

IN A FOREIGN LAND

Daniel 1:1-21

The Point: Even in a hostile culture. Christians are called to remain true to their identity as God's chosen people.

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Daniel and his friends were taken captive

The hero of the story we are about to read is not one of the Hebrew teenagers, but the all-powerful God of grace who keeps His promises. At the beginning of the Book of Daniel, we were introduced to four remarkable young men who were uprooted and replanted in the harsh and wicked soil of the Babylonian Empire. Though they were away from home, they were not outside the sovereign plan of God.

In order for God's people to be salt and light in the evil empire of Babylon, they would need to be prepared for the challenges such a culture would throw at them—challenges designed to lead them away from God. Look at the pressures Daniel and his three friends had to face and notice how these pressures are similar to the ones we face in our own culture today

▶ What challenges do Christians face today that might lead them away from God?

Daniel lives according to his beliefs

Despite the Babylonian strategy to convert Daniel and his friends, the young Hebrews were determined not to abandon their convictions or their commitment to God.

Notice how Daniel resisted the temptation to defile himself (v. 8). The immersion into the world of pagan Babylon did not win over his heart or mind. The text does not explain why the food was problematic for Daniel. It may have been that the food was unclean for a Hebrew (Lev. 11:1-23); it may have been that the food was offered to idols (Deut. 6:3-15); or it may have communicated an absolute allegiance to the king that Daniel reserved for God alone.

God gives grace to those who seek to live holy lives before Him

Daniel and his friends had faith that God would honor the risk they were taking in seeking to be holy. It was already settled in their hearts that they would remain faithful to their God, no matter what. Daniel and his friends testified to God's grace and power through their service, their wisdom, and their understanding.

Essential Doctrines

New Identity of the Believer: When a person places faith in Christ, that person undergoes a fundamental change of identity. He or she goes from being an enemy under God's wrath (Eph. 2:1-3) to being welcomed into God's family as a beloved child (Eph. 2:19). The believer in Christ is declared righteous on account of Christ's perfect life and substitutionary death and resurrection. No longer is the person a slave to sin, defined by past failures or present struggles. The person has been delivered from the realm of darkness and now belongs to the kingdom of light (Col. 1:13). Anyone who is in Christ is a "new creation" in whom the old, sinful self is passed away and the new, redeemed self is alive and progressing, until the person becomes more and more like Christ (2 Cor. 5:17).

	Leader Note: Because some content from the Personal Study Guide will not be available on the One Sheet, make sure to adapt the session based on how you use the material with your group.	ì
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YOUR STORY
Daniel's exile was no accident in God's plan—God used it to make Himself known to those who didn't know Him. In a similar way, how can we see ourselves as being "sent" to the people around us?
Why do you think it was important for Daniel and his friends to remember their identity as God's people? Why is knowing our identity such an important lesson for us today?
What does this account teach about the source of true wisdom and understanding? How does this differ from the world's standard view of where wisdom comes from?
► How are you actively seeking God's wisdom in your own life?
YOUR MISSION
It is fascinating to note the far-reaching influence Daniel and his friends—these exiled teenagers—were given by God in a foreign land and culture. Because they held on to their identity as God's people, and because they intentionally lived out their beliefs in a time and culture where it would have been convenient to do otherwise, God blessed them and allowed them to become leaders who would positively influence those around them. Of course, at the same time this doesn't come as a surprise. God has always desired to use young men and women in significant ways for both His glory and their good and joy. > What are some other biblical examples of God using young men and women in significant ways?
Why do you think young people often believe God can't use them until they are older? What things tempt you to believe this about yourself?
Heart Imagine how difficult it must have been for Daniel and his friends, being uprooted from everything and everyone they were familiar with and being transported to a foreign land and culture. How sad would you be if you were kidnapped and forced to live somewhere else? To go to school somewhere else? To learn a new language and customs, being treated poorly on account of where you are from? Despite these trying circumstances, Daniel and his friends clung to their faith in God and the truth of their biblical worldview. Since they were grounded in their faith and God protected them, these young Hebrews were able to face their situation with courage and strength. Share about a time when your faith provided the anchor you needed during a tough situation.
▶ How would that situation have been different if you hadn't been grounded in your faith?
Hands How do we live in exile? As we have seen, we must begin by first recognizing the hand of God in our circumstances. God may send you to a difficult place to spread His name—whether it be a new school, neighborhood, or overseas mission opportunity. God often brings suffering into the lives of His people to demonstrate His sovereignty, strengthen our faith, show Himself wise and strong, and display His glory among the nations so that they might be drawn to Him. • What does this account teach us about going through difficulties in our lives?
What does this account teach us about God's faithfulness in being with us when we feel as if we are living in exile?



PROTECTION IN THE FURNACE

Daniel 3:8-30

The Point: God alone deserves our ultimate allegiance.

HIS STORY

Nebuchadnezzar builds an idol

King Nebuchadnezzar once paid homage and praise to Daniel's God (2:46-47), but his devotion was shallow and short-lived. In chapter 3, Nebuchadnezzar set up a great statue that was 90 feet tall with a width of 9 feet, gold plated from head to toe (3:1).

The biblical writer went to great lengths to note the idolatrous nature of this statue of gold. The word "image" occurred more than 10 times in chapter 3, and as you know, God's people were forbidden to worship graven "images" of any sort (Ex. 20:4).

When the time came to bow down and worship the image as commanded by the king, three men remained standing (v. 12). There was no fanfare or outburst of protest, just a quiet act of civil disobedience. Quickly, the enemies of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego sprung into action, accusing them before the king.

God's people refuse to bow to the idol

In light of the situation they faced, how would these young men respond to the charges against them? What would they do? Or, more importantly, what would God do next?

Nebuchadnezzar was furious. The three Jews resisted the herd mentality and bravely stood alone (apparently Daniel was not present). The king commanded that they be brought before him (v. 13). He asked if the accusations were true that they would not serve his gods or "worship" the golden statue he set up (v. 14).

God shows up and protects His people

These young men weren't sure how their situation would unfold. Would God spare them? Or would God allow the evil directed against them to continue? Yet, despite not knowing how God would respond, the young men stood firmly in the belief that God is in control, no matter the end result.

Nebuchadnezzar invited the three Jewish men out of the furnace for all to see that the fire had brought no bodily harm to them (v. 27). In fact, there was no evidence that these men were in the furnace: no singed hair, no burnt clothes, and not even the scent of fire. The king rightly attributed this to their God (v. 28), the God he called "the Most High God" (v. 26), and earlier called "God of gods, Lord of kings" (2:47).

