

A *Discover Together*
BIBLE STUDY

by Sue Edwards

Daniel

*Discovering the Courage to
Stand for Your Faith*



LEADER'S GUIDE

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Publications

Daniel: Discovering the Courage to Stand for Your Faith
Leader's Guide
©20143 Sue Edwards

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Before You Begin . . .

Most Christians laud Daniel as one of the most beloved and respected heroes of the faith. We have studied his memoirs for centuries to learn how to obey God in difficult circumstances. Stories of Daniel in the lions' den, Daniel interpreting the writing on the wall, and Daniel's friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace are staples in most children's curriculum. Also, God revealed foundational prophecies to Daniel that help us understand his sovereign redemptive plan for the world.

Today we can add another important reason to study the book of Daniel. He thrived in a hostile environment, in exile, where we find ourselves today. We have not been exiled to another country but we live in a post-Christian nation that feels like exile to many of us. Our world has changed and now many of the practices and principles we hold sacred are no longer honored. In light of those changes, how do we find the courage to stand for our faith like Daniel? He lived among the pagans with exemplary integrity. After exposure to Daniel, many pagans saw Daniel's God differently, some even reverencing the God of Israel. Daniel worked for the common good of the pagan rulers and nations he served, living out Jeremiah's instructions in 29:7, "Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." God is calling us to learn how to honor him in a pagan land and to seek the common good of that place. You have chosen a study that could not be more relevant!

Women in your world need to learn these new attitudes and skills. If you invite other women to join you, familiarize yourself with this Leader's Guide. Then, as you work your way through the study, read the week-by-week leader's guide. I have included discussion topics particular to that lesson, trouble-shooting tips, activity ideas, and other pertinent information and counsel to aid in a productive group experience.

If you are new at leading a small group, be sure to digest the Training Guide for Small-Group Leaders—which you can find online at <http://www.discovertogether-series.com>—before your first gathering. Even if you have led groups before, consider reviewing the instructions and tips in the Training Guide. Skilled leaders enhance the likelihood that a group will bond and thrive, but a poor leader usually stifles healthy interaction. If you encounter particular challenges in your group, refer back to the Training Guide for help, or send me a Facebook message at [Facebook.com/DiscoverTogetherSeries](https://www.facebook.com/DiscoverTogetherSeries).



A SERIOUS STUDY

Every book of the Bible has an ethos, an atmosphere or tone. Daniel's memoirs reflect a serious tone. The book is composed of the selected memoirs of a godly man who prospered in difficult situations because of a strong faith and consistent walk with God. His writings have been preserved so we can learn from him and emulate his practices. The study should foster deep discussions that develop true disciples ready for the real world. Learning how to live in a post-Christian world challenges women today but gaining needed insights and practicing new skills should result in more productive lives and a more vibrant witness for Christ. If some of the participants struggle with the serious nature of the study, remind them that the ultimate goal of the book is to enable them to thrive in trials, finding joy, peace, and a way to make Jesus look good whatever occurs. When a woman knows what to do in the midst of struggles, her heart can rest in both good times and bad. God has prepared her for anything. And that's a great feeling!

A SAFE PLACE

Creating a group atmosphere that feels open and protected will be especially important as you discuss these serious issues. We need a place where we can be brutally honest about our doubts and fears. We need a place where no questions are off limits. Your role as a leader is to create a safe place to process and share. Safe places destroy roadblocks to faith and bring down strongholds, resulting in spiritual, emotional, and mental health. As you guide the group with skill and a caring heart, women may actually change the way they think, feel, and act when faced with troubling circumstances. What a privilege!

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Each lesson walks you verse by verse through Daniel's memoirs. Observation, interpretation, application, correlation, opinion, and share questions flow, guiding you through the text to help you grasp God's intended meaning and apply it to life today. This methodical approach is based on sound interpretive principles designed to reduce error and speculation. However, occasionally women will be asked to place themselves into the setting or the shoes of participants, but this exercise, although somewhat speculative, helps the passage come alive in the mind's eye of contemporary readers. Opinion and share questions aid in application to current and personal issues.

The goal isn't just head knowledge—it's life change. Authentic growth includes fresh thinking that leads to new attitudes and convictions, followed by changed behavior. The lessons are designed to transform the student, from head to heart to

hand. Although each lesson is grounded in the book of Daniel, occasionally you will study other related passages.

I will provide short commentaries on unclear or perplexing passages. My goal in this Leader’s Guide is not to overwhelm you with massive amounts of information but instead to give you concise answers that will help you guide your group through any “rough spots.” It also provides additional quality resources for further study on your own.

