

HOPE AWAY FROM HOME

— DANIEL —

Leader's Guide



St Stephen's
Normanhurst

Contents

<u>Series Introduction</u>	3
<u>The COMA Method</u>	4
<u>Context</u>	6
<u>Observations</u>	7
<u>Meaning</u>	9
<u>Application</u>	11
<u>Daniel 1</u>	13
<u>Daniel 2</u>	20
<u>Daniel 3</u>	30
<u>Daniel 4</u>	38
<u>Daniel 5</u>	49
<u>Daniel 6</u>	57

Series Introduction

Daniel and his friends lived in a time of exile. They had been taken away from their homes in Jerusalem and led to live in a foreign city. They were constantly tempted to worship other gods and join in the customs of the people around them. There was a pull to downplay their unique identity of God's people, and to assimilate to the culture around them. But God gave Daniel multiple visions during the time of his exile. Visions that showed him that God was still sovereign and that he would establish his eternal kingdom. These visions gave Daniel confidence to faithfully follow God in Babylon and to live with hope even though they were far from home.

It is very possible that we might forget that we too live in a time of exile. We are longing for our heavenly home. In the New Testament, the Apostle Peter writes to Christians and reminds them to abstain from sinful desires and live such good lives that bring glory to God whilst they live as foreigners and exiles (1 Peter 2:11-12).

As we study Daniel together, we will be reminded that we have a hope in God's eternal kingdom, a hope that helps us to live as we long for our heavenly home.

The COMA Method

We believe that God's word is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness; equipping us for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17). We believe that God's word is effective, it always achieves the purpose that God intends for it (Isa 55:11).

"God is an effective communicator. He knows how to use human words in order to communicate his nature, character and purpose. He is neither constrained nor frustrated in his desire to make himself known."

Mark D. Thompson - The Clarity of Scripture

God's word is clear and effective. But at the same time there are things in scripture that are hard for us to understand, and it is possible that someone could distort God's word (2 Pet 3:16). For this reason, we want to teach one another to carefully read God's word in its context. We want to be able to study God's word and observe what it is actually saying. We want to understand what the scriptures mean, and how to apply them to our lives.



In term 4, we will be using the COMA method to unpack the scriptures together. COMA stands for:

Context

Observations

Meaning

Application

Each study will work through each of these steps. Our goal is to equip one another with the tools that will empower us to read, understand and be transformed by God's word day by day.

Here are some helpful tools that will help you to do the COMA method in your groups and equip God's people to read God's word for themselves.

Context

Recalling what we have read previously, so that we can understand what we are reading now.

We want to understand God's word rightly. Without context, our understanding of God's word is simply deficient. It is true that a text without context is just a 'con'. We also want to be able to remember God's word. We want to be able to recall God's word, in all situations. For these reasons, we recommend the following activity.

Exercise: With Bibles closed, remind one another what we have seen so far in the book of Daniel.

Tips:

- Make it fun and work as a team
- Try to have at least 1 key idea from each passage
- Keep this exercise to 5 minutes

This may be difficult at first, but every successive week we do this, we will see memories strengthened and people better equipped to bring what they have learnt previously back into their minds.

Observation

Coming to the Bible with curiosity and intrigue, carefully examining what it says.

Whether we have been a Christian for a long or a short period of time, it is so easy for us to assume that we know what the Bible is saying. We miss out on being challenged and changed if we do not work against this assumption. Here are a few exercises that will help us to observe carefully what is going on in any passage that fits the *narrative genre*.

Exercise 1: Pray and read the passage.

Exercise 2: As one person reads the passage again, underline anything that stands out to you.

Exercise 3: In groups of 3-4 draw a storyboard that captures the main idea of the narrative.