▶ What are some other examples in Scripture where we see God being a Savior who draws near to His people during their time of need? (See Ex. 3:6,12; Isa. 43:2; Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 8:37-39; Heb. 13:5; 1 Pet. 4:12-14).

Essential Doctrines

The Church and the Kingdom: The church and the kingdom of God are closely related, though not identical. When the Bible speaks of the kingdom of God, it is referring to the reign of God in the world. The church is the people of God who live under His loving rule now, in anticipation of the full manifestation of God's kingdom in the future. The church's mission is to witness to God's kingdom, proclaiming God's message of salvation through Christ and demonstrating the power of the gospel through good works, so that others may be brought to live under God's reign.

YOUR STORY STORY
▶ What are some areas of life in which Christians are criticized for obeying God rather than
culture or popular opinion?
▶ What are some ways Christians can demonstrate to their surrounding culture that their
ultimate allegiance is to God, not men?
What can we learn from the Jewish men's confession of faith when they claimed they would follow God even if He chose not to deliver them?
would follow God even if He chose not to deliver them?
What does this account teach us about the character of God and His relationship to His people? How does this encourage you as you face difficulties in your own life?
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YOUR MISSION
Head
Theologians have long debated the identity of the fourth individual in the furnace. Some believe this is a theophany, or a manifestation of God's presence. Others call this a Christophany, or
a preincarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God. Regardless, the
important thing to note is that the Lord was there with them. The God who did not deliver them
from the fire was the God who met them in the fire and delivered them out of the fire. • When has God chosen not to deliver you from a trial, and instead met you in the midst of
the trial?
N/bat is the impact of consing Codia processes when you face difficulties?
What is the impact of sensing God's presence when you face difficulties?
Heart
It's hard for us to identify with Nebuchadnezzar in this account, but maybe we should. Do we
not sometimes exalt ourselves in similar ways? Do we not often act as if matters of destiny are in our hands and not God's? Do we not draw attention to who we are, who we know, and what we
have done? Is the same pride that is in the heart of this king not lurking in our own? When we are
honest with ourselves, we will come to the conclusion that we also have pride within our own heart
and that this pride causes us to trust in ourselves rather than in the God of our salvation.
▶ In what areas of your life have you played the role of Nebuchadnezzar?
▶ How does the faith of these young Jewish men encourage you when it comes to dealing
with pride in your own heart?
Hands
Honoring and obeying God is not always popular. Sometimes, allegiance to God leads to serious
problems and, in many cases, life-threatening situations. While the latter may not often be your
experience, it is a daily reality for many of our brothers and sisters around the world. Simply trying
to live a life that is faithful to the God and Savior they love, these believers are criticized, ostracized and hated. Still, they declare by words and actions that we obey God above men (Acts 5:29).
► How does this account help us remain strong in faith as we seek to follow Jesus today?
► What are some ways we can encourage and support brothers and sisters in Christ around
the world who face intense opposition to their faith?



THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL

Daniel 5:1-9,13-31

The Point: God opposes those who remain prideful against Him.

HIS STORY

God responds to Belshazzar's sin

The Hebrew people had been defeated and exiled, but God was in control and they were learning to trust Him even when they could not see His hand at work. There is a chronological gap of roughly 20 years between Daniel 4 and Daniel 5. Up until this point, we have dealt with King Nebuchadnezzar. However, in this chapter, we are introduced to his successor—King Belshazzar.

Here the all-powerful Babylonian king, Belshazzar, was throwing a party for the ages. However, what he didn't know was that he was the last in the line of Babylonian kings. Darius the Mede was about to invade Babylon and bring its empire to an end.

When have you faced something difficult and had to learn to trust God even though you didn't see Him at work in that situation?

Daniel Confronts Belshazzar

The story continued when Daniel, then much older, was brought before the king to interpret the strange message on the wall. As we see in Daniel's translation of the message, King Belshazzar was guilty of failing to learn from his predecessor—Nebuchadnezzar—that pride goes before a fall. Exalt yourself against God, and you will be struck down.

According to Daniel, the Most High God gave Belshazzar's grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, his kingdom along with the glory and privileges that go with such a position. His grandfather became arrogant and prideful, so God took him down and caused him to live like a beast, with animals like oxen and donkeys. God did this so that he would know God rules over all and even sets earthly rulers in place as He wills (v. 21). By saying this, Daniel was essentially pointing the finger at Belshazzar and saying he should know better because of what happened to his grandfather.

Daniel interprets God's warning

Next, Daniel translated the writing that was inscribed on the wall. It was bad news for Belshazzar. Belshazzar showed no signs of repentance for his arrogance, blasphemies, idolatry, pride, and sensualities. He died that night, and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom. The Babylonian king had challenged and mocked the Most High God. He had been confronted with his sin and showed no repentance. In this case, God's judgment came as fast as a lightning bolt from heaven.

Essential Doctrines

God is Omnipotent: God is all-powerful: There is nothing God cannot do so long as it does not contradict His own nature or law. God has power and authority over the universe He created, from the largest solar system to the smallest particle. Affirming that God is all-powerful does not mean that God can sin—since that would go against His perfect moral nature. As Christians, we rest in the belief that the God who has all power is good, and we gain great comfort by knowing that an all-powerful God is working for our good and joy.

YOUR STORY STORY	
▶ Belshazzar's sin made him dull to and unaware of what was taking place around him. What are some modern day examples of sin dulling our senses? Why do you think sin blinds us and makes us oblivious to reality?	
What are the major character distinctions between Daniel and Belshazzar? What kind of character shows up more in your own life, character like Daniel's or Belshazzar?	
▶ When have you sensed God warning you away from sin or self-exaltation?	
▶ What can we learn from this account when it comes to listening to God's wisdom over the wisdom of this world?	
YOUR MISSION	
Head	
It is interesting to note that the "wise men" of Babylon could not interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2 and had to be bailed out by Daniel and that the same thing happened again in chapter 4. For the third time, the king's "wise men" were brought in and failed to interpret the message.	
Because of accounts like these, we are reminded to not put our trust in worldly wisdom, but in the unfailing wisdom that comes from God.	
▶ When have you felt pressure to choose between the wisdom of this world and wisdom revealed in Scripture? What was the outcome of that situation?	
Why can we have assurance that biblical wisdom will win every time, even over the best of human wisdom?	
Heart This story reminds us once again of the spiritual dangers of a prideful heart. Pride tries to elevate	
the self above God by denying any dependence upon Him. Belshazzar was prideful and acted out on that pride by gloating over the items stolen from the temple. As Scripture makes abundantly clear, God opposes the prideful but gives grace to those who are humble and acknowledge their	
complete dependence upon Him (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). Why do you think it is easy to recognize pride in others but often difficult to see it within ourselves?	
▶ In what areas has pride surfaced in your own life?	
Hands	
This story not only teaches us how to stand up for truth even when it isn't personally convenient, but also how to respectfully challenge those who are clearly in sin and in need of personal repentance. Daniel wasn't assured that speaking the truth and confronting Belshazzar's sin would result in his personal safety. After all, the pagan king could have reacted quite negatively to what	
Daniel had to say. Nevertheless, Daniel did what he was called to do, giving us an example of how to speak truth in a loving way, while calling others to repentance.	
 Give an example of when you or someone you know stood up for truth when it wasn't personally convenient. 	
Why is it important that we focus both on speaking truth and being gracious in the manner in which we speak?	