DISCOVERY LEARNING

What distinguishes *The Discover Together Series* from many other Bible studies? Too many Bible studies are full of author’s commentary, their own conclusions and discoveries written down to encourage others. And that’s good. But for women to grow stronger in their faith, to put down deep roots, they need to wrestle with these issues for themselves. They need to process what *they* believe Scripture says to them personally and how *they* need to apply it to particular situations in their own lives. Discovery learning leads to women owning our own faith, which is mandatory when personal storms descend. But unless we have deep roots into biblical truths that we have grown over time, we are easily uprooted. When we think deeply about how the Bible applies to our own lives, and particularly when we talk about these issues with others, we are far more likely to develop an enduring faith that can withstand the trials and tribulations that we all face from time to time.

Help women understand the value of getting into God’s Word for themselves as well as discussing their discoveries with others. These endeavors reap rich spiritual rewards—the benefit of women discovering God’s Word for themselves.

It’s easier to read someone else’s discoveries. It’s not messy or nearly as time-consuming. But if we want to help women grow up in Christ, we must be willing to wade into the mess and deal with the confusion. Otherwise we produce women research calls “received knowers.” These women rely too heavily on experts but never truly develop their own faith systems that inform them and carry them through when they need personal answers and help. You have chosen a Bible study designed to challenge women to discover God’s truths for themselves—and you will be a vital part of the process as you lead women well. Determine to stick with women for the long haul and remember that God uses His Word and discovery learning to change lives for eternity.

WILL YOU END WITH A WRAP-UP MESSAGE?

Leading small groups and teaching the Bible are two different skills. When you wear your small-group leader’s hat, you do not lecture! But you may want to end your time

by putting on a teacher’s hat. Participants often enjoy hearing a message to crystallize biblical truth after they have spent time studying on their own and learning from one another.

Your wrap-up might be a ten-minute informal presentation, allowing for interaction and questions, or a forty-five minute formal lecture, more like a pastor’s message on Sunday. If your study consists of several small groups, you may prefer a formal lecture. If you’re meeting in a home, your group may prefer a more interactive format. Use what works for you and your group. Resources to sharpen your teaching skills are listed on page 7. If you believe that God may want you to teach the Bible, step out and try.

Women love to hear their own leaders teach them rather than hear virtual teachers on DVD. At first, your skills may not be as honed as more experienced teachers, but in time and with practice you should improve. And you have advantages over a virtual teacher. Women need models they can watch, hug, and talk to. And when one of their own steps out and is used by God, it inspires everyone to step forward and use their gifts, too. So, if something in you says, “teach!”—then go for it!

INTRODUCTORY IDEAS

If you plan to include lecture in your format, you may want to begin with introductory comments about Daniel, his time in history, and what the Babylonian and Assyrian exile meant in the lives of the Jewish people. What do the women in your group know about Daniel and his friends who were deported from their homeland? Or do they need insight into Babylonian and Assyrian history and culture at that time? Do they need to get to know you as their teacher or have an opportunity to learn more about each other? Do they need time to interact, building trust and comfort in the group? Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you as you consider how to prepare your group for the study.

ENLIST WOMEN TO TEACH WITH YOU

Other women have something to say that would benefit the group. Listen attentively when they tell how God works in their lives. Identify women who inspire others. Who holds a high view of the Bible and has spent time studying? Who walks close to God? Who lives wisely? Who is articulate? Passionate? Growing? Mature? Organized in their thinking?

If you add a teaching element to your Bible study format, consider asking one of these women to share a short testimony or deliver the message for the entire group that week. She will need a cooperative attitude. When you give a woman the platform

you give her influence. I’ve worked with a few women who took advantage of this opportunity. They spoke twice as long as time allotted. Or they refused to prepare, wandering aimlessly. Or they became so emotional that they broke down, upsetting women in the study.

To alleviate these problems, set a time limit and ask women to write out what they will say. Insist they review their message with you. Stress that if they’re a “time hog,” group time will be shorter, irritating group participants. Use wisdom as you select women presenters, but consider how much women will benefit by hearing a variety of voices.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU TEACH WITH ACCURACY AND SKILL

- Hendricks, Howard G. *Teaching to Change Lives*, Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987.
- Mathews, Alice P. *Preaching That Speaks to Women*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003.
- Robinson, Haddon. *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*. 2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. (See also Christiancourses.com for an online course.)
- Roose, Jackie. *She Can Teach: Empowering Women to Teach the Scriptures Effectively*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013.
- Stanley, Andy. *Communicating for a Change*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2006.

RESOURCES TO HELP YOU STUDY THE BOOK OF DANIEL

- Baldwin, Joyce G. *Daniel*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1978, reprinted 2009.
- Gangel, Kenneth O., General Editor Max Anders. *Daniel*. Holman Old Testament Commentary. Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2001.
- Longman, Tremper, III. *Daniel, The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999.
- Miller, Stephen R. *Daniel, Vol. 18, The New American Commentary, New International Version*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1994.

LESSON 1

How to Thrive When You Find Yourself in Exile

GET ACQUAINTED

Open with prayer. Should you pray or invite one of the participants to do so? Be sensitive to the women. If they're comfortable praying out loud, give them opportunity. If not, you, as the leader, pray. Then spend some time getting to know one another. You might, for example, ask each woman to introduce herself by telling something about family, hobbies, what she likes to do on a Saturday night, a pet peeve, or what she hopes to gain from the study. If time allows, spend your first meeting connecting with questions or ice breaker games.