Tips:

- Breaking into groups 3-4 gives people more chances to share their thoughts and articulate what they are thinking.
- The exercises are meant to be simple, but they should not be rushed. The goal is not to complete the exercise, but to mine the passage for all the gold that can be found. If someone finishes quickly, encourage them to go back to the text and see if there is more gold to be found in the passage.
- The goal of the drawing exercise is not to have a perfect picture, but to have something that captures and summarises the main details of the passage.
- Give 10-15 minutes for this exercise.

Meaning

Discovering the main point that the human author was intending for their original audience and how Jesus fulfills this part of the scriptures.

Before we move to consider what the passage means for us, it is important that we consider what it would have meant for the original audience that the author was writing to. We do this by considering the context of the passage and pulling together the observations that we have made earlier and letting that shape our understanding of what the passage means.

Exercise 1: In groups of 2-3, consider what the author of Daniel wanted his original readers to understand about:

- God
- Hope in Exile

Exercise 2: In groups of 2-3, identify what is the same and what is different about our understanding of the passage this side of the cross.

Tips:

- It is important that we don't get bogged down in the minutiae and miss the main point of the passage. Even if your group has not come to a resolution on every difficult verse, they can still move towards trying to discover the meaning of the passage.
- Provide time for your group to investigate the meaning in smaller groups of 2-3, and then come back together to share your findings. This will allow people more time to talk and discover the meaning.
- Give around 20 minutes for these exercises.

Application

Asking how we are to respond to God's word.

Application is asking the question, 'So what?' What does this passage mean for me today? How does it shape my thoughts, affections and actions?

Exercise 1: As a large group, gather together a basket of ideas for how we could apply this passage to different parts of our lives using the questions below.



Head: What thoughts or beliefs have been confirmed or challenged by God's word?



Heart: What has God revealed about an attitude or idol that I need to deal with?



Hands: What behaviours am I being convicted of that I need to stop/start/keep doing?



Mouth: What from this sermon can I share with someone this week? Who will I share it with?

Exercise 2: On your own, write down one application point that you will commit to this week.

Exercise 3: In groups of 2 or 3 share your application point and pray for one another putting it into practice this week.

Tips:

- Encourage your group to make application points that are specific enough that they would be able to identify whether or not they achieved them.
- Encourage your group to make application points that are realistic. If they have never read the Bible before, a good goal for the following week could be to read it 2-3 times, rather than immediately to jump to 7 out of 7 days of the week.
- Give around 20 minutes for Application

Daniel 1:1–21 (NIV)

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. ² And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god.

³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—⁴ young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. ⁵ The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king's service.

⁶ Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ⁷ The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

⁸ But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to

defile himself this way. ⁹ Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, ¹⁰ but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

¹¹ Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, ¹² "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. ¹³ Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." ¹⁴ So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

¹⁵ At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. ¹⁶ So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

¹⁷ To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

¹⁸ At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. ¹⁹ The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel,