GOD THE SUSTAINER | SESSION 4 PROTECTION IN THE LIONS' DEN

Daniel 6:1-28

The Point: God glorifies Himself through the rescue of those who trust Him.

HIS STORY

Daniel remains faithful to God

Daniel's rise in power was not because of his natural ability, but because God worked in Daniel's life, and Daniel walked with God. Still, as many have discovered, it can get lonely at the top. Success can increase your enemies. The blessings of the righteous can stir up the jealously of the wicked. In the passage that follows, we see the plot to bring down Daniel.

The officials knew if they wanted Daniel gone, they had to use his integrity against him. By manipulating Darius into making an irreversible decree, the officials hoped to trap Daniel in an act of disobedience to the king. Their goal was not to see Daniel demoted; their goal was to see Daniel dead.

When Daniel found out Darius signed an edict honoring himself as the exclusive deity of the empire, what did he do? What he had always done. He obeyed God rather than man. He continued a pattern of spiritual devotion that had marked his life for years, a pattern his enemies knew well. He went to his home, upstairs to the place of prayer, where the windows were open toward Jerusalem. He then got down on his knees and prayed three times daily, as he had always done.

Daniel trusts God for deliverance

Godly people seek to remain faithful to God, no matter what may happen or what circumstances they may encounter. In this passage, Daniel demonstrated his complete dependence on the Lord for rescue.

King Darius was upset about the situation and tried to find a way to deliver a man he obviously admired, appreciated, and respected. Unfortunately, Darius was caught in a trap of his own making. His evil administrators reminded him once more (the decree is mentioned four times for emphasis and effect) of the binding nature of the law of the Medes and Persians. When the King made a law, even he was bound by his words.

God saves Daniel and glorifies His name

So what happened next? The next morning king Darius returned, fully expecting the den to be the tomb for whatever remained of Daniel's body. But Darius was in for a surprise.

We see how God used this entire story to show His greatness to the pagan world. Darius was clearly impacted by God's miraculous deliverance of Daniel. His declaration accomplishes at least two important purposes: It recognizes the greatness, even the superiority, of Israel's God; and it cancels out the irrevocable edict of verses 6-9. This is an amazing example of how God can even use unbelievers to proclaim His glory. As Proverbs 21:1 says, "A king's heart is like streams of water in the Lord's hand: He directs it wherever He chooses."

Make a list of the attributes given to God in Darius' song. How is God's ultimate mission of receiving glory and honor from people of all nations revealed in this song?

Essential Doctrines

Priesthood of the Believer: God's intention for humanity is that we be a kingdom of priests, not just a kingdom with priests. Although God set up the priestly system in the Old Testament due to the sinfulness of humanity and people's need for a mediator, His ultimate purpose is that we come to God directly, through the mediating work of Jesus Christ, thus eliminating the need of another priest. Because of the work of Christ on the cross (exemplified in His tearing down the curtain that prevented access into the holy of holies, Christians are free to approach God with boldness (Rom. 5:1-5; Heb. 4:14-16).

YOUR STORY	
What was it about Daniel's faith that made him a model servant? How does your faith impact the things you are involved in (school, sports, family life, etc.)?	
When Daniel refused to obey the king's edict, what statement did it send to the rest of the world? What are some areas in our own culture in which we are called to obey God rather than men?	
▶ What role do you think Daniel's consistent practice of prayer had in shaping him to be the kind of man he was? How has your own personal prayer life given shape to the person you are today?	
► As with Daniel, how can we make sure God receives the glory for who He is and what He has done for us?	
YOUR MISSION	
 Head God chose to glorify Himself through miraculously saving Daniel in the lions' den. God used Daniel's trial and difficulties, however stressful they may have been to Daniel on a personal level, to point unbelievers to Himself. As a result, a pagan king witnessed the miraculous hand of God and publicly proclaimed God's greatness. In fact, Darius went so far as to say that God's kingdom would have no end and that He is without rival. This should automatically cause us to wonder how God is using our own trials and sufferings to make much of Himself. Share about a time when God used a difficult period in your own life to point others to Himself. 	
► How does this account give you a different perspective on personal trials, allowing you to step back and see the bigger picture of God's work?	
Heart This story teaches us once again that God honors those who remain faithful to Him. Just as he blessed and honored Daniel under the Babylonians, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, he did so again under the Medo-Persians and Darius (that is Cyrus the Persian). It is also worth noting, through all of these accounts, it appears that Daniel always sought to remain humble before God—in contrast to the earthly kings around him. As we know from Scripture, God opposes the proud, but gives grace to those who are humble (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5). In what ways are you intentionally seeking to live a life faithfully devoted to God? What does such a life look like?	
▶ What are some ways you can cultivate humility in your own life?	
 Hands Even though it would have been a good time for Daniel to take a month off from being faithful to God, he persevered. From a worldly standpoint, Daniel's faithfulness wasn't personally convenient; however, obedience to and love for God was deeply ingrained in Daniel. He did not push his spiritual disciplines into the shadows of privacy. He had honored God in this manner the entire time He was in Babylon, and he would not stop now—not for a month, not even for a moment. What are some spiritual disciplines you have intentionally tried to hide from others out of fear of what they might think or say? 	
How does Daniel's faithfulness challenge you to live out your own faith in the presence of others?	



GOD BRINGS HIS PEOPLE HOME

Ezra 1:1-8; 3:1-13

The Point: Worshiping God should be the first priority of His people.

HIS STORY

God sends the Israelites home

The first six chapters of Ezra highlight God's sovereignty in the preservation of His people. God brought His chosen people, Israel, back into the land of promise. What's more, He used the ruler of the nation to accomplish His purposes.

After years of living in exile, the people of God were sovereignly given free passage to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. God moved within the heart of the king to not only allow His people to return and rebuild the temple, but to also provide the finances for their mission. The king encouraged people to give a voluntary gift to the Israelites as they returned, much like the type of offerings we are called to give today.