For an extended community builder, locate a set of Lego building blocks, or a similar children's building set, dump the blocks out on a flat surface, and ask the women to collaborate on building a strong structure. Encourage creativity and fun. Once the structure has taken form, explain that this study of Daniel is designed to help us strengthen our faith in a post-Christian culture. To live well in a hostile environment will require wisdom, courage, perseverance, and love for people who don't share our values or faith. Learning these skills, our goal as we study the book of Daniel together, will require prayer and intentionality.

You might also gather stories of courageous Christian women who faced trials and triumphed through their faith in God—women like Corrie Ten Boom, Amy Carmichael, Mother Theresa, Elizabeth Elliott, Joni Eareckson Tada, Henrietta Mears, or Evangeline Booth. If women in your midst have overcome significant obstacles, you might give them some time to tell their own stories. Again, stories of women in your midst are just as powerful, and sometimes more so, than stories of women no one knows personally. You might even relate one of these stories each week as the women learn how to overcome challenges in their own lives. Remind them that they will need one another, as well as God, to succeed. You may want to pray for one another as you close.

GET FOCUSED

Look over the study guide with your group and express your excitement about the topic. Create and discuss ground rules. If women join later, remember to orient them. Stress the importance of confidentiality.



Some women come to Bible study for the sole purpose of studying Scripture. Others come for community, to find friends. Regardless of your own bent, honor both desires. We all need a relationship with God through serious Bible study *and* we all need relationships through connecting in authentic community. Be sure the schedule reflects time for both.

DISCUSS LESSON 1: HOW TO THRIVE WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF IN EXILE

Did you ask the women to come prepared to discuss the first lesson? If so, dive in. Paraphrase parts of the introductory section and ask the first question. This is an observation question and I suggest that you don't spend too much time on these kinds of questions. Spend more time on the share and opinion questions, but don't skip observation (What does the text say?) and interpretation questions (What does the text mean?). If you do, you will interrupt the flow of the discussion, as many questions are based on subsequent questions. If you don't want to spend time discussing the observation question, you may summarize the answer yourself and then move on to other kinds of questions.

If you run out of time, cut questions that do not hinder the logical flow of the lesson. If you don't have enough time to cover all the questions well, you may simply want to discuss one part of the lesson thoroughly and not address every section. Make the questions work for you and your group.

Point out that notes pepper the lesson, to help with difficult passages and to give helpful background. Tell them to look for the quotes in the margins and not to miss the digging deeper questions if they are up for more challenge. These added elements should bring the truths of the lesson to life and you may even want to discuss them.

LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 1 sets the historical backdrop for Daniel's memoirs. If your group time is short, you, as the leader, could summarize the answers to questions 1–6, setting the scene for the situation and action that follow. Then spend your time on Daniel's dilemma as well as applying the lessons you learn from this situation to your lives today. However, if you are not rushed and your group loves history, then spend more time on the first 6 questions before moving to Daniel's situation and application. But be sure to leave time for the questions that link to our lives today, especially questions 16 to 25. Application is key to changed lives.

Pay particular attention to ways Daniel interacts with pagan authority figures. Over and over in this book, Daniel models wise strategies in tense situations with

pagans who have power over us. Focus on the questions that cause women to think through what they would do when faced with similar situations. Help them find ways to influence pagans without compromising their faith.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 5 asks, “What price would Babylon pay for her cruelty and enslavement of Israel?” and the women are asked to consider Jeremiah 25:12 and 13. In these verses, God pronounces judgment on Babylon for their harsh treatment of the Jews, even though God uses Babylon to discipline the Jews. We see this pattern a number of times in the Old Testament. Students may struggle to understand a God who would judge pagans that he uses for his divine purposes. Some women are so accustomed to seeing God only as a loving God that they chafe at the reality that God is also a holy God who judges disobedience and evil. Help women understand that a God who is not righteous and holy is not a God worth worshipping.

In addition, as Creator, God has the right to judge those who disobey him and rebel against the provisions that he makes for sin. For us today, God sent his Son Jesus to satisfy his righteous demands but people must come to God on his terms and accept the free gift of the grace that covers sin. For those who lived during Daniel’s days, God made provisions for sin when people believed God’s promises and entered into a relationship with him on that basis. The sacrificial system set up in the Temple pictured the provisions for sin that God would bring later—a provision that was retro-active for Old Testament believers. If women struggle understanding God’s judgment in the Old Testament, teach them these truths in a follow-up teaching time.