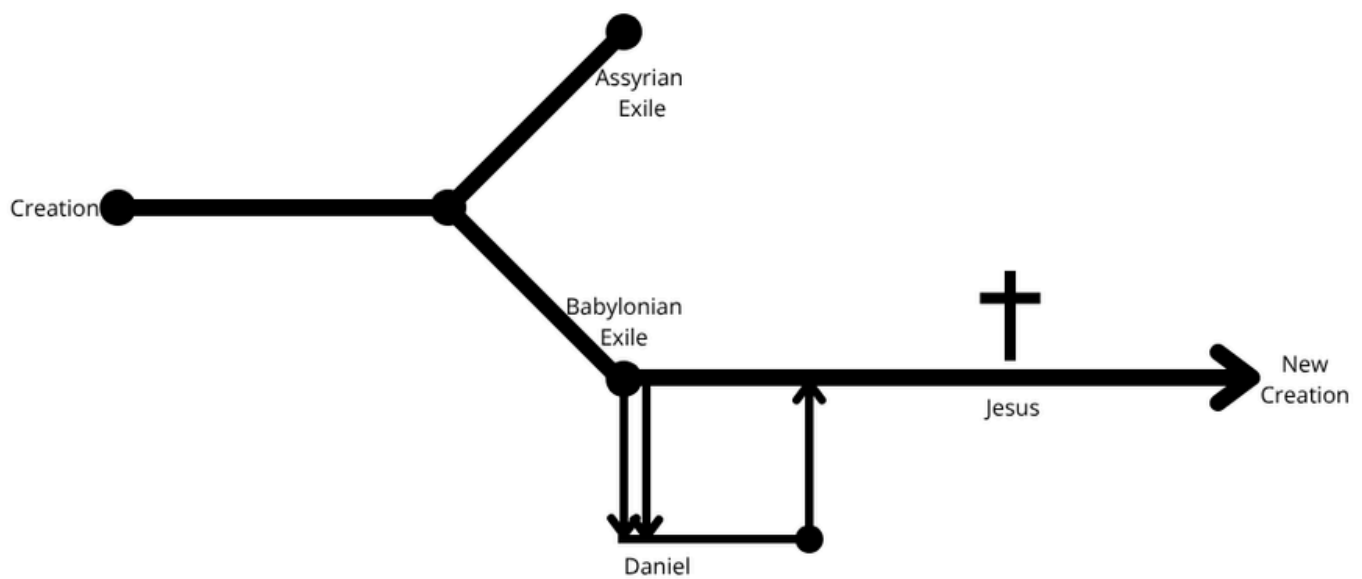


Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. ²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

²¹ And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Context

For a few minutes think of however many Biblical figures you can and try to place them on the appropriate part of the Biblical timeline.



Observation

Pray and read the passage.

As one person reads the passage again, underline anything that stands out to you.

In groups of 3-4 draw a storyboard that captures the main idea of the narrative.

Meaning

In groups of 2-3, consider what the author of Daniel wanted his original readers to understand about:

- **God**
- **Hope in Exile**

In groups of 2-3, identify what is the same and what is different about our understanding of the passage this side of the cross.

Application

As a large group, gather together a basket of ideas for how we could apply this passage to different parts of our lives using the questions below.



Head: What thoughts or beliefs have been confirmed or challenged by God's word?



Heart: What has God revealed about an attitude or idol that I need to deal with?



Hands: What behaviours am I being convicted of that I need to stop/start/keep doing?



Mouth: What from this sermon can I share with someone this week? Who will I share it with?

On your own, write down one application point that you will commit to this week.

In groups of 2 or 3 share your application point and pray for one another as you seek to put it into practice this week.

Daniel 2:1–49 (NIV)

In the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar had dreams; his mind was troubled and he could not sleep. ² So the king summoned the magicians, enchanter, sorcerers and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. When they came in and stood before the king, ³ he said to them, “I have had a dream that troubles me and I want to know what it means.”

⁴ Then the astrologers answered the king, “May the king live forever! Tell your servants the dream, and we will interpret it.”

⁵ The king replied to the astrologers, “This is what I have firmly decided: If you do not tell me what my dream was and interpret it, I will have you cut into pieces and your houses turned into piles of rubble. ⁶ But if you tell me the dream and explain it, you will receive from me gifts and rewards and great honor. So tell me the dream and interpret it for me.”

⁷ Once more they replied, “Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will interpret it.”

⁸ Then the king answered, “I am certain that you are trying to gain time, because you realize that this is what I have firmly decided: ⁹ If you do not tell me the dream, there is only one penalty for you. You have conspired to tell me misleading and wicked things, hoping the situation will change. So then, tell me the dream, and I will know that you can interpret it for me.”

¹⁰ The astrologers answered the king, "There is no one on earth who can do what the king asks! No king, however great and mighty, has ever asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or astrologer. ¹¹ What the king asks is too difficult. No one can reveal it to the king except the gods, and they do not live among humans."

¹² This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. ¹³ So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for Daniel and his friends to put them to death.