When have you witnessed God using unlikely people, like the pagan king here, to provide for His people? Explain.

The people journey back to Jerusalem and worship God

Consider the scene as these exiles returned to their land. The Lord had not been worshiped in Jerusalem in fifty years, since the city's fall. So, it's not surprising that the first concern of the community was to lift up name of the Lord, even though the temple was not fully constructed.

While the people of God fully intended to rebuild the temple, they knew a physical temple wasn't a requirement to worship God. Before the temple's grand re-opening, even before all of the once familiar things were restored in Jerusalem, the people simply worshiped God with a cheerful heart.

The reconstruction of the temple begins

Worship is at the center of life in the community of faith. In the Jews' return to Jerusalem, their worship highlighted God's goodness to His people for allowing them to return and reconstruct the temple. Notice the multifaceted nature of their worship and how it exalted the Lord.

The people gathered together to celebrate the new foundation that was in place for the temple. However, the primary purpose of their gathering was to worship God, the One the temple points to.

Essential Doctrines

Preservation of Scripture: God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity through the text of Scripture, having inspired it and directed it to be free from error. God has also acted providentially throughout the course of history to ensure the biblical text is faithfully preserved for future generations. Our belief in the preservation of Scripture is supported by investigation into how the canon of Scripture was formed, and how manuscripts were faithfully transmitted throughout the centuries.

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WOULD STORY
YOUR STORY
God's promise of return was fulfilled under His sovereign direction after 50 years of exile. What does this say about the importance of waiting on the Lord and relying on His timing?
► The people voluntarily gave of their resources for the construction of the temple. How is the giving of our resources an act of worship?
▶ What does this account teach us about worshiping God?
▶ What does this account teach us about outward displays of worship?
YOUR MISSION
Head In this account, it can be easy to overlook the fact that the Israelites worshiped according to the Law of Moses. The Law (the first five books of the Bible) gave God's people clear warnings about worshiping Him in the same way the surrounding nations worshiped their gods. The purpose of this warning was to not only redirect Israel toward distinct and holy living, but also for the simple purpose of demonstrating the better way of the God of Israel. • Why is it important that Christianity not blend in with the surrounding culture?
What are some ways Christians can communicate living a better way to our surrounding culture today?
Heart As these chapters showed, neither experiencing the presence of God nor the opportunity to worship Him are attached to a geographical location. This reality is further emphasized in the New Testament as Christ followers are said to be the very temple of God by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in them (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 4:30). Worship is first and foremost an issue of the heart—an internal joy and satisfaction in who God is and what He has done. Because of that, all of life is worship, offering us moments to take joy in God even in the smallest tasks of our day. • What are the dangers in thinking that worship is something that only takes place during a church service?
▶ If worship is primarily of the heart, how has your worship been lately? Are you currently finding satisfaction and joy in God? If not, why do you think that is the case?
Hands We learn from these chapters that both young and old people lifted praises to God with various expressions and from different stages of life. Not only that, but those praises produced a unified sound that glorified the Lord and could be heard from far away. Thus, far from being an event designed for only one generation, we see all of God's people united in proclaiming the goodness of God to those around them. Such demonstration is a powerful witness to the world. ▶ Have you built relationships with older people in your church? Why or why not?
Why is it important for younger Christians to build relationships with older Christians? What are the dangers of never having older Christians who speak into your life?



THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

Ezra 4:1-7; 5:1-5; 6:13-22

The Point: God is able to transform hearts and minds to accomplish His will.

HIS STORY

The people faced opposition with the rebuilding of the temple

In the previous session, we learned that the exiled Jews were returning in waves to Jerusalem, where they began the process of laying a foundation for a new temple. The Jews had permission to rebuild, but they still faced opposition, and this opposition took on two forms. Let's take a look.

The reason the Jews declined their help was due to the simple reason that even though these neighbors made sacrifices to God, they didn't worship Him alone—they also worshiped the false gods in their pantheon. These returning Jews knew the history of their people all too well—how they would be drawn away from God because they participated in the idolatry of the surrounding nations. Having learned their lesson about falling into idolatry and risking God's judgment and discipline once more, the Jews decided that they alone would build the temple. This was their way of saying that the Lord alone was God and no other "god" would be worshiped with this new temple.

What are some ways you can guard your mind from idol worship? How can you make sure your worship is not influenced by those idols?

God's people listened to God's word

God used two prophets, Haggai and Zachariah, to rebuke and exhort God's people who were in desperate need of encouragement. The prophets' mission was to bring about spiritual renewal and to motivate the people to restore proper worship of the Lord.

The prophetic message was clear: When God and His work are neglected, He removes His blessing and the people and community become spiritually malnourished.

The temple was finally rebuilt

On March 12, 515 B. C., the celebration began—four years after the work was renewed and twenty years after the efforts began (Ezra 3:8). The completion of the temple was nearly 70 years after Solomon's temple fell in 586 B. C., just as Jeremiah prophesied (Jer. 25:12–14; 29:10).

The celebrations that followed the construction were a vital part of living as the people of God—there were occasions of fellowship, worship, and of glorifying God. In essence, these days of celebration helped God's people remember His saving acts from generation to generation.

Essential Doctrines

Inerrancy of Scripture: Inerrancy refers to the belief that the Scripture is completely truthful, without any mixture of error in all its teachings, no matter what subject it addresses. Believing the Scriptures to be inerrant does not preclude the biblical authors' inclusion of observations from a human observer, the use of round numbers, unusual grammatical constructions, or varying perspectives on a particular event. It does mean, however, that Scripture is an infallible guide to salvation and that it is truthful in all that it affirms (Matt. 5:18; John 10:35; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