Question 9 asks why Daniel and his young friends balked at eating Babylonian food. If the group does not come up with answers, guide them to the sidebar next to the question for insight. In verse 12, Daniel requests that he and his friends be given only vegetables and water to eat and drink. Some women in the group who follow personal eating restrictions may want to use this verse to insinuate that everyone should eat this way. However, other passages in Scripture do not support this idea. Steer the women away from a discussion on this topic by saying something like, “Let’s not get into divisive personal eating restrictions in our discussion. Other passages give different perspectives, but this kind of discussion will sidetrack us from the main lesson we want to learn from this chapter.” If women want examples of these passages, you can point them to Genesis 9:2–3 where God added to what Noah was allowed to eat and Acts 10 where Peter is instructed to eat a variety of foods that were not kosher. Also, 1 Corinthians 8:8 says, “But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.” The entire chapter sheds light on legalistic issues related to eating and may help women understand that God gives

freedom related to these issues. Do your best as a leader to steer the discussion away from this divisive topic.

Question 14 asks women to observe what Daniel did in this compromising situation. If they struggle to find clear answers, direct them to the video on page 17. I address this question clearly and talk about several practical applications that we can learn when we find ourselves in similar situations. You may want to play the video for the group and discuss it.

Question 21 asks why Daniel might have chosen this incident to kick off his memoir. Women may come up with a variety of ideas but one to consider is this: authors sometimes chose a small incident early in their writings to illustrate major themes that they develop throughout the book. Daniel may have chosen this incident to set the tone for what would happen throughout his memoirs. He faced a variety of similar challenging circumstances. He found himself in increasingly dangerous and difficult situations where ruling pagans or peers attempted to cause him to abandon his faith. Yet, over and over, as he clung to his faith, God rescued him, often miraculously. The situation in chapter 1 sets the stage for a series of similar life-threatening episodes that again and again show us that God is faithful to his own.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

The memory verse for this lesson, 1 Peter 2:23, *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly*, applies to lesson 1 and many of the other lessons ahead. Consider making an attractive bookmark containing this verse for women to keep as a reminder of the what Jesus taught and acted when pagans sought to harm him. Many of the lessons will focus on the necessity of planting our roots deep into our relationship with God in order to withstand the dangers of living under pagan authority and influence. The bookmark might serve to tie the lessons together as the women move forward in their study.

LESSON 2

Lay Down in God's Hands

LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 2 comprises an important account as well as our first taste of prophetic visions. Daniel has chosen to tell us how God spared his life and the lives of his friends when the king demanded, on penalty of death, that his dream be described and interpreted. God revealed the dream and its meaning to Daniel just in time to save himself and others from execution. Out of gratitude, Daniel prays a beautiful prayer, expressing his faith in God's sovereignty. Through the king's dream, we learn which Gentile nations reigned in the ancient world and we are given a peek into the future. Fifty years later, God gives Daniel a dream that adds to the king's dream by revealing character qualities of national leaders and more insight into the final Gentile leader of the world who will come against God's people.

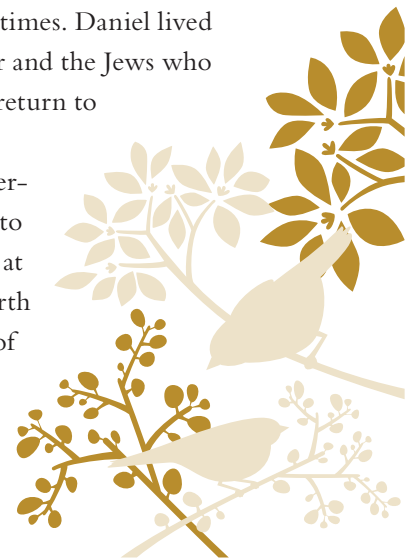
The lesson covers two chapters, but it's important to study the king and Daniel's dreams together since they reveal important aspects of the same prophetic foundation that we will need to understand other biblical prophecies later, both in the book of Daniel and other books of the Bible.

Encourage your students to persevere through the two chapters because of the rich rewards and insights that await. Help them understand that these dreams provide a needed foundation for anyone who wants to understand what God has revealed about his sovereign plan for the world.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 5 relates to Daniel's conversation with the commander of the king's guard and later Daniel's conversation with the king himself. Women have asked me if Daniel risked death like Queen Esther did when she entered the Persian king's presence unannounced. I don't think so. First we are dealing with different times. Daniel lived during the exile while Esther lived after the exile. Actually, Esther and the Jews who lived in Persia after the exile were disobedient Jews who failed to return to their homeland after they were free to do so.

We possess limited knowledge of court etiquette in these different ancient kingdoms. We might surmise that Daniel's freedom to address the king without fear shows us his status in the royal court at this time. He and his friends were included when orders went forth from the king to execute all his "wise men" (2:13). Possibly one of



the perks of this position was freer access to the king. For whatever reason, we see that Daniel could enter the king’s presence without fear and this access saved the lives of not only Daniel and his friends but all the king’s magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers. Daniel’s concern for these pagans in 2:18 illustrates that we should be concerned for the welfare of all people, even people with whom we disagree.

