stream of social media, blogs, online news sources and 24-hour news cycles, we can quickly become overwhelmed with the dreariness of the world.

Choose one source of media negativity to fast from this week. Write it down.

Leader: Give people a minute or two to write these down. Ask them to share their fasting choice. This fast will last until the next time you meet. Ask people in the group to document (however they want) how this small media fast affects their joy levels, and how it influenced their ability to worship in the midst of this difficult world.

What stands in the way of you believing God is working all things for good behind the scenes (See Romans 8:28)?

How can a strong, Daniel-like belief in God's rule over everything help you put your current circumstances in perspective?

Larry said, "God is much more concerned about our ultimate holiness than He is about current happiness." He is more interested in the way we respond to difficulties than he is in alleviating our current pain. This is not an easy way to view God, and it's counter-cultural. And yet, if we look back on our lives when we had the most

significant spiritual growth, it came smack-dab in the middle of difficulties. There is hope, no matter what you face today. God is at work.

DEEPER WALK

Leader: *Challenge the group to practice at least one of the suggested activities in Deeper Walk. You may even invite them to circle the one they want to do, and then follow up at the beginning of the next session to find out how it went.*

Personal Action: Fast from whatever media platform causes you the most stress and worry. Recount how the fast changed your perspective.

Mentoring: Who do you know right now who, like Daniel, has trusted God in the midst of a painful/difficult circumstance? Ask this question: What helped you thrive in the midst of a painful trial? What gives you peace when the culture seems to be getting crazier and more godless?

Conversation: Talk to a significant friend or group of friends about the three things you listed in the Last Word section. Ask for input about how you can experience God's presence in the midst of those difficulties. Ask your friends what their list of three would be. End the time praying directly and specifically for each other.

Memorization: Write down Habakkuk 3:17–18 on a 3 x 5 card, then keep it with you in an obvious place (purse, wallet, car, mirror). Read and memorize it when life feels out of control.

Pray: Ask God to give you His perspective on a painful situation. Ask Him to teach you what it means to thrive in Babylon. • **Read:** For deeper study on the topics we talked about this week, read chapters 1–4 in *Thriving in Babylon: Why Hope, Humility, and Wisdom Matter in a Godless Culture*.

Study: Take a deeper look at the life of Daniel and see firsthand how he thrived in Babylon. Read Daniel 1–6.