YOUR STORY STORY	
What kind of opposition or adversity comes against obedient Christians today? What do we learn from the exiles' response to opposition?	
▶ What are the warning signs of someone with spiritual apathy?	
▶ What role does Scripture play in helping us overcome this apathy in our own lives?	
How has this session challenged you when it comes to dealing with opposition to your faith in your own life?	
YOUR MISSION	
Head	
A parallel passage to this account can be found in the Book of Haggai. Haggai admonished the	
people for their neglect of God's house because their attention had shifted away from the things of God to their own personal wellbeing. In essence, Haggai lamented that the people lived in fine	
homes while the temple lay in ruins (Hag. 1:3-6). This happens when spiritual apathy sets in—we	
neglect the things of God in pursuit of the things of this world.	
What are some earthly comforts that can distract you from following God's will?	
How can Christians guard themselves from falling for such distractions?	
Word.	
Heart One of the things we learn from this account is how the Word of God is able to turn people back	
to God in repentance. When apathy set in on account of the opposition, it took a word from God	
through the mouths of the prophets for the people to realign their priorities. They went from being	
concerned only about earthly possessions and securities to doing the will of God, resulting in a renewed sense of purpose and devotion to Him.	
► How has the Word of God reshaped the priorities in your own life?	
Why should Christians turn their attention to Cod's Word when hattling against	
Why should Christians turn their attention to God's Word when battling against spiritual apathy?	
Hands	
In a society where tolerance and openness are seen as absolute values, Christians face the ever-	
present danger of compromising their beliefs. We are pressured to minimize the differences between	
Christianity and other faiths, as if all religious beliefs are basically the same. But this jumbled thinking provides an opportunity for us to do two things simultaneously: We demonstrate our love	
for those who we believe to be in error, and we are passionate in upholding the Word of God.	
▶ Why do you think Christians find it difficult to do these things simultaneously?	
Chara about a time when you showed love by graciously speaking to the interthe life of	
Share about a time when you showed love by graciously speaking truth into the life of someone who was in sin. What was the result?	
	



GOD THE PROVIDER | SESSION 7 ESTHER (PART I) Esther 4

The Point: The Lord is working His plan even when we cannot see Him.

HIS STORY

God's people faced extinction

In our journey through the Bible, we have seen how the Babylonian and Assyrian empires took God's people into exile. As the Persian Empire spread across the world, it became more and more difficult for God's people to maintain their Jewish identity. There were many Jews who questioned or lost their faith during these times. But God had promised to maintain a remnant of His people, and so faithful Jews passed down their heritage and faith to new generations of children.

Esther was one such child. She was an orphan—raised by her cousin Mordecai. In addition to her difficult family situation, Esther belonged to an immigrant family, which means she was part of a religious, racial, and cultural minority. The dominant culture in Persia was so unfriendly to Jews that Mordecai and Esther felt the need to hide their cultural identity. Esther knew what it meant to be an outsider.

When have you felt like an "outsider" because of your faith? How do you respond in these situations?

Mordecai believed in God's sovereign plan for deliverance

Mordecai hoped that Esther would rely on her position to seek protection for their people. Mordecai recognized the role he had in God's plan to preserve His people, and he recognized the role Esther might have as well.

Esther risked her life for the sake of her people

Like Esther, many of us have had tough experiences. But God has a way of taking everything we are—our personalities, our experiences, our gifts and talents, our "baggage," our hopes, our faith—and redeeming it all. Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead so that God could take broken people like us and make us useful for Him. We can know that nothing in our background or our present circumstances is outside of the sovereign power of God. He is always working, even when we can't see Him (Rom. 8:28).

And while we trust God's commitment to keep all of His promises, we still bear a responsibility to participate in His redemptive plan for this world and the people in it. Obedience matters. God *could* execute His purposes without our help, but He won't. He chooses to use us to accomplish His plans (Eph. 2:10).

Essential Doctrines

God's Providence: Providence refers to God's continuing work and involvement in His creation. This includes, in various degrees, God's preservation of the created order, His governance, and His care for His people (Gen. 8:21-22; Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). Christians believe the world, and even the cosmos itself, is contingent upon God, incapable of existing apart from Him. Christians also believe in God's personal and direct intervention in the world—as opposed to a hands-off approach to creation—that affects not only the natural order, but also the individuals and events within human history.

YOUR STORY STORY	
Share about a time in your own life when God seemed distant during a difficult situation. What happened?	
▶ How can we encourage each other to seek the Lord when His hand of providence is hidden from our view?	
What are some aspects of your past that you've seen God use to make you more effective in serving Him?	
▶ What are some examples of people taking risks to follow Christ? When have you had to risk your own welfare in doing what God called you to do?	
YOUR MISSION	
Head In many ways the Book of Esther resembles our lives. We may find it hard to identify with the miraculous "God-encounters" of Abraham or Moses. We haven't seen fire fall from the sky like Elijah. We haven't killed a giant in battle like David. But many of us have felt marginalized and forgotten like Esther. And because of that, her life story shows us that in the midst of the chaotic, difficult, and overwhelming circumstances of life, we are not alone. God is there with power and a plan and a part for us to play. In what ways is Esther's story similar to your own?	
▶ How does her story strengthen your confidence that God is near and cares for you?	
Heart Like Esther, perhaps you too have found yourself overcome with grief or overwhelmed by terrible circumstances. When we cannot see what God is doing, we may begin to question if He is paying attention. But He is there. Instead of dwelling on doubts and questions, we should call out to the great God whom we trust is there, even when He seems to be hidden.	
► Have you ever heard someone say they don't "feel" God's presence? Why is it dangerous to rely solely upon our feelings in answering the question of God's closeness?	
What are some examples in Scripture that you can point to for encouragement when wondering if God is near?	
 Hands Have you ever felt insignificant? Have you ever doubted that God could use you? It's likely that Esther felt that way. But God had orchestrated the events of her life—even the sad, tragic, and terrible moments—so that she would be in a position to make a difference for His sake. The Bible indicates that God is doing the same in all of our lives. God is weaving the events of our lives—even the difficult and painful parts—to prepare us and position us for usefulness in His kingdom. Yet we still have to make real choices that really matter. And our decision to be obedient, faithful, and to seize our defining moments can have ripples and consequences far beyond what we can see or imagine. Who are some other people throughout history whose life circumstances and position made it possible for them to change the world? 	
▶ When have you felt like you were put somewhere "for such a time as this" to do God's will?	



GOD THE PROVIDER | SESSION 8 ESTHER (PART II)

Esther 6:6-11; 7:3-10; 9:1-2

The Point: God calls us to look beyond what we can see and trust in Him for deliverance.

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Haman's plan against Mordecai backfired

Realizing that he had not honored Mordecai for spoiling the plot against his death, the king decided to reward him. He inquired about who, in the court, might be able to give this reward. Of course, it was none other than murderous Haman, who "happened" to enter the court to ask for permission to hang Mordecai. But God was about to thwart his plans and deliver the Jews from his hands. The way these events moved in favor of Esther and Mordecai made God's providence in the situation undeniable.

Haman was sentenced to death

Humiliation and exaltation were reversed between Haman and Mordecai. Next, this account demonstrated the reversal of judgment and salvation, as Esther once again made a bold request of the king.

Esther risked it all, this time to save her people. Esther had to make a choice: to act or not to act. Esther decided to act and respectfully appealed to King Ahasuerus on behalf of Israel, revealing that she was of Jewish descent. Moreover, without naming the perpetrator, she uncovered a treacherous plan to annihilate her people.