Question 21 asks “What happened to the ten horns of the last beast?” and “From the description of the ‘little horn’, what can you learn about him?” These two questions delve into a great mystery and we can only speculate as we attempt to discern what God is telling us.

Horns usually picture strength and these ten horns probably represent 10 rulers, like the 10 toes of the statue. They seem to be ruling at the same time. Since we don’t see any historical parallel to 10 outstanding rulers in the locale of the Roman Empire, many speculate that this refers to 10 future rulers in the locale of the ancient Roman Empire.

Scholars differ as to the identity of the 10 rulers. Some insist this is figurative language and don’t correspond to real rulers at all. Others believe the 10 are real future rulers who will be ruling when Jesus comes back at his second coming. They take these numbers literally just like they take other numbers in Daniel literally. If one takes the numbers literally, then it follows that God will revive or reestablish something like the Roman Empire in the future.

In 7:8, Daniel describes an 11th horn rising among the 10, then displacing 3 of them. He describes this horn with humanlike features: eyes and a boasting mouth. Many scholars believe the 11th horn represents the Antichrist.

For more information, consult my friend and colleague Dr. Tom Constable’s excellent notes on Daniel at www.soniclight.com. You will find up-to-date notes on all books of the Bible at this site, notes you can trust that are clear and easy to understand.

Some women in this study may struggle with the mysterious nature of prophecy. They want to nail down every truth and expect exact answers to every question. Help them understand that God does not always give us exact answers. He does reveal all that we need to know to live well now, but he doesn’t owe us precise answers that unlock his future plans for the world.

In addition, prophecy is not revealed all in one place in the Bible. Answers are progressive throughout the pages of the Bible, and even then we observe gaps and mysteries that cause endless debate. Help women be content with the revelations that God gives us. Help them see that God expects them to trust him for the rest. After all, if everything was revealed now, we wouldn’t need faith. In this lesson, we can walk away with a framework of God’s plan. He orchestrates his will on the earth through

Gentile nations and human Gentile rulers. However, one day God will establish his own kingdom, taking over the rule of the earth through his Son, Jesus Christ. Our role is to be faithful and represent him well as we live under the rule of these pagan Gentile rulers, waiting for Jesus' return, knowing that he's sovereign even when we cannot understand all that he is doing.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

Identify artists within your community and ask them to portray any of the prophetic images you learn about in chapters 2 and/or 7. You might even ask several artists who use various mediums—painting, drawing, or sculpture, for example—to create what they see.

LESSON 3

A Walk in the Fire

LESSON CONTENT

In chapter 3, Daniel reports on an account where he was not present. We don't know why for sure. Maybe since he was chief advisor to the king, he was required to stay back at the palace to make sure everything remained copasetic. Maybe he was ill for a season and needed to remain behind. Whatever the reason, he wasn't present for the grand dedication of the king's statue. Imagine the story his friends recounted when they returned from the experience!

Women who have been believers since childhood may initially find this account uninspiring. Challenge them to read and study as if for the first time. God has much to teach us all, especially related to how we stand for Christ in a post-Christian culture. Help them see fresh application that might help them now.

This lesson should help women when they are faced with situations that would cause them to make moral or spiritual compromises that would dishonor God. In our first lesson, we looked at ways to find creative alternatives in these kinds of situations. In the situation described in this lesson, no creative alternatives exist. A courageous stand was the only right way to respond. This lesson should help women discern the difference and how to respond in each kind of situation.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 8 deals with Exodus 20:5–6, a controversial passage that seems to insinuate that children of pagans will be punished for their parents' sins and children of believers will be rewarded for their parents' faithfulness. However, we know from many other passages that God does not hold children responsible for their parents' sins. We each come to God on the merits of our own belief, receiving his grace as a free gift. Yet children often reap the consequences of their parents' sins.

For example, a child who grows up in the dysfunctional home of an alcoholic will have issues to work through that won't affect some other children. In my opinion, because God is just, he takes those issues into account as he deals with us. He extends extra mercy to those who have more to overcome. For this reason, only God can judge people because only he knows the full extent of the issues that they face. This question should generate some interesting and helpful discussion.

Students sometimes ask me to tell them the identity of the



fourth man in the furnace in question 11. Scholars disagree on the answer, and the note nearby should help. As you lead, emphasize the differences to ward off women arguing for their particular view.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Find film clips that illustrate courage, especially courageous women, and play them for the group. You may want to follow the viewing with a discussion.
- Make or purchase bracelets with all or part of Joshua 1:9: *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*

LESSON 4

Lessons from a Tree

LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 4 digs deep into the king's relationship with Almighty God, probably the result of the king's relationship with Daniel. We influence pagans around us when they observe our relationship with God, although ultimately we are not responsible for how they respond to God. The king watched Daniel for many years and undoubtedly was greatly influenced by him. Yet, we don't know whether or not the king actually came to a personal faith with the Most High God. Pride stood in his way, illustrated by chapter 4.