¹⁴ When Arioch, the commander of the king's guard, had gone out to put to death the wise men of Babylon, Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact. ¹⁵ He asked the king's officer, "Why did the king issue such a harsh decree?" Arioch then explained the matter to Daniel. ¹⁶ At this, Daniel went in to the king and asked for time, so that he might interpret the dream for him.

¹⁷ Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. ¹⁸ He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹ During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven ²⁰ and said:

"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.

²¹ He changes times and seasons;
he deposes kings and raises up others.
He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the discerning.

²² He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness,
and light dwells with him.

²³ I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors:
You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you,
you have made known to us the dream of the king."

²⁴ Then Daniel went to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to execute the wise men of Babylon, and said to him, "Do not execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I will interpret his dream for him."

²⁵ Arioch took Daniel to the king at once and said, "I have found a man among the exiles from Judah who can tell the king what his dream means."

²⁶ The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"

²⁷ Daniel replied, “No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you were lying in bed are these:

²⁹ “As Your Majesty was lying there, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. ³⁰ As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than anyone else alive, but so that Your Majesty may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

³¹ “Your Majesty looked, and there before you stood a large statue—an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance.

³² The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, ³³ its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. ³⁴ While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. ³⁵ Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were all broken to pieces and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge

mountain and filled the whole earth.

³⁶ “This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king.

³⁷ Your Majesty, you are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; ³⁸ in your hands he has placed all mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds in the sky. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

³⁹ “After you, another kingdom will arise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. ⁴⁰

Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. ⁴¹ Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. ⁴² As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. ⁴³ And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

⁴⁴ “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them

to an end, but it will itself endure forever.⁴⁵ This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands—a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces.

“The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy.”

⁴⁶ Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell prostrate before Daniel and paid him honor and ordered that an offering and incense be presented to him. ⁴⁷ The king said to Daniel, “Surely your God is the God of gods and the Lord of kings and a revealer of mysteries, for you were able to reveal this mystery.”

⁴⁸ Then the king placed Daniel in a high position and lavished many gifts on him. He made him ruler over the entire province of Babylon and placed him in charge of all its wise men. ⁴⁹ Moreover, at Daniel’s request the king appointed Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel himself remained at the royal court.

Context

With Bibles closed, remind one another what we have seen so far in the book of Daniel.

Observation

Pray and read the passage.

As one person reads the passage again, underline anything that stands out to you.

In groups of 3-4 draw a storyboard that captures the main idea of the narrative.

Meaning

In groups of 2-3, consider what the author of Daniel wanted his original readers to understand about:

- **God**
- **Hope in Exile**

In groups of 2-3, identify what is the same and what is different about our understanding of the passage this side of the cross.

Application

As a large group, gather together a basket of ideas for how we could apply this passage to different parts of our lives using the questions below.



Head: What thoughts or beliefs have been confirmed or challenged by God's word?



Heart: What has God revealed about an attitude or idol that I need to deal with?



Hands: What behaviours am I being convicted of that I need to stop/start/keep doing?



Mouth: What from this sermon can I share with someone this week? Who will I share it with?

On your own, write down one application point that you will commit to this week.

In groups of 2 or 3 share your application point and pray for one another as you seek to put it into practice this week.

Daniel 3:1–30 (NIV)

King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, sixty cubits high and six cubits wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. ² He then summoned the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials to come to the dedication of the image he had set up. ³ So the satraps, prefects, governors, advisers, treasurers, judges, magistrates and all the other provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and they stood before it.

⁴ Then the herald loudly proclaimed, “Nations and peoples of every language, this is what you are commanded to do: ⁵ As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, you must fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. ⁶ Whoever does not fall down and worship will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

⁷ Therefore, as soon as they heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp and all kinds of music, all the nations and peoples of every language fell down and worshiped the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

⁸ At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹ They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “May the king live

forever! ¹⁰ Your Majesty has issued a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹ and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace. ¹² But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, Your Majesty. They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.”