Read and consider Proverbs 5:22. How was this truth reflected in Haman's life? How does this Proverb serve as a warning for us when it comes to entertaining personal sins in our own lives?

God's people experienced victory of their enemies

Throughout the Bible, God often allowed terror to fall on the enemies of His people through changing circumstances or power. It is important to remember that God's hand was behind each circumstance, actively protecting and fighting for His people. The Israelites' victory over King Ahasuerus' provinces was ultimately God's victory. The hand of God is infinitely more powerful than the kingdoms of men. In the Book of Esther, God was truly shown to be the King of kings.

Essential Doctrines

Christ's Humiliation: Although God the Son was equal with God and worthy of all the glory God receives, He chose to humble Himself by taking on human flesh. He left His glorious state and came in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), and experienced a humiliating death on a cross (Phil. 2:6-8) by becoming sin for us so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21).

VOLID STORY	
YOUR STORY	
What can we learn from this account when it comes to trusting God in the midst of difficult circumstances?	
How does an eternal perspective help us persevere and trust in God while we are in the middle of tough situations?	
How does Esther's courage and willingness to take risks challenge you in your walk with Christ?	
What does this session teach us about humility and pride, especially as shown within the lives of Esther and Haman?	
YOUR MISSION	
Head	
One of the things we often observe in the Bible, and even in life experience, is that God's work is most clearly seen when circumstances are at their harshest, and when we are most desperate. God calls us to look beyond earthly appearances and strength and to honor and trust Him for final victory. If God has delivered us from sin and death, a terror much greater than Haman, can we not trust Him with the uncertainties and struggles in life? If God has provided an advocate in Jesus Christ, much greater than Esther, can we not trust that He is working all things for good even if we do not see it in the moment? In what ways can we learn to fully rely on God during difficult times?	
▶ How does the promise of future victory help you deal with defeat today?	
Heart	
In the narrative, Haman selfishly thought the king wanted to honor him. He couldn't imagine anyone the king would want to honor more (6:6b). In redemptive history, God often exalted the humble and brought low those in high positions. In the stories of Jacob (Gen. 25:23), Gideon (Gen. 41:39-44), and David (1 Sam. 16:6-13), we see the theme of God lifting up the humble. Haman the high and wicked was brought low, while Esther, the once orphaned Jewish maiden, was elevated to be the queen of the Persian Empire. • Why does God often use the low and humble to do great and mighty things?	
► How does this theme of "humbling those who exalt themselves" play out in other stories in Scripture? Why do you think this theme is so prominent in Scripture?	
Manufa.	
Hands God's providential hand is usually hidden from us. However, if you take the time to reflect on your life, you will see His fingerprints all over your journey. The same God who worked in the lives of Esther and Mordecai is the same God who is providentially at work in your life. ▶ What are some modern day distractions that can prevent you from noticing God's work in your life?	
Like Esther and Mordecai, how will you take risks in your own life for God's glory and the good of others?	



GOD THE PROVIDER | SESSION 9 THE PRAYERS OF NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah 1:1-11; 2:1-8

The Point: Prayer demonstrates that we are completely dependent upon God.

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Nehemiah prayed for his people

Nehemiah's story began with Nehemiah's prayer on behalf of his people, the Israelites. Nehemiah, whose name means *God has comforted*, was introduced as the intercessor who represented God's people before Him.

The desperate but trusting posture of prayer exemplified by Nehemiah in response to this situation is instructive. When Nehemiah saw the plight of his people, he wept and mourned, fasting and praying to the sovereign God of heaven.

▶ What can you learn from Nehemiah's response to the news from the remnant in Jerusalem?

Nehemiah prayed to the God who forgives and redeems

The specificity of Nehemiah's prayer indicated that He intimately knew the God of heaven, Yahweh. This was a prayer to the one true God, the God of Israel.

► Take a look at the prayer of Nehemiah. What attributes of God did He appeal to? What characteristics did he use to describe the people?

Notice that when Nehemiah called out to the God of Israel, he also confessed Israel's sin and recalled their commitment to obedience from the time of Moses. Nehemiah confessed that he and the entire people of God had become corrupt and had failed to keep the commands given to Moses (1:6-7). Moreover, he recognized that their sin had resulted in their current situation (1:8). Their disobedience had led to their exile in Babylon.

Nehemiah prayed while he took action

Nehemiah requested that the king send him home, to the city where his ancestors were buried, so that he could rebuild it. He also asked the king for authoritative letters to show to the governor who had previously convinced Artaxerxes to stop the rebuilding of that very city (Ezra 4:7-9). Even more, Nehemiah requested lumber from the king's forests to fund the project.

Essential Doctrines

Prayer and Providence: If God is in control and already knows the future, why pray? The Bible teaches that, although God has a plan for this world that He promises to fulfill, prayer is often the means God uses to accomplish His divine purpose. Even though God may know the end result, the means that lead to that end result will be accomplished through prayer. In this sense, it is true that "prayer changes things," and it is also true that God uses prayer to change our hearts so that our will comes into conformity with His.

Leader Note: Because some content
from the Personal Study Guide will not be
available on the One Sheet, make sure to
adapt the session based on how you use
the material with your group.

YOUR STORY	
When was the last time you prayed because you felt heavily burdened for a specific person or situation?	
When you are struck with fear, anxiety, or insecurity, what is your first response? What or who do you typically reach for? How is Nehemiah's example instructive for us?	
When Nehemiah talked to the king, he also prayed internally that God would work in the situation. What does this teach us about prayer and how it doesn't always need to be audible with eyes closed and heads bowed?	
▶ How does our understanding of Christ carrying our burden of sin to the cross motivate us to cry out to Him with the burdens we encounter in this life?	
YOUR MISSION	
Head Have you ever wondered why Jesus told the disciples to pray for their needs (Matt. 6:11-13), after He told them that God knew all their needs before they even asked (Matt. 6:7-8)? Sounds strange unless you understand that in prayer, God enlists us as participants in the work He is doing. Prayer is the means to accomplish God's will. Through prayer we become instruments to bring about God's will and appointed goals. How does it encourage you to know that God knows your needs even before you ask?	
How does in encourage you to know that God works through your prayers to answer them?	
Heart We learn from this account that the best way to respond to God's steadfast love is by keeping His commandments (Deut. 7:9; Neh. 1:5). Like Israel, we are called to obey in loving and worshipful response to God's love, shown through our salvation in Christ. Of course, it is extremely important to know that true obedience is a response to God's love, not a requirement for God's love. We love Him because He loved us first (1 John 4:19). ▶ Why is it important to emphasize that obedience is the response to God's love and not a requirement for it?	
What does it say about us if we know God's loving forgiveness but don't seek to follow Him in obedience?	
Hands Nehemiah's prayer life is an example to us in our own lives. Nehemiah realized that even though God was sovereign and in control, orchestrating events for His glory and the good of His people, he was still called to pray and ask God to move in the situation. As Trevin Wax says, "Prayer is motivated by present need (daily bread) in light of future hope (kingdom come)." In other words, our assurance in Christ and His future return is what fuels our confidence into today's prayers. How can the past actions and future promises of God provide us with confidence in prayer for our current circumstances?	
How consistent is your prayer life? What have you learned from Nehemiah's account that might encourage you to be more disciplined in this area?	