This lesson should help women deal with their own personal struggles with pride. In addition, this lesson should help women realize that although they must represent Christ to the best of their ability around pagans, they are not ultimately responsible for how pagans respond to the Lord. Like the king, pagans make choices. Daniel was a marvelous witness and yet the king may have chosen to go his own way. We aren't sure. God disciplined the king to get his attention and we may see God do that to pagans in our lives. Often we can only sit and watch, and pray for them. Sometimes they seek God and sometimes they don't. The final decision is not ours. We don't know whether the king came to faith or not. I wonder if Daniel left this question unanswered to help us leave the results to God. This lesson should help women realize this important truth.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 19 asks women to trace the king's responses to God through chapter four. Again, we don't know whether or not the king came to faith. I believe this is on purpose. We are not promised that unbelievers will respond favorably to our witness, both in actions and words. We are only called to love them, to pray for them, and to show them what a godly life looks like. The king highly esteemed Daniel and was greatly influenced by him. We don't know if that was enough. As women live in a pagan world, we are only responsible to live and act like Daniel. Through this lesson, help women in your group deal with their own pride which can lead to all kinds of ugly sins, and help them give up control to God.



CREATIVE ARTS IDEA

Bring in a bonsai tree and place it in clear view as you work through the lesson as a visual aid. Or decorate the room with pictures of trees. Or locate some pictures of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, believed by some to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. These visuals might help set the ethos, the atmosphere for the lesson.

LESSON 5

Deciphering the Writing on the Wall

LESSON CONTENT

Daniel's encounter with a thoroughly wicked pagan king on the night that he loses both his life and his kingdom teach us how to deal with pagans who constantly blaspheme God. Daniel models what that looks like as God uses Daniel in his judgment pronouncement. We must learn when it is appropriate to confront others concerning their wickedness and when to withhold judgment. Lesson 5 should help.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 19 asks us to consider whether we as believers are to judge others and question 20 continues the discussion asking the difference between judging and confronting another believer for the purpose of redemption or restoration. This question is important because in many post-Christian cultures today, all judgment is politically incorrect. The highest value is tolerance and acceptance. But we know that God will judge the world one day. His attributes include holiness and righteousness and he condemns sin. At the same time, Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged . . ."

Many Christians are extremely confused about whether or not they are called to judge others, and, if so, when and how. A thorough explanation of Matthew 7:1–6 may help, and I address that passage in the video for Lesson 5.

In a nutshell, the primary person we are called to judge is ourselves. We must remove the speck from our own eye before we attempt to remove the log from the eyes of others. We also need to be cautious in passing judgment on people who are not believers and do not have the Holy Spirit to help them obey the Lord. Notice that in our lesson this week, God passed judgment on the king; Daniel did not. We cannot expect pagans to live holy lives. They have no power to do so. In some cases, as in Daniel's situation, God may use us to communicate why he is passing judgment, but we need to be realistic in our expectations of nonbelievers.

Also, judging is reserved for mature, seasoned, wise believers and judging is not about critical feelings. It's about action. It does not involve how we feel but what we do. If we judge another, we must confront them for their good and it should be on a clear basis that



we actually observe. It should be sin as sin is defined in Scripture. We must love them enough to caution them against the harmful path they are pursuing.

Our primary calling as Christians is not to judge but to love. Jesus made this truth clear in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). It should really be labeled the parable of the two sons or even better the parable of the loving gracious father, who represents God. Both brothers insulted and used their father for their own selfish purposes. The younger brother did it by squandering what his father gave him; the older brother by looking to his own good works instead of loving his father. Both needed to learn to love the father. Both needed grace and redemption. Only the younger son returned and loved his father for sure. Our call as Christians is to love people the way that the Father loved his sons—and occasionally to exhibit tough love in the form of a cleansing redemptive judgment for the good of the one who is lost. At times, God may use us to proclaim judgment but remember that God is the ultimate judge.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

Display a long white cloth on the wall with markers nearby. Sometime during your gathering, encourage women to write or draw on the cloth. They might write particular truths from the Bible that they think God wants to communicate to us through lesson 5. Or you may determine a better use for the cloth for your particular group right now. Use it to allow women free expression of what they are learning about God through their study.

LESSON 6

How to Survive Conflict When Cats Are After You

LESSON CONTENT

Again Daniel found himself captive to another pagan government, and again he earned favor with those in authority. Daniel shows us that it's possible to be a valuable participant in a culture hostile to God while keeping the faith. But just because some in authority valued his wisdom, skills, and integrity, doesn't mean everyone did. Chapter 6 illustrates that although we may curry favor with some when we stand for the Lord in a pagan culture, others will resist and resent us. Nevertheless, God has our back. Will he always rescue us from difficult situations? He doesn't promise that he will, but this chapter shows us that he can, and he promises to always be with us.