¹³ Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴ and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵ Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, “King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver

us from Your Majesty's hand. ¹⁸ But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

¹⁹ Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰ and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹ So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²² The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³ and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.

²⁴ Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?"

They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty."

²⁵ He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."

²⁶ Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego,

So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, ²⁷ and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

²⁸ Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. ²⁹ Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."

³⁰ Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Context

With Bibles closed, remind one another what we have seen so far in the book of Daniel.

Observation

Pray and read the passage.

As one person reads the passage again, underline anything that stands out to you.

In groups of 3-4 draw a storyboard that captures the main idea of the narrative.

Meaning

In groups of 2-3, consider what the author of Daniel wanted his original readers to understand about:

- **God**
- **Hope in Exile**

In groups of 2-3, identify what is the same and what is different about our understanding of the passage this side of the cross.

Application

As a large group, gather together a basket of ideas for how we could apply this passage to different parts of our lives using the questions below.



Head: What thoughts or beliefs have been confirmed or challenged by God's word?



Heart: What has God revealed about an attitude or idol that I need to deal with?



Hands: What behaviours am I being convicted of that I need to stop/start/keep doing?



Mouth: What from this sermon can I share with someone this week? Who will I share it with?

On your own, write down one application point that you will commit to this week.

In groups of 2 or 3 share your application point and pray for one another as you seek to put it into practice this week.

Daniel 4:1–37 (NIV)

King Nebuchadnezzar,

To the nations and peoples of every language, who live in all the earth:

May you prosper greatly!

² It is my pleasure to tell you about the miraculous signs and wonders that the Most High God has performed for me.

³ How great are his signs,
how mighty his wonders!

His kingdom is an eternal kingdom;
his dominion endures from generation to generation.

⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. ⁵ I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me. ⁶ So I commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be brought before me to interpret the dream for me. ⁷ When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners came, I told them the dream, but they could not interpret it for me. ⁸ Finally, Daniel came into my presence and I told him the dream. (He is called Belteshazzar, after the name of my god, and the spirit of the holy gods is in him.)

⁹ I said, “Belteshazzar, chief of the magicians, I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no mystery is too difficult

for you. Here is my dream; interpret it for me. ¹⁰ These are the visions I saw while lying in bed: I looked, and there before me stood a tree in the middle of the land. Its height was enormous.

¹¹ The tree grew large and strong and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the ends of the earth. ¹² Its leaves were beautiful, its fruit abundant, and on it was food for all. Under it the wild animals found shelter, and the birds lived in its branches; from it every creature was fed.

¹³ "In the visions I saw while lying in bed, I looked, and there before me was a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven. ¹⁴ He called in a loud voice: 'Cut down the tree and trim off its branches; strip off its leaves and scatter its fruit. Let the animals flee from under it and the birds from its branches. ¹⁵ But let the stump and its roots, bound with iron and bronze, remain in the ground, in the grass of the field.

" 'Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals among the plants of the earth. ¹⁶ Let his mind be changed from that of a man and let him be given the mind of an animal, till seven times pass by for him.

¹⁷ " 'The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of people.'

¹⁸ “This is the dream that I, King Nebuchadnezzar, had. Now, Belteshazzar, tell me what it means, for none of the wise men in my kingdom can interpret it for me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you.”

¹⁹ Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time, and his thoughts terrified him. So the king said, “Belteshazzar, do not let the dream or its meaning alarm you.”

Belteshazzar answered, “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries! ²⁰ The tree you saw, which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, ²¹ with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds —²² Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.

²³ “Your Majesty saw a holy one, a messenger, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze, in the grass of the field, while its roots remain in the ground. Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven; let him live with the wild animals, until seven times pass by for him.’

²⁴ “This is the interpretation, Your Majesty, and this is the decree

the Most High has issued against my lord the king: ²⁵ You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes. ²⁶ The command to leave the stump of the tree with its roots means that your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules. ²⁷ Therefore, Your Majesty, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue."