GOD THE PROVIDER | SESSION 10 THE REBUILDING OF THE WALL

Nehemiah 4:7-14; 5:1-13; 6:15-16

The Point: God calls us to do the right thing in the right way.

HIS STORY

Nehemiah called the people to act wisely

God's people were confronted with additional difficulties. First, God's people were despised by Sanballat and his associates—the men who were set on stopping God's people from building the wall.

Second, the foundations of the wall were in ruins. God's enemies mocked the Israelites, pointing out that the wall's foundations were rubbish, and a mere fox could knock down their feeble work. By all human standards, the possibility of achieving their goal did not look good.

What are the "wise" aspects you see in Nehemiah's response to the opposition he faced? What would have been an unwise response??

The people overcame obstacles and Gave God glory for the success

Even after the Israelites resumed building and were encouraged by Nehemiah, they still faced opposition. The enemies of God were not only angry that Nehemiah had come, but they were also angry about the wall being rebuilt. The rebuilding of the wall was part of the plan to create a community environment for the protection of God's people, but also an environment where God's laws could be enforced and where His justice could be upheld.

While God's people focused on the work of the wall, they had apparently neglected their fields. In light of this neglect, they hired others to work their fields in exchange for grain. Moreover, while there was famine because of the neglect, the king did not suspend the taxes they owed. Because of this situation, God's people were selling their children into debt-slavery. During this time, God's people also neglected the poor and compromised their ability to provide for themselves.

Essential Doctrines

Social Concern: All Christians are under obligation to seek to make the will of Christ supreme in our own lives and in human society. Means and methods used for the improvement of society and the establishment of righteousness among men can be truly and permanently helpful only when they are rooted in the regeneration of the individual by the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. In the spirit of Christ, Christians should oppose racism, every form of greed, selfishness, and vice, and all forms of sexual immorality, including adultery, homosexuality, and pornography. We should work to provide for the orphaned, the needy, the abused, the aged, the helpless, and the sick. We should speak on behalf of the unborn and contend for the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death. Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love. In order to promote these ends Christians should be ready to work with all men of good will in any good cause, always being careful to act in the spirit of love without compromising their loyalty to Christ and His truth. (Micah 6:8; Eph. 6:5-9; 1 Thess. 3:12).

Leader Note: Because some content
from the Personal Study Guide will not be
available on the One Sheet, make sure to
adapt the session based on how you use
the material with your group.

VOLID STORY	
YOUR STORY	
► Fear is a strong force that often keeps us from fulfilling God's will for our lives. What are some specific ways that we, the people of God, can fight fear with faith?	
Why is it important that we keep a close watch on our own lives as we seek to be obedient to the will and commands of God?	
▶ When we are confronted with our own shortfalls and sins, there are two responses: to repent and turn, or to react with resistance. How does the gospel empower us toward the first response?	
▶ When have you seen God do something so amazing that you realized "only God could have done this?"	
YOUR MISSION	
Head	
We, like the Israelites in this passage, can never fully live up to God's law. Even though the Israelites were fully focused on accomplishing God's will in building the wall, they compromised	
in other areas. As they compromised in other areas, the entire work of building the wall was compromised. The good news is, when Nehemiah confronted their sin, they repented and sought to	
make right their wrongs (5:12-13). Just as the Israelites repented after Nehemiah's convicting call, we should also repent when confronted with compromise in our own lives.	
▶ What are some areas of compromise in your own life where repentance is needed?	
▶ What are some ways to identify any blind spots of sin that you may not be aware of?	
Heart	
Throughout this story Nehemiah reminded the people that God was with them. Nehemiah also declared that God would not only give them the ability to accomplish this task, but that He	
would also make them prosper. Moreover, Nehemiah knew that God would not only frustrate their enemies, He would also fight for His people. All of these truths climax in the triumphant	
 declaration, even by their enemies, that God had accomplished this work. In light of His promises to the Israelites despite their compromises, what does this story teach you about God's character? 	
▶ Why should this strengthen your own belief in God's promises to you found in Scripture?	
Hands	
This story challenges believers to attempt great things for God while at the same time expecting	
great things from God. Keeping these two notions together is important in light of the fact that great things done for the sake of the Kingdom won't come about while Christians are sitting	
comfortably on the sidelines, unwilling to participate. No, God calls us to act, serve, and take risks, all while acknowledging our complete and utter dependence upon Him to accomplish	
His purposes.	
How does this story challenge the perception that Christianity is merely a set of beliefs to be held and not a life to be lived?	
▶ Why is it important to give God glory for the success we experience?	



GOD THE PROVIDER | SESSION 11 GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER

Nehemiah 8:1-12

The Point: Biblical community must be centered on God's Word.

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God's People are centered on the Word

Throughout Israel's history, idolatry was at the root of their rebellion against God. Because of their sin, God's people spent over 70 years in exile. Once they moved back to Jerusalem, they were able to gather publicly and worship the Lord by listening to His Word. The event was timely. The Law required the nation to gather to hear the Word of God read every seven years (Deut. 31:9-13).

▶ How can you tell if a church is centered on the proclamation of God's Word or centered on something else? Why is gathering to hear God's Word so important for believers?

God's people revere the word together

We live in a culture where it's sometimes hard to hold a person's attention. It seems our attention spans are getting shorter and shorter. We quickly turn to electronic devices whenever we face a moment of boredom. Consider the contrast with the people of Israel and how they listened to God's Word on this day.

God's people respond in repentance and accountability

The privilege of a heart that knows God

Here we see Ezra reading the Scriptures. Some people may not have understood the language the Scriptures were written in because they had grown up in a foreign land, in exile where Hebrew was not spoken, read, or written. In response, the Levites walked among the people and took time to explain the Scriptures to them in the language they were able to understand. Once the people understood God's Word they began to weep—they were broken by their heritage of disobedience.