Lesson 6 teaches us valuable lessons on conflict resolution skills and peacemaking with others we work and serve with. Living in a post-Christian culture often results in conflict with pagans, and Christians need to hone peacemaking skills to represent God well and thrive. Encourage the women in your gatherings to pursue honest dialogue and help one another become experts in conflict resolution.

Like the three in the furnace account, familiarity may cause women to approach this story with a yawn. Help them to see the story with fresh eyes by expressing your own exuberance for new lessons we can glean if we look deeply into what God does for Daniel in the lions' den.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 3 addresses potential challenges women face if they distinguish themselves and others don't. Research reveals "the dead-even rule" among women, and understanding this tendency might be helpful for your students. When two women consider themselves peers in their work or ministry, they usually get along well. But if one receives a promotion, it's that former peer friend who is most likely to come against her, often acting out of jealousy or envy. This tendency causes serious pain in the lives of both women, but understanding these inclinations can help women adjust their expectations.



CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Locate a film clip that illustrates the damage people sometimes inflict on one another when they are not skilled peacemakers. Discuss what you see and how Jesus might instruct the characters to handle their disagreements.
- Ask women to write case studies (actual situations they've faced) that reflect real conflicts they've experienced. Have them change names and enough details so that no one recognizes the actual situation. Then discuss wise responses.
- Enlist a panel of conflict resolution experts for a question and answer time.

LESSON 7

A God We Can Count

LESSON CONTENT

Lesson 7 is divided into two parts: Daniel’s beautiful prayer asking for insight into when his people could return home and God’s marvelous prophetic answer that told him far more than he asked for. If you have the option to meet for two weeks instead of one on this lesson, and you want to give your students plenty of time to discuss both sections, you might divide this lesson into two parts and meet for two weeks instead of one. You can cover the lesson in one, but two would give you more flexibility.

The second part of the lesson, beginning with question 12, focuses on a foundational prophetic timetable that shows the flow of events from the end of the exile until God ushers in his millennial kingdom at the end of world history. The time table is revealed in four mysterious verses that give us clues into God’s plan for the world. Scholars debate the meaning of each word and the timing of each event. I hold to a pre-millennial pretribulation end times view and I’m giving you what I believe are sound interpretations of the verses. However, I realize that godly scholarly people disagree. Don’t let this section cause arguing among your women. If women hold different viewpoints, hear them out, and respect various ideas. Guide the discussion with an irenic tone and set ground rules if you need to. I hope that by the end of your discussion, you are each enthralled with the reality that God is giving us important insights into our future and it’s clear that he has a beautiful plan for the culmination and restoration of his people and the earth. This lesson should build the faith of all who work through it.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Below are answers to some of the fill-in-the-blank questions connected with verse 24. Make allowances for women using difference versions of the Bible throughout your discussion.

Seventy sevens (490 years) **are decreed for your people Israel or the Jews and your holy city Jerusalem to:** answers to the blanks 1–6 come straight from verse 24.

What group of people does this prophecy apply to? Specifically the Jewish people but all believers can learn about their future from these prophecies.



(Question) These six items represent two sets of three. How are the first three items similar? How about the last three items? In your opinion, which have been accomplished? Which remain to be accomplished?

(Answer) The first three items deal with sin. Jesus’ work on the cross finished transgressions, put an end to sin, and atoned for wickedness, therefore the first three items have been accomplished. (Some women may not see it that way so leave room for disagreement.) The last three have not yet been accomplished. (See the sidebar for the note on the meaning of “to anoint the most holy.”)

The notes and sidebars in the lesson explaining verses 25, 26, and 27 should be sufficient to answer the questions. Read this material carefully as you prepare to lead the lesson. Depending on the nature of the participants, you might consider putting on your “teacher” hat beginning with question 12 rather than leading a discussion on the material. Normally you want the women to discover truth for themselves, but this may be an exception.

If you cover this lesson in one time period, you might lead a discussion over questions 1–12, and then teach the material on verses 24–27 yourself or ask a gifted teacher to prepare a clear and interesting message to top off your time together. Be sure to include what you learn about the purpose of studying prophecy from passages like 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11.

Be patient with students. These verses are challenging and mysterious. Don’t expect everyone to agree. If women walk away with a profound respect for prophetic biblical literature and trusting more in the sovereignty of a loving God and his plan for their future, then your time together has been productive.

CREATIVE ARTS IDEAS

- Create a bookmark of the chart that explains the timetable at the end of the lesson. It should be useful for the women to refer to through the lesson and in future lessons in Daniel and other prophetic books of the Bible.
- Listen to a DVD on end times. For example: *The Bible and the End of the World* (Mark Hitchcock) or *The End Times in the Words of Jesus* (Tim LaHaye, Edward Hindson, Thomas Ice) or a free download of Mark Hitchcock’s teaching on Revelation at DiscoverTogetherSeries.com. (Click on Revelation and look for the Bonus material.)