²⁸ All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. ²⁹ Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰ he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"

³¹ Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. ³² You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes."

³³ Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.

³⁴ At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

His dominion is an eternal dominion;
his kingdom endures from generation to generation.

³⁵ All the peoples of the earth
are regarded as nothing.

He does as he pleases
with the powers of heaven
and the peoples of the earth.

No one can hold back his hand
or say to him: "What have you done?"

³⁶ At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before. ³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

Context

With Bibles closed, remind one another what we have seen so far in the book of Daniel.

Observation

Pray and read the passage.

As one person reads the passage again, underline anything that stands out to you.

In groups of 3-4 draw a storyboard that captures the main idea of the narrative.

Meaning

In groups of 2-3, consider what the author of Daniel wanted his original readers to understand about:

- **God**
- **Hope in Exile**

In groups of 2-3, identify what is the same and what is different about our understanding of the passage this side of the cross.

Application

As a large group, gather together a basket of ideas for how we could apply this passage to different parts of our lives using the questions below.



Head: What thoughts or beliefs have been confirmed or challenged by God's word?



Heart: What has God revealed about an attitude or idol that I need to deal with?



Hands: What behaviours am I being convicted of that I need to stop/start/keep doing?



Mouth: What from this sermon can I share with someone this week? Who will I share it with?

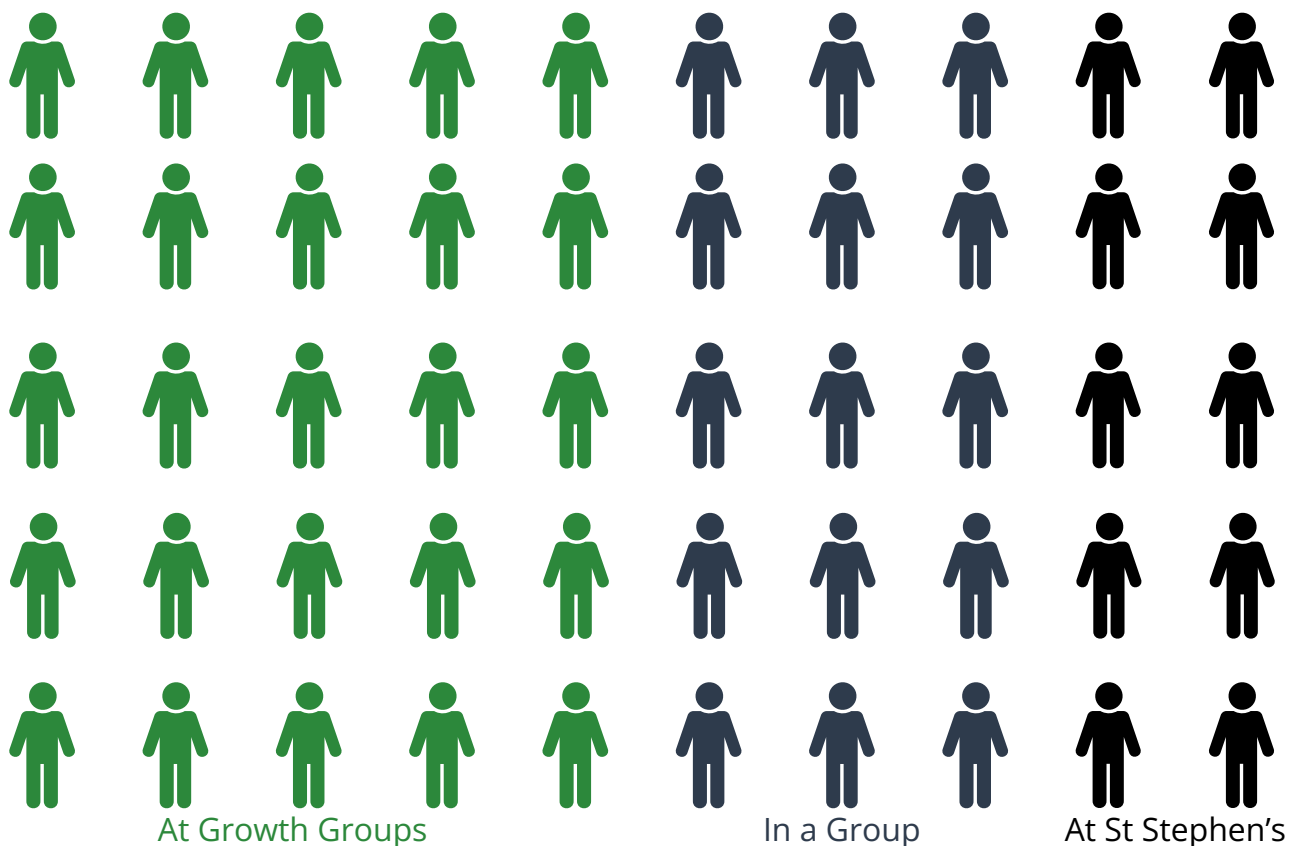
On your own, write down one application point that you will commit to this week.

In groups of 2 or 3 share your application point and pray for one another as you seek to put it into practice this week.

Growth Groups in 2026

We want every person at St Stephen's to be able to grow to be more like Jesus in 2026. Our Growth Groups are places where we gather to encourage and nurture in the faith.

At St Stephen's we have approximately 500 adult members. 78% of our members are in a Growth Group. However, on any given week the average attendance is around 60%. This means that every week, less than half of all our adult members are able to be encouraged and nurtured in Growth Groups each week.



Growth Groups in 2026

We want every person to have the opportunity to be a part of a Growth Group so they can hear God's word and be transformed by it. We want groups that will produce deep, prayerful, supportive, Christian communities. To help make this happen, we ask that every person completes a survey so that we can know how to best cater to each persons preferences as much as we are able. This survey will help us to understand your preferences for leading in 2026. Your group members will also have a seperate form which will help them to provide their preferences in 2026. I'll give you an update via email each week to let you know how you are going at helping your people land in a group next year.



Survey will open on November 10, 2025.

Daniel 5:1–31 (NIV)

King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. ² While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. ³ So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. ⁴ As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.

⁵ Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. ⁶ His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.

⁷ The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, "Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom."

⁸ Then all the king's wise men came in, but they could not read

the writing or tell the king what it meant.⁹ So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.

¹⁰ The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. "May the king live forever!" she said. "Don't be alarmed! Don't look so pale!"¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners.¹² He did this because Daniel, whom the king called Belteshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means."

¹³ So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, "Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah?"¹⁴ I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom.¹⁵ The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it.¹⁶ Now I have heard that you are able to

give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”

¹⁷ Then Daniel answered the king, “You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.

¹⁸ “Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. ¹⁹ Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. ²⁰ But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. ²¹ He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.

²² “But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. ²³ Instead, you have set yourself up

against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. ²⁴ Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.

²⁵ "This is the inscription that was written:

MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN

²⁶ "Here is what these words mean:

Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.

²⁷ Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.

²⁸ Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

²⁹ Then at Belshazzar's command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.

³⁰ That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain,

³¹ and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.

Context

With Bibles closed, remind one another what we have seen so far in the book of Daniel.

Observation

Pray and read the passage.

As one person reads the passage again, underline anything that stands out to you.

In groups of 3-4 draw a storyboard that captures the main idea of the narrative.

Meaning

In groups of 2-3, consider what the author of Daniel wanted his original readers to understand about:

- **God**
- **Hope in Exile**

In groups of 2-3, identify what is the same and what is different about our understanding of the passage this side of the cross.

Application

As a large group, gather together a basket of ideas for how we could apply this passage to different parts of our lives using the questions below.



Head: What thoughts or beliefs have been confirmed or challenged by God's word?



Heart: What has God revealed about an attitude or idol that I need to deal with?



Hands: What behaviours am I being convicted of that I need to stop/start/keep doing?



Mouth: What from this sermon can I share with someone this week? Who will I share it with?

On your own, write down one application point that you will commit to this week.

In groups of 2 or 3 share your application point and pray for one another as you seek to put it into practice this week.

Daniel 6:1–28 (NIV)

It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, ² with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. The satraps were made accountable to them so that the king might not suffer loss. ³ Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ At this, the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent. ⁵ Finally these men said, “We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God.”

⁶ So these administrators and satraps went as a group to the king and said: “May King Darius live forever! ⁷ The royal administrators, prefects, satraps, advisers and governors have all agreed that the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions’ den. ⁸ Now, Your Majesty, issue the decree and put it in writing so that it cannot be altered—in

accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”⁹ So King Darius put the decree in writing.

¹⁰ Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. ¹¹ Then these men went as a group and found Daniel praying and asking God for help. ¹² So they went to the king and spoke to him about his royal decree: “Did you not publish a decree that during the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except to you, Your Majesty, would be thrown into the lions’ den?”

The king answered, “The decree stands—in accordance with the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be repealed.”

¹³ Then they said to the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, Your Majesty, or to the decree you put in writing. He still prays three times a day.” ¹⁴

When the king heard this, he was greatly distressed; he was determined to rescue Daniel and made every effort until sundown to save him.

¹⁵ Then the men went as a group to King Darius and said to him, “Remember, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and Persians no decree or edict that the king issues can

be changed.”

¹⁶ So the king gave the order, and they brought Daniel and threw him into the lions’ den. The king said to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, rescue you!”

¹⁷ A stone was brought and placed over the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the rings of his nobles, so that Daniel’s situation might not be changed. ¹⁸ Then the king returned to his palace and spent the night without eating and without any entertainment being brought to him. And he could not sleep.

¹⁹ At the first light of dawn, the king got up and hurried to the lions’ den. ²⁰ When he came near the den, he called to Daniel in an anguished voice, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to rescue you from the lions?”

²¹ Daniel answered, “May the king live forever! ²² My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty.”

²³ The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. And when Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

²⁴ At the king’s command, the men who had falsely accused

Daniel were brought in and thrown into the lions' den, along with their wives and children. And before they reached the floor of the den, the lions overpowered them and crushed all their bones.

²⁵ Then King Darius wrote to all the nations and peoples of every language in all the earth:

"May you prosper greatly!

²⁶ "I issue a decree that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel.

"For he is the living God
and he endures forever;
his kingdom will not be destroyed,
his dominion will never end.

²⁷ He rescues and he saves;
he performs signs and wonders
in the heavens and on the earth.

He has rescued Daniel
from the power of the lions."

²⁸ So Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Context

With Bibles closed, remind one another what we have seen so far in the book of Daniel.

Observation

Pray and read the passage.

As one person reads the passage again, underline anything that stands out to you.

In groups of 3-4 draw a storyboard that captures the main idea of the narrative.

Meaning

In groups of 2-3, consider what the author of Daniel wanted his original readers to understand about:

- **God**
- **Hope in Exile**

In groups of 2-3, identify what is the same and what is different about our understanding of the passage this side of the cross.

Application

As a large group, gather together a basket of ideas for how we could apply this passage to different parts of our lives using the questions below.



Head: What thoughts or beliefs have been confirmed or challenged by God's word?



Heart: What has God revealed about an attitude or idol that I need to deal with?



Hands: What behaviours am I being convicted of that I need to stop/start/keep doing?



Mouth: What from this sermon can I share with someone this week? Who will I share it with?

On your own, write down one application point that you will commit to this week.

In groups of 2 or 3 share your application point and pray for one another as you seek to put it into practice this week.









St Stephen's
Normanhurst