God provided His people with an opportunity to demonstrate their repentance. They were to celebrate the Feast of the Trumpets. This seems to be God's pattern for His people: God speaks, His people listen with open ears and hearts, He corrects them, the people are broken by their sin, and God comforts them with His Word and shows them how to live righteously.

Essential Doctrines

Inspiration of Scripture: The inspiration of Scripture refers to God's direction of the human authors of the Bible so that they composed and recorded His message to humankind in their original writings (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). Occasionally, this inspiration was achieved through dictation, where God directly spoke to the original authors. Most of the time, however, this inspiration was achieved through the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit through the personalities of the authors so that their writings can be considered the very words of God.

YOUR STORY
What things may be filling up your heart and life and preventing you from having a fresh hunger and thirst for God's Word?
▶ What are some ways we can hold each other accountable as we seek to obey God's Word?
▶ What benefits follow from reading and studying God's Word?
How has this session encouraged or challenged you when it comes to your own personal study time in God's Word?
YOUR MISSION
Head
It is interesting to note that the people of Israel stood there and listened to the reading of Scripture for over six hours. No cell phones, no social media, and no electronic devices to fiddle with when they got bored. They were not able to have a public reading of Scripture for decades, but through Ezra's reading, God's voice spoke again. Why were they so hungry to hear God's Word? Because they knew they were hearing the actual words of God. • Why do we so often fail to crave God's Word as we should?
▶ What are some ways we can increase our desire to read and listen to God's Word?
Heart We experience revival when we focus on hearing from God through His Word as it is read and explained to us. Revival happens in community, never in isolation. It also happens when God's people repent and hold each other accountable. When we discipline ourselves to gather together to hear God's Word, we can expect the Word to impact the way we think and view the world around us. We will develop a deeper burden to know God more intimately. We will grow in our desire to share the gospel with those who don't know God and are not pursuing Him. ▶ Why do you think God chose His Word to be the main source for bringing revival? ▶ What area(s) mentioned above do you need to re-prioritize in the coming weeks—God's Word, experiencing community with other believers, repentance, and accountability? Hands The leaders of the nation of Israel influenced the people by leading them in the reading of Scripture offering explanation to those who did not understand the language (Neh. 8:4-6). The people observed the nation's leaders as God's Word was being read. Ezra praised God, and the people followed his example. The leaders in this scene were shaping culture by humbly listening to God's Word with people they were leading.
Word with people they were leading. When has someone helped you understand something in Scripture that was difficult to understand?
▶ When have you helped someone else understand something in Scripture?



GOD THE PROVIDER | SESSION 12

THE WARNING AGAINST SHALLOW WORSHIP

Malachi 1:6-14; 3:7-12; 4:1-6

HIS STORY

The people committed shallow worship

Notice that God gave two indictments against His people at the beginning: they showed Him no honor, and they showed Him no fear. Not only did they *not* honor and fear Him, but they *despised* His name.

Despising means having an attitude of ongoing disrespect for someone or something; it refers to the act of conveying insignificance or worthlessness upon an object, idea, or individual. The text shows us that the people did this to God by offering crippled, lame, or blinded animals to the Lord rather than the perfect, blameless sacrifice He requested. He even asked them, "Do you think that if you gave even the governor what you're giving me that he'd be okay with it?"

- ▶ In what ways do people "despise" God's name today?
- ▶ How can you guard against this in your own life?

Their shallow worship minimized God's worth

In the first half of the Book of Malachi, God questioned the quality of the sacrifices of the people. Then, He questioned the quantity of their sacrifices.

Essentially, God told the Israelites that, despite their believing otherwise, they were far from Him. God had challenged the Israelites previously for their poor sacrifices, their lack of worship, their idolatry, and their faithlessness. The root of the problem is the heart. They had misappropriated their funds. In other words, they failed to deal responsibly with what God had given them. Giving is an indication of the state of our hearts, and measures how much we value God.

Shallow worship deserves judgment

The text speaks of a future light in the midst of Israel's darkness. Israel expected unending blessings because of their position as God's chosen people. However, God first informed them that He would come to set all wrongs right—beginning the process with their lukewarm worship.

The final two verses of Malachi offer the ultimate cliffhanger to the Old Testament. He ends with a promise of someone to come and a warning about things already done. "Look," Malachi wrote, "I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before Day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse."

Essential Doctrines

Worship: While many reduce worship to an event or the singing of worship songs, worship is first and foremost something of the heart and extends to all areas of life. The aim and focus of worship is God, giving Him the exact due of praise and adoration that He deserves. Worship should be carried out not only at a personal level within a Christian's life, but also in joining with other Christians in the corporate act of worship and stewarding our gifts for the glory of God. Corporate worship not only serves to edify and strengthen other Christians, but it also serves as a witness to non-believers of the greatness of God.

The Point: Worship involves giving God our very best.

YOUR STORY	
➤ Sometimes people assume they are in a right relationship with God, but they are not.	
What are some ways we can guard against having such a false notion?	
▶ What are some areas of life where students struggle to give God their best?	
How does this passage relate to Jesus' words about our hearts being where our treasure is?	
After having gone through the Old Testament up to this point, what have been some highlights for you? What individuals and/or accounts have challenged you most in your walk with Christ?	
YOUR MISSION	
Head We learned from Malachi 3:6-12 about our actions and God's reactions. First, the Book of Malachi teaches that if we obey the mandates of God in humble and faithful service, we can expect God to act. This does not mean He rewards us immediately or even financially; however, when we trust God with what we have, we experience His blessing. How should Christians understand the promise that God will bless Israel if they obey?	
► What are some ways this idea could be misunderstood and misapplied?	
Heart God calls us to give the very best of everything we have out of love for Him. In fact, Scripture teaches that followers of Christ should be in the habit of offering up these five things in particular: Our bodies (Rom. 12:1-2), our finances (Phil. 4:14-18), our praise (Heb. 13:15), our works (Heb. 13:16), and our witness (Rom. 15:16). In light of God"s greatness and everything He freely offers to us through His Son, we should be willing to joyfully submit all things to Him in response. In what ways does our worship of God through these five offerings display God's greatness?	
What do we communicate about our view of God and His grace toward us when we fail to give Him our very best?	
 Hands We learn from these texts that God has blessed us to be a blessing to others. We are to give the Lord our time, talents, and treasures for both His glory and the good of others. As Jim Elliot said, "A man is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." What are some ways you are intentionally seeking to be a blessing to others with your time, talents, and treasures? 	
► How might your blessing others in this way point them to Christ?	