LESSON 8

A Peek Into the Unseen Reality

LESSON CONTENT

I hesitated to share the story that introduces the lesson. It defies what some believe about God’s work in the world today—that he speaks audibly when it suits him. But it seemed the perfect time to relate this encounter. If it disturbs women in your study, encourage them to give God freedom to work as he sees fit, and to realize that God won’t fit into our neat and tidy little boxes sometimes.

Chapter 10 contains eye-opening truth about spiritual warfare and deserves deliberate scrutiny for clues about what’s going on in the unseen reality. Walk through the lesson with a sense of reverence.

Chapter 10 is full of mystery and your discussion will probably bring out different opinions and speculation. Respect different ideas and don’t try to nail down exactly what’s going on. But women should come away with increased understanding and appreciation for how little we actually know about spiritual warfare and how much is going on behind the scenes of our earthly existence. Reverence and awe for God and what he’s doing are worthy goals as we attempt to wrap our minds and hearts around the inscrutable. God is bigger than we can fathom, and that’s good to know.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 2 asks us to comment on what we can glean about Daniel’s emotional state from verses 2 and 3. The text talks about him “mourning” and that he fasted from nourishment and luxuries for three weeks. Passages in Ezra lead us to believe that he learned of the resistance his fellow Jews were facing back home. They had been through 70 years of captivity, and now when they were finally back home, enemies were hindering them from every side. I wonder if this news may have caused Daniel some depression. He was at least 80 years old by now, in his twilight years. He had been kidnapped as a teen and lived out his days in a foreign land clinging to his faith. His friends had returned home but he probably was not healthy enough to make the trip. All these factors may have been too much for even Daniel and he succumbed to a deep sadness. All he could do was pray and mourn, but God knew and cared. Our peek into the unseen reality may be a gift from God to his beloved servant at the end of his days, and we benefit from God’s tender revelation to Daniel. His work had been important in God’s plan for the ages. God was still at work,



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despite the bad news from home. God encouraged Daniel with amazing truths that few are privileged to see. We observe God’s compassionate heart in these incredible verses.

In Question 5 we see that the angel touched Daniel to awaken him, and we observe touch in several other verses. Daniel also points out that these angel “touches” gave him strength. I asked questions related to these physical touches to cause us to think about the power of physical touch and to consider that these angels had a sort of physicality that allowed them to touch people and infuse strength into them. Was this strength the result of the power of caring that is communicated by touch, or was supernatural strength infused? We don’t know. But even touch between people often communicates care, which strengthens. The question is simply designed to ask us to think about the power of touch and to consider that this power is manifested in the heavenly as well as earthly realms.

LESSON 9

The End; He Wins

LESSON CONTENT

You'll find an explanation for the structure of Lesson 10 in the introduction. This lesson focuses on passages that are still future for us, particularly the Antichrist and the culmination of earth history. These verses are deep, intriguing, and fascinating—and will require time and energy to work through, but, oh, the rewards! Again, we are dealing with mysteries and marvelous revelations that will be difficult to nail down but give us clues into God's ultimate plans. The many notes and sidebars should guide women in their understanding. Grasping these realities should help women gain perspective and strength as we live in post-Christian cultures. God is in control and he knows exactly what he is doing. That knowledge should help women live well even when our values are misunderstood and our principles mocked.

TROUBLESHOOTING

Question 15 relates to verse 4 where Daniel is instructed to “roll up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end.” Consult the sidebar by Miller for insight. The angel is not instructing Daniel to keep the words secret, but to make sure they are kept in a safe place and to preserve the revelation because it is valuable. Dr. Tom Constable also points out in his notes that Daniel is to “run his cylinder-seal across the bottom to guarantee authenticity” (page 143). This certifies that what was in the scroll and what God had revealed to him was truthful.

WILL YOU SAY GOOD-BYE OR GO ON TOGETHER?

Is this a short-term group, or do you, as the leader, want to continue meeting? The first decision is yours. Count the cost. Is the group thriving? Bonding? Committed? Worth the effort you are investing? Answer these questions honestly. Every group has a beginning and an end. Is this the time for your group to disband? If so, tell the group your reasons, kindly but emphatically. Don't be pressured into continuing against your better judgment.

If you determine you're excited about leading the group through another study, you may want to poll the group to learn their desires. Plan a date to meet for a brainstorming session on what to study and



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what changes might be in order, if any. (Check out my website www.DiscoverTogetherSeries.com for additional study options.)

Either way, use this last gathering of *Daniel, Discovering the Courage to Stand for Your Faith* to reflect, review, and celebrate what has been accomplished. Plan a time that fosters a sense of closure, possibly festive food, a potluck brunch or luncheon, or some other special activity. For example, you might talk about how God has helped you live in a post-Christian culture. You might reread and discuss favorite quotes in the margins of the lessons. You could list benefits you enjoyed as a result of the study. You might talk about changes you observed in the members as a result of sharing this study. In some way, celebrate this final chapter in your group experience. Praise and thank God for what he has done in your lives individually and as a worshipping community. If any of the participants are leaving the group, be sure to say good-bye and pray